

FEMINISM: A WAY TOWARDS ENDING AFRICAN WOMEN SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISEMPOWERMENT IN ADICHIE'S STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a simulacrum of reality and every work of arts is a product of its social and cultural milieu. Consequently, every writer is a product of his/her social, political and historical environment. In Igbo traditional societies, women face patriarchy. Thus, whether in fiction or in reality, it was the privilege of men to promote their perspective. Moreover, they convey their philosophy instead of highlighting both theirs and that of women. As a reaction to such a situation, women embrace the art of writing leading to the birth of movements such as feminism. Chimamanda's aim is to correct and improve women's living conditions in a patriarchal society where they are deprived of their rights and liberty.

My aim in this paper is to stress the ideas behind Adichie Chimamanda's male and female characters through events in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. These hidden ideas connote feminism that aims at freeing women from their patriarchal chains.

KEYWORDS: Feminism, Ending, Women, Disempowerment, Patriarchy

RESUME

La littérature est un simulacre de la réalité et toute œuvre d'art est un produit de son milieu culturel et social. Par conséquence, tout écrivain est un produit de son environnement socio-culturel et historique. Dans les sociétés traditionnelles Ibo, les femmes font face au patriarcat. Ainsi, que ce soit dans la fiction ou dans la réalité, c'était le privilège des hommes de promouvoir leur perspective et de transmettre leur philosophie au lieu de mettre en exergue les leurs aussi bien que celles des femmes. Comme réaction à une pareille situation, les femmes ont embrasé l'art d'écrire qui a conduit à la naissance des mouvements tel que le féminisme. Le but visé par Chimamanda est d'améliorer les conditions de vie des femmes dans une société patriarcale où elles ne jouissent pas pleinement de leurs droits et leur liberté.

Mon objectif dans cet article est de mettre l'accent sur le message de Chimamanda à travers les personnages de ses œuvres intitulées *Purple Hibiscus* et *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Ce message rime avec le féminisme dont le but principal est de libérer les femmes des chaînes patriarcales.

KEYWORDS: Féminisme, Femme, Mettre Fin, Patriarcat, Dénuement De Pouvoir

INTRODUCTION

In most of African traditional societies, women are commonly believed to be inferior to men. In Israel's code, for example, women are believed to be feeble people. Their only task is to bear children. In early Israel, women are considered as slaves and so, they are their husbands' "properties". Consequently, men can have women through kidnapping or in a way they want. In Igbo society, a man's value is measured according to his ability to rule his wives. Prisoner girls were

considered as properties and could be attributed to soldiers. Even in *The Bible*, fathers have generally such an authority on families that daughters cannot refuse their decision of attributing them to a man. Moreover, one can say that in this great book, people tend to consider more the relationships between men and God than the ones between God and women as one can read in Genesis (chapter 28, verse 13) “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob” but nowhere can one read “God of Rebecca, God of Rachael, God of Deborah”, despite the fact that these women have taken active part in many important biblical events.

As a rule, women are referred to as people who are inferior to men. So, for several centuries, the articulation of literary genres in every sector was solely managed by men in Africa. Women’s efforts were therefore overshadowed by that of men. Moreover, one can notice in French language that if there is only one male baby among thousands of females, the masculine personal pronoun ‘ils’ is used to refer to them. In most of African traditional cultures, everything that relates to the female conveys an idea of weakness or lack of seriousness. To make fun of a man, for example, a sentence like “he is behaving like a woman” is used. Furthermore, to silence women they are compared to hens. Thus, there is an African saying that: ‘hens crackle but cocks crow’. When diseases such as malaria are not worrying, they are called ‘female’. So, in Africa, femininity coheres with feebleness, submission and lack of seriousness.

Whether in fiction or out here in society, it has always been the privilege of men to promote their perspectives. It is also their perspective to convey their philosophy instead of highlighting both theirs and that of women. The whole system of unjust treatment of women by men as far as I am concerned is due to patriarchy, which according to *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* is: “A Society, system or country that is ruled or controlled by men”.¹ For Lois Tyson:

Patriarchy is, by definition, sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of women is called biological essentialism because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women.²

Chimamanda Ngozy is a young Nigerian female writer who is mainly concerned with the ongoing effect of colonization in Africa, and more importantly in Nigeria. Consequently, she centered her novels on African women changing status and images and breaking patriarchal chains. In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* innumerable illustrations have shown how Igbo adult female people living in Nigeria, especially in the East, were very attached to the moral principles and beliefs which they think are valuable, consequently, making agonizing situations, especially during the Biafran War, bearable.

WOMEN AS ACTIVE AGENTS

In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie presents women who relentlessly struggle to achieve the much desired freedom from the clutches of tradition, from socio-political and economic disempowerment as well as from male oppression. She uses Auntie Ifeoma as a symbol of a changed woman. Auntie Ifeoma is supposed to take the children to the late husband’s hometown even though she complains that Ifediora’sumunna is not treating her well. Mama informs auntie that the boys should get to know their umunna a thinking which places boys and generally men at a position above

¹ Albert S. Hornby. *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005. p.1068.

² Tyson Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. Louisville: University of Louisville. 1999. p.84.

girls and women. The demand made by Beatrice that Ifeoma should take her children to their home town shows how children tie married women to their husband's clan. Ifeoma is reluctant about taking the children to her in-laws'. So, she represents an example to educated women who deliberately escape a system in which men have all or most of the power and importance.

Ifeoma challenges the way the government appoints university administrators. She is there after accused of being disloyal and is subjected to police harassment, sacked and finally forced to go into exile from where Amaka corresponds with people living in Nigeria. Through her letters, she bitterly criticizes Nigerian judiciary. Ifeoma and Amaka can therefore be read as Adichie's schema aimed at suggesting ways of emancipating the African women from the yoke of patriarchy and other discriminatory practices. As a well-educated and enlightened woman, Auntie Ifeoma educates her kids with fairness giving them equal treatment. She does not discriminate against the children on gender lines especially when assigning domestic duties. Chimamanda Adichie can be considered as a female writer whose main aim is to cancel the idea of men over women from African's mind. The experience that Eugene's children have at auntie Ifeoma's house in Nsukka leads to a volition.

There is increased consciousness and desire for freedom on the domestic front as Jaja and Kambili head home from Nsukka. Jaja demands to have the key to his room and Kambili notes:

I wanted to tell Mama that it did feel different to be back; that our living room had too much empty space, too much wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our furniture were lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted skin in the harmattan, the leather sofas greeting was a clammy coldness (..) ³

The fact that Kambili and Jaja have been brought to Nsukka entailed a remarkable revolution in their mind. This visit has enabled Kambili to make clearly the difference between Eugene, his father and Ifeoma, his aunt's houses. In the former's house, silence is the daily rule whereas the latter's is full of joy as people are on speaking term.

Through the journeying motive, Kambili discovers her true self and her desire for freedom is heightened. Auntie Ifeoma's children express themselves freely. This condition is totally absent at Enugu. Adichie, while comparing Eugene and Ifeoma's environments, recommend publicly a special way of treating and educating children. Consequently, female and male children must be given the same attention. This way of treating children must be noticed anywhere they are involved: at home, at school, in religious matters...To put extra emphasis on religious matters, Adichie has used Amaka who symbolizes a good converted African. Amaka, while choosing a confirmation name, insisted firmly on an African name. This choice cannot be done by Kambili on whom Ruth was imposed. The author pairs the two families to suggest an alternative upbringing and gender socialization. Beatrice's only attitude and reaction when Eugene exercises violence and authority on Kambili is to stand aside of him and beg his pardon as it can be noticed in the following quotation: "please biko!" ⁴

Mama unconsciously approves Papa's philosophy, thus highlights her state that it is the one in which she can no longer do what she wants. This subordination coupled with strong morally correctness can be paired with Okonkwo's wives in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) who stand aside as Okonkwo beats their co-wife Ojiugo. Mama's action is also

³-Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*.p.192.

⁴-Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*.p.211.

similar to what Maiguru does when Babamukuru assaults Nyasha in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*.⁵ This African married women attitude in such a situation clearly gives information about how patriarchy imposes silence on women. Adichie suggests that women should do something to change how society functions through the character of Ifeoma. Aunt Ifeoma's worry is based on the moment when people, especially African, will sincerely fight violence: "... lecturers and students attend lectures with guns to their heads? When do we speak out?" Aunt Ifeoma's voice was raised. But the blaze in her eyes was not focused on the woman; she was angry at something bigger than the woman before her".⁶

Ifeoma is angry about oppression and lack of freedom at both domestic and public levels. It is the disturbing helplessness and passivity that she finds with Beatrice and some colleagues at the university that Adichie admonishes. Adichie's voice calls upon women to identify all forms of social oppression and to go ahead and confront them.

After Papa's death, Jaja was imprisoned. After his release, his mother with him joined their hands to control the business of the family. They even get to know who to bribe, to hire or to fire. Though they are silent, it is silence with freedom. They have their own voice and when Mama turns to Kambili and says "Thank you" Kambili tells us, "It is one of the few times in the past three years that she has spoken without first being spoken to".⁷ This is an indication of a new family that has freedom and some joy though it has its problems and ghosts. Although Papa is dead, Jaja as a son and brother is ready to suffer on behalf of his mother and sister. Through Jaja, Adichie suggests masculine selflessness and a regard for women.

Wives are expected to be mothers and motherhood has over time been seen as a source of strength in most African communities. All over the world, women have had status and respect for their role in nurturing and ensuring continuity. Freud⁸ describes the mother as the child's primary love object and the parent most responsible for its optimal development. He argues that in the early years of an infant's life the relationship of the infant with the mother is close but during the Oedipal conflict the boy declares publicly that he no longer loves his mother as he was threatened by his father imbued with patriarchal power. Freud, to strengthen this idea, states that the girl changes sides. So, she runs far from her mother because she qualifies her as a person who is unable to influence events. The Mende people overvalue motherhood who, according to Kolawole⁹ consider wives as God since life emanate from them. Kolawole, surprisingly enough, acknowledges women's marginalization in most societies. But for this study; I investigate how it is a possible source of exploitation, oppression and exclusion within the social-political space in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Purple Hibiscus surveys motherhood through the characters of Beatrice and Aunt Ifeoma. Simone De Beauvoir¹⁰ argues that women's ability to give birth is subsequently the source of their subordination. She contends that motherhood signals that women were twice doomed: biologically during pregnancy and socially when children restricted them at home. Chodorow¹¹ blames sexual inequality in society on the division of labor that allocates the primary infant and child care to women at home while men take valued occupations outside. In addition, she assumes that daughters and sons grow differently as the consequence of their opposite treatment. The daughters who share the core female identity with the mother copy their mother while the sons remain separate and autonomous.

⁵-Tsitsi Dangaramba. *Nervous Conditions*. Zimbabwe: women's Press. 1988.

⁶-Adichie. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. p.223.

⁷-Ibid. p. 306.

⁸-Freud Sigmund. "Femininity" *New Introductory Lecturers on Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton. 1963

⁹-Kolawole Mary Modukpe. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Africa Press. 1997.

¹⁰-Simone De Beauvoir. *Second Sex*. London: Picador Classics. 1989.

¹¹-Chodorow N. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Psychology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1978.

The societal desire for children happens to be an avenue through which women are exploited and oppressed. Linked with the desire for children is also the strong social demand and desire to mother to bear boys. In most of African societies, the boy-child is highly valued. Consequently, girls are relegated to a lesser position. This situation leads to a disgusting position. This desire for babies urges Beatrice, Eugene's wife to do her best to have them in order to escape his in-laws disagreement. The members of Eugene's umunna are opposed to his having two children only.

Beatrice's time is mainly devoted to housework because of her children and the husband. Immediately Papa throws the missal to Jaja and breaks the figurines. Beatrice is the one who collects them without using gloves to avoid danger for her children. Jaja warns Mama "careful, Mama, or those pieces will cut your fingers".¹² Jaja acknowledges that his mother does everything she can to ensure her family's safety. Mama does every work linked with her family including plaiting her daughter's hair while her husband finds pleasure in sleeping before lunch time. plaiting the hair of Kambili every Sunday before lunch. This situation is a proof of the unfair division of tasks for men and women. Mama's obligations place her squarely in the domestic arena. It is no surprise that when Aunt Ifeoma wants to take them out Mama cannot go because she tells Ifeoma that, "you know Eugene likes me to stay around".¹³ Therefore, the domestic space, reserved for mothers, is a site of patriarchal oppression.

The characters and circumstances in *Purple Hibiscus* compare well with Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* where Eugene just like Babamukuru are symbols of masculinity. Both are domineering, benevolent and they provide for their own families and the clan but are callous, unreasonable, brutal and oppressive. Men's education does not impact on their attitude towards women. Despite these men being highly educated, they exploit their wives and just like Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*, Maiguru in *Nervous Conditions* has to lie low and to continuously pamper Babamukuru. Eugene and Babamukuru are good examples. Adichie seems to suggest that negative patriarchy rears its ugly face in African modern era despite the progress made in different areas of human endeavour. It means that women can only be respected if they fulfill their biological duty of mothering. Mama's worry lies in seeing her husband having more sons from other women. This will lessen her importance in Eugene's household. Fears. For a woman to have security and a permanent position then she should have several children and more boys. The experiences of Beatrice are reminiscent of what Nnu Ego in Emecheta's novel entitled *The Joys of Motherhood* witnesses while she tries hard to impose mother's skills on men. This kind of request is tightly fixed on African women's strong desire to see their burden softened as it is indirectly suggested by Adichie.

Aunt Ifeoma's high education from which her freedom results does not hinder her being controlled by her family and she spends much of her time with the children: helping, correcting, punishing, encouraging and cooking. She is widowed and struggling as Papa Nnukwu realizes "since the father of her children died, she has seen hard times".¹⁴

Kambili notes that she behaves like a referee who has done a good job and is admiring the players who in this case are her children: Amaka, Obiora and Chima. Adichie uses Ifeoma's character to open women's eyes on the characteristics of a system which overvalues men. So, she pleads for similar ways to reach their own actualization. She stands against oppression when everyone else remains silent. Through this character Adichie voices out a strong belief which consists in encouraging exploited African women to never give up competing with men.

¹²-Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*.p.8.

¹³-Ibid.,p.80.

¹⁴-Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*.p.65.

The identity of women is linked with their children and one can note that those women who are childless suffers the indignity of lacking mother-derived identity. This is realised in Ogige Market where Kambili notes: Mama Joe's shed in Ogige Market just barely fit the high stool where she sat and the smaller stool in front.... Wooden boards with lopsided print leaned on broken chairs in front of the sheds. The closest ones read: "The women and children called every female who walked past ...While she turned my hair... she chattered non stop to (...) mama Caro."¹⁵

From this extract we realize the identity of mothers is crucial in getting business names. Such identification serves to marginalize those who are childless. Rarely have women been studied as daughters in literature since the identity of wives and mothers overshadow other identities. This happens despite the affirmations of Oyewumi (1997) that seniority; to be precise older/young is more important than sex/gender in African context. Moreover, she put emphasis on the fact that the relationships between men and women are complete. Yet seniority is relational; one is young or older depending on the context and situation. Seniority unlike gender is only graspable as part of relationships and neither rigidly fixated on the body nor dichotomized. These insights are critical as we try to make sense of the identity of women as daughters which is an identity in transition in the worlds of the two novels. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the socialization of daughters produces docile, submissive and unimaginative characters due to the oppressive and overly patriarchal environment they grow up in. To Papa, Kambili should be God fearing and a "backyard snob as the girls in her class point out. She simply does things in a weird way; isolating herself from the other students and remaining silent. Okuyade (2007) affirms that silence in *Purple Hibiscus* is magnified to a level whereby it can be heard. Eugene threatens are his family members so that they are doomed to a deep silence which can pair the one in a friars' center.

In a rare twist Mama kills her husband and that way frees herself and her children from the yoke of domestic servitude. This killing is symbolic in that it points to the author's desire of a world free of gender-engineered violence at the domestic level. The Biblical allusion of Jesus serves to exonerate Mama from the killing since Jaja and Kambili believe that someone has to die for some other people to be saved. Kambili says:

God knows best, I said". God works in mysterious ways. And I thought how Papa would be proud that I had said that (...) Look what he did to his faithful servant Job, even to his own son. But have you ever wondered why? Why did He have to murder his own son so we would be saved? Why did He have to go ahead and save us? ¹⁶

For the freedom of women to be fully realized sometimes drastic and radical measures have to be taken.

In a different scenario Ifeoma goads the sister-in-law (Beatrice) to quit an abusive marriage. In doing so Ifeoma taunts those women living in abusive relationships to seek an alternative lifestyle outside marriage. Ifeoma moreover disputes the undemocratic way of appointing the sole administrator in an effort to have positive change in the manner the University is managed. Although she is eventually sacked, her efforts mean a lot since she provokes the other lecturers to resist dictatorship from all fronts. The indispensable position taken by women in *Purple Hibiscus* points to the need to center women issues in Adichie's society on the changing roles of modern African women.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL PROGRESS

Adichie, in her second novel *Half of a YellowSun* tackles issues which are thematically related to what is in

¹⁵-Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*.pp.236-7.

¹⁶-Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*.p.289.

Purple Hibiscus. The author projects women characters struggling to keep their families hopeful even when the country is going through a civil war. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* women are depicted as resolute and progressive. They give direction when and where necessary and guide their men and society in time of difficulties. Those women who are not progressive are drawn in the negative light and we, as readers, are called upon to disregard them. Adichie uses characters like Alice to state her position on mistresses, concubinage and being second wives. Alice is depicted as eccentric and anti-social. She is always sheepishly taking herself to very unfulfilling male relationships.

Alice shows clearly her anger to the army officer who tricks her. Yet, nobody appreciates her love affair with Odenigbo as Olanna was away. Adichie uses her character called Alice so that every woman is aware of the importance of faithfulness and the advantages of monogamy. Infidelity on the part of men is a serious challenge women have to often face in *Half of a Yellow sun*. To put emphasis on women's sorrow entailed by unfaithfulness and polygamy, Mrs Ozobia and a Yoruba woman are used by Adichie. The Yoruba woman, Mr Ozobia's mistress is very lucky as she is bought a nice house in Lagos. The adjectives used to describe the Mistress: common riff raff, a Yoruba goat, old and ugly.¹⁷ These descriptions make the readers share in loathing women who take other women's husbands. Adichie is not the only one to rebuke unfaithful women and prostitutes that she considers as married women's woes. Her senior sister, Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* (1980) also illustrates this situation with some female and male characters. Men, for variety sake, have mistresses. Such actions are a source of humiliation to the wives. This humiliation jars on Mrs Ozobiaso that she cannot refrain from crying. She was crying while telling Olanna about her father's mistress:

"He has bought her a house in Ikeja, her Mother said, and "My friend lives on the same street."

... "Have you talked to him? Olanna asked.

"What am I to say to him?" Gwayagini? "There is nothing I can say to him. I

Just wanted to let you know what is happening so that they will not say I did not tell somebody".¹⁸

Telling her secret to her daughter who is also a woman is a proof that women should join hands to succeed in fighting their oppressors. Mr When Mrs Ozobia says "so that they will not say I did not tell somebody"¹⁹ suggests that the society does not approve of Chief Ozobia's behaviour. The above incident points to the desperate situation women find themselves when playing the role of wives. When Olana's mother, Mrs Ozobia, demonstrates to her that it is not worth discussing infidelity topic with the husband, she acknowledges that men superiority on women is definitely true in that field. She is almost confirming that she fears the husband and so he can do whatever he wishes. Such fears imply the unequal gender relationships that characterise marriage and the position of African women in patriarchal societies. The fact that Aunt Ifekais afraid of her husband's extra marital love affairs is a proof that men's unfaithfulness is accepted while women's is categorically rejected. But surprisingly enough, she is conscious of husband's infidelity impact on married women. Although husbands are unfaithful, wives are still in quest of their family's welfare. That is what Adichie tries to inculcate in women through the use of Aunt Ifeka, Mama Dozie, Edna Whaler, Kainene and Olanna in her novel entitled *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The desire for children is explored through the characters of Olanna, Arize, Odenigbo's mother and Anulika among others

¹⁷-Adichie. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. p.218.

¹⁸-Ibid.,P.207

¹⁹-Loc.Cit.

in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It is the desire for a child and a grandson that drives Odenigbo's mother to coerce Amala into sleeping with Odenigbo and this leads to the near collapse of Odenigbo's relationship with Olanna. To Mama Odenigbo, a spoiled woman is one who cannot bear children. She says, "No-body knows if she can have children. Do you know? Does anyone know?"²⁰. Mama's concern grows out of the significance attached to children in Igbo society and by extension in Africa. She seriously wants to have a grandson. She complains that those girls who go to University follow men until their bodies are useless to have children. She says: "No wonder my son has not married while his mates are counting how many children they have".²¹

The situation described here resembles what happens in Nwapa's *One is Enough* where Amaka's relationship with her husband Obiora is strained by a mother-in-law who accuses her of being barren. So, in short, it is clear that the non-stop quest for children seems to be the main cause of African barren women's unhappiness as it is showed through the precede cases.

Children take care of parents and carry on the family name. This explains why women and nearly everyone's lives are dominated by the idea of bearing children and especially sons to increase the number of the family members and make sure that the name of this family will not disappear. This in itself points to the patriarchal nature of Adichie's society that ties a woman to the husbands' *umunna* by virtue of having mothered boys. To diminish the impact of barrenness on families and especially on women, Adichie put forward the idea of adoption. Amala's child, Olanna and Kainene is examples of adopted children in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Olanna also feels glad when the nurse asks her how many children she has. Her feelings emanate out of what society demands from women: motherhood. A similar societal obsession with the desire to have children is what makes Arize's mother-in-law disgrace her by demanding to know how many abortions she has had before marriage. Arize's "misfortune" because she doesn't get pregnant for three years after marriage, is a source of oppression from her mother-in-law. It is what Amala suffers in the hands of Odenigbo's mother, in that Odenigbo's mother wants to use her to get a grandson. Such a situation puts women under a lot of pressure, curtails their freedom and makes them slaves of societal demand(s) and desire(s) leaving them without a choice of their own.

Adichie makes use of mothers-in-law to demonstrate clearly that there are some women accept patriarchal principles and impose them on other women. Consequently, women are harassing their fellow women. Through the characters of Ifeoma, Olanna and Kainene, Adichie shows that motherhood can be revised in order to stop women oppression and suffering. In the use of Kainene and Olanna Adichie revises the perception that women should have on issues of motherhood. Whatever is captured in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in terms of women and motherhood is progressive unlike what we get in *Purple Hibiscus*. Kainene and Olanna live happily although they are childless. This type of life is what Adichie advocates.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie depicts daughters who reject to be tools of male aggrandizement through the episode where Ozobia uses his daughter Olanna to get a contract from the Minister of Finance; chief Okonji which Olanna doesn't appreciate neither does Kainene as it can be noticed in the following extract which points to the question of daughters being used as sex enticements since she observes:

²⁰-Adichie. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. p.198.

²¹-Ibid., p. 97.

The ten percent is standard, so extras always help. The other bidders probably don't have a beautiful daughter. Kainene dragged the word out until it sounded cloying, sticky: beau- ti- ful. (...). "The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait," ...²²

This demonstrates the use of women by men in the society presented by Adichie for material gains. When the parents conspire to have Olanna get sexually involved with the finance minister they paint an ugly picture of daughters who have no choice of even sexual partners. We learn that Olanna's father did not receive her choice of Odenigbo positively. The narrator identifies that all is not well with Odenigbo as Olanna's fiancée and notes, "her father only wanted to gall him and show how unimpressed he was by a senior lecturer from Nsukka".²³ Adichie brings up a situation where Olanna rebels to suggest that women should stand their grounds on issues of personal choice. Personal choice points to characters' autonomy and some degree of liberty on the part of women. Eberechi suffers during the war in that she is used as sex bait and denied her right to choose a partner. Such an act is a total disregard of her humanity and denies the young girl her basic rights. Adichie highlights these episodes to herald positive change for the betterment of women's welfare. In commodifying daughters, Adichie is condemning the difference of being the owner of property, the heir (for boys and men) and being the property (for daughters and women) and thus suggesting a revision to the existing gender parities.

Arndt Susan²⁴ is another female writer who thinks that women feel more comfortable when they are single in Nigeria as well as in Kenya. But what she does not comment on is the fact that women exploit one another. Adichie examines concubinage through Chief Ozobia, Kainene, Richard, Susan, Olanna, Mohamed, Ugwu, Eberechi, Alice, the army colonel and the Yoruba woman in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. To illustrate this idea, the narrator observes:

(...) But then she didn't smile in that plastic way the mistresses did. She didn't even have the generic prettiness that made him inclined to believe the rumour that Nigerian politicians swapped mistresses.²⁵

Women are so marginalized that being indignified social spaces unaccompanied by a man is "abnormal". Going to such places for Kainene is a pointer that she has a choice and thus she is exercising her freedom. Adichie highlights the episode above to show that the progressive contemporary woman has the ability to be in social gatherings unaccompanied.

Adichie discredits those women who are perpetuating practices that degrade and oppress fellow women like Alice, Amala, Nnankwanze's mother and Odenigbo's mother. Although African scholars like Emecheta, Aidoo, Nwapa, Frank and Mariama Ba argue that wifehood and motherhood are the major sources of oppression, it is palpable from this study that other relationships with men are also oppressive. In such relationships women, unconsciously exploit fellow women as they cohabit with their husbands or boyfriends and that way such women help the institution of patriarchy to continue subordinating them. In bringing up such observations Adichie wants the conscience of the women in such liaisons to be revived so as to lessen the suffering of fellow women.

Adichie, in *Half of a Yellow Sun* sees women as progressive elements in society in the sense that they are the promoters of their society during all difficult times like war, famine, unemployment. Kainene is a clear-cut example of such women who imbibe progressive ideas. During war time, she initiates agricultural activities so that refugees could be

²² Ibid., p.35.

²³ Adichie. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. p.32.

²⁴ Susan Arndt. "African Gender Trouble and African Womanism. An Interview with Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni" Signs. Chicago: University Press. 2000.

²⁵ Adichie. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. p.37.

feed. Another progressive action lies in her capacity to find a new job for her husband. She also starts a school to teach the children so that there would be continuity after the war.

OPPOSING OPPRESSIVE CULTURES AND TRADITIONS

The cornerstone of the relations and activities in any given society is culture. Cham ²⁶ affirms “(...) a healthy culture is a culture of equality, a culture free from all forms of exploitation and above all, a culture rooted in the true traditions of the people”.²⁷ My aim in referring to Cham is to show my disagreement about some cultural practices and mainly the ones which try to make people believe the total control of women by men in the societies dealt with by Adichie her two novels. I can then affirm that one actual tragedy of the African women is a culture which hinders their progress and permanently establishes them in a state of submission.

Ogundipe-Leslie ²⁸ identifies the socialization process which is engendered in that it connects macho strength and heroism to males and associates traditional roles of wife and mother with women. A woman’s value undoubtedly depends on her capacity to respect patriarchal principles mainly as far as sex is concerned. Okonkwo and Ekwueme make their wives suffer respectively in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and in Elechi Amadi’s *Concubine*.²⁹ These examples confirm that aggression and violence is a feature of men whereas acquiescence is associated with women in most African communities. In order to rethink the position of the African women in regard to limitations occasioned by culture and traditions Miss Adebayo in *Half of a Yellow Sun* challenges most men when they meet for evening discussions at Odenigbo’s house.

Kainene is physically described in overly masculine adjectives and she takes after Beatrice Okohin in Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*³⁰ who defies gender conventions which serve to decenter and disregard women and all their issues. Beatrice considers trivial and chauvinistic the idea “that every woman wants a man to complete her”.³¹ Ifeoma confronts similar chauvinism when she suggests to the sister -in-law that life may begin at the end of a marriage in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Catholicism is shown as patriarchal in Adichie’s works and the voice of women is totally subsumed in its masculine system. Chimamanda Adichie, in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, clearly shows this aspect of that new religion through the fact that Eugene is very attached to Virgin Mary he regularly begs to try to persuade God to forgive him and to answer his prayer. Moreover, he has named a special Mary for Nigeria. Taking these facts into account, Adichie criticizes strongly this patriarchal principle of Christianity, especially Catholic faith. Examining carefully the relationships existing between Papa and Mary Mother of God, one can conclude that femininity is at a top place in Catholic Church. To insist on this place, Adichie has used the apparitions of Mary in Nigeria and at a well- defined place called Ahokpe. These apparitions prompt people, particularly Papa, a totalitarian husband, to increase their devotion to this female being. He even regularly refers to Mary-Mother of God whereas Father Benedict, a catholic priest does not. Consequently, the authority of women is realized and their state of subordination subverted. Amaka’s suggestion of

²⁶ -Cham, M. “Contemporary Society and Female Imagination : A Study of the Novels of Mariama Ba. In Durossima Jones, Eldred and Eustace Palmer and Marjorie Jones “. (eds.). Women in African Literature Today. 1987

²⁷ -Ibid., p.100.

²⁸ -Leslie Ogundikpe. *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*. Trenton NJ.: Africa World Press. 1994

²⁹ -Elechi Amadi. *The Concubine*. London: Heinemann. 1966.

³⁰ -Chinua Achebe. *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Heinemann. 1987.

³¹ -Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus*. p.88.

African name coupled with Beatrice's refusal to adopt patriarchal prescribed behavior to show sadness after her husband's death highlights African women's stretched freedom and their rise from a traditional inferior position. Thus, Kambili observes:

The compound gates were locked. Mama had told Adamu not to open the gates to all the people who wanted to throng in for mgbalu, to commiserate with us. (...). Adamu said it was unheard of, to turn sympathizes away...³²

After Eugene's death, Beatrice refused wearing all black or all white. This change in the Igbo custom clearly shows a change in the modern women's life norms. Mama also does not wear "all black or all white".³³ for a year and even does not cut her hair as custom demands. Mama's desire to change the way of mourning serves to advocate for a situation where women are not subjected to senseless rituals and customs at the expense of their comfort.

Adichie satirizes the activities of *umunna* which is a male caucus for enslaving women. Women are totally against what *umunna* does or says since it is an institution that serves to marginalize them. Members of Ifediora's *umunna* say a lot of negative things about Ifeoma. And as mentioned earlier in this thesis Eugene's *umunna* advises him to have more children, especially boys, by getting married with another wife in order to deserve the pride which he cannot get with only two children. Cultures are mostly created by men and that is why most of them are oppressive to women making them act within male confines. Therefore, Adichie advocates for eradicating every habit aiming at deepening the social and economic gaps between men and women. These habits include dowry, accepting being chosen a husband, relentless desire for male children, etc. To illustrate what she advocates, she has used Aunt *Ifeomawho* who does not attach too much importance to the *imammuo* ritual.

I therefore argue that Adichie's characters: Olanna, Kainene, Adebayo, Ifeoma, Amaka, Mrs *Muokelu* and Mama *Onitsha* remodeled to subvert the customs and traditions, especially, the ones which keep on conveying ideas about women's total submission to men. In order to free African women from patriarchal burden, Adichie has used some educated women. These educated women in the two novels are able to escape male oppression unlike the uneducated ones. The theme of women education in Adichie's novels echoes well with Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*³⁴ where education has the potential to provide women with the possibility of crafting new identity beyond that of womanhood and acquire consciousness of empowerment that impacts on their relationship with males at the family and societal levels. The silencing shown by African women is entailed by cultural items such as: tradition, religion, marriage, motherhood and the desire for baby boys. The author of *Half of a Yellow sun*, Adichie bitterly criticizes anything maintaining women at an inferior position when compared with men, severely denounces all the organizations which do not aim at stopping unfairness among men and women.

This part of the research work also explores the different strategies Adichie adopts to grant women a voice in the face of the silencing structures. The contents of the books written by women can be considered and accepted as a way towards breaking patriarchal chains. This is because, according to Kolawole counter discourse, it is a healthy approach in African women's search for acceptable feminine aesthetics. The way Adichie's female characters struggle to end their oppression is an issue that has received special attention in this chapter. Speaking of traditions and cultures that are suppressive, strong female characters, education for women and female solidarity are identified as the strategies that

³² -Adichie. *Purple Hibiscus.*, pp.287-9.

³³ -Ibid., p.298.

³⁴ -Mariama Ba. *So Long a Letter*. Ibadan: New Horn Press. 1980.

women and female writers utilize to fight oppression and exclusion.

Although other African female writers explore the gender issues discussed in this chapter before, Adichie is unique in the sense that her works are cast in wider the unfair treatment of mankind in general. Her approach to fighting oppression confirms that despite the struggles by women to assert themselves in a world dominated by men through the ways identified in this chapter the war against gender subordination in Africa is far from being over.

CONCLUSIONS

Like other female writers such as Efuia Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo and Flora Nwapa, Adichie is involved in the process of writing about themselves, creating and recreating a history within their communities. Notably the woman's own social situation, such as gender politics has been women writers' major concern. So far, women as subject are their focal point in their writings. Adichie, therefore, gives a clear cut picture of African patriarchal societies, with all the assumptions and erroneous ideas that they involve

All in all, Adichie Chimamanda portrays her female characters with very feminine views. She deserves commendations for not displaying or flouting her feminism like Buchi Emecheta, her senior sister. She, nevertheless, subtly and skillfully drives her gender ideology into the constitutive core of her stories giving the reader the freedom to detect her major and central ideological preoccupations. This female writer acknowledges education and feminism as the main solutions for African women's problems. So, to really impose themselves in all modern fields, women should oppose concrete resistance to oppression and repression and enhance education for girls in societies that are imbued with patriarchal ideas.

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