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Gender Issues in Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

Women in Africa have been exploited by the oppression of race, gender, and class. The depiction of the Black women solely as ill-fated and submissive receivers of sexual and racial abuse subdues the assumptions that Black women can actively participate in changing their fate and bringing about some changes in their lives. This article attempts to identify and analyze gender issues, and discrimination women encountered in Nigerian society, as reflected in the works of Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta clearly shows how traditional Igbo society was harmful and unfair to women. Aku-nna bravely tries to stand up for herself by refusing to marry contrary to what her community expected of her. In the same vein, Adichie's novel is a feminist work that challenges the dehumanizing tendencies of the menfolk as evident in the character of Mama (Beatrice Achike) who eventually exposed the African conception of an ideal woman who keeps dumb even in the face of humiliation, victimization, and brutality to be perceived as a good woman. However, Adichie applauds female characters like Kambili and Aunty Ifeoma, who do not need men for their sustenance or keep themselves attached to men to assert their identity.

Keywords: Women, feminism, gender issues, discrimination, oppression.

Introduction

The representation of female gender in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, is generally intolerant and biased. It is a common belief that men are the bulwark of any society. However, their contribution to the overall development of humanity and nature, in general, is excellent. On the other hand, women are saddled with the responsibilities of raising children at home and other routine works of the family up to the extending roles of caring and nurturing, and they are not seen as necessary as men. This is because they are considered to be half part of their husbands and the family. Therefore, women have

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been marginalized from their own respected culture for ages. Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, robust, protective, and decisive.

In contrast, women are presented as emotional (irrational), weak, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify such inequalities, which still occur today. This implies that women's roles have been marginalized due to the patriarchal (sexist) beliefs of the traditional society. The belief that men are superior to women economically, politically and socially has been imposed in the traditional society. Oriaku in her essay titled "Buchi Emecheta is not a Feminist then What?" asserts that "Chinua Achebe, one of the most celebrated African novelist and patriarch presents his early women as victims of a society regulated by cultural norms and traditional values" (Oriaku,1986, p.34). One must acknowledge as well that male and female roles are societal constructs, and thus, the entire female identity is based more upon societal constraints rather than physiological realities. Women are taught to mother, while men are conditioned to dominate and control. Mary Kolawole further observes that with male writers in Nigeria, "women are presented as tragic heroines unable to speak from their subaltern position" (Kolawole, 1998, p.228). With human society being dominated by men who make the rules, the situation leads to the production of macho values which stifle women portraiture as positive contributors to societal development. Most girls are caught up with agricultural and domestic chores in their everyday lives. Most girls are also denied their right to education either because of the myth that educating girls is of no importance since their destiny is to get married whereby future husbands will reap the rewards of the girls' education or for economic reasons because parents cannot afford to send all their children to school. Given the difficult choice of who to educate between girls and boys, parents are likely to provide education to a boy rather than to a girl.

It is this male-dominant culture that initiated feminists to develop feminist criticism to reflect and expose the deep-rooted biased culture. Feminists assume that women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. Feminism is a social movement, by and for women, directed at changing attitudes and social conditions toward women. Novels like *The Bride Price*, generally explore women's problems and abuses and introduce female characters seeking expanded

options. Still, they seldom address the more significant issues of alternatives and structural changes for all women advocated by feminism. This implies that protest against patriarchy (sexist discrimination) in the traditional society is not new; it has been there for ages. However, the belief that men are superior to women has been commonly practiced. Feminists have observed to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions in politics, social power, economy, and others is recent.

Feminism is also a world-wide ideology and political movement directed at changing the existing power relations between men and women. It is a social theory that highlights the inequalities in the male and female relationships in any society where patriarchal hegemony is in practice. Patriarch is an ideology that gives men the confidence to subordinate the female or treat, the female as an inferior being, men in such society, hide under the disguise of patriarchy to subjugate women by a system of sex-role stereotyping to which they are subjected from the early age. Thus, feminism as an ideology, according to Ify G. Achufusi, in "Feminist Inclination of Flora Nwapa," came about from the realization that a woman can never hope to have the proper recompense for her services until her usefulness and her success in life are not only demonstrated but fully understood and acknowledged (Achufusi, 1994, p.164). The early feminists believed that the solution to women's subjugation should come from a political movement since patriarchy is tagged as an oppressive political system.

Feminists argue that the inferior position long occupied by women in the patriarchal society has been culturally, not biologically set. Thus, feminism, like Marxism, is rooted in the political discourses of modernity but also challenging its idea of sovereignty, equality, liberty, rights, and rationality. However, literature is one of the most popular venues that propagates gender issues and seeks to liberate women from male oppression. Several writers like Cyprian Ekwensi, Ousmane Sembene, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Alex La Guma, Peter Abraham, and then Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Grace Ogot, Bessie Head, later writers like Ngozi Adichie, Lola Soneyin to mention but few provide most of the background material for the discussion and analysis of the African female experience in fiction. Their works concern with the socio-cultural perception of women and the dominant factors that encourage problems or crises in their lives. Barbara Smith, in *The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender,*

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and Freedom, asserts that "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, Jewish women ...Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Smith, 1998, p.96). There are other African Feminist writers like Catherine Acholonu, who believed that women should not be seen as objects to decorate the homes with, but instead, they should be regarded as significant contributors to the growth of the nation without really affecting their roles as mothers and wives at home. In her article titled; "Buchi Emecheta," Acholonu asserts that: "Women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about and companion to be flattered or claimed with promises. They should see themselves as nation's primary fundamental root from which all else grows and blossoms, and women must be encouraged to take a keen interest in the destiny of the country"(Acholonu, 1985, p.62).

Scholars have studied Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* from different perspectives using various conceptual frameworks such as Feminism, Marxism, Postcolonialism, among others. However, this research identifies the need to explore how patriarchal principles presuppose the female gender to discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation, among others. Works of two female African writers were purposely selected, Emecheta's *The Bride Price* represents the early female writers in Africa while Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* symbolizes the modern-day female writers. This will provide the much-needed facts in identifying the traditional and modern ways of marginalizing women, specifically African women.

This article aims to re-examine the categorization of female characters as subordinate and inferior beings in two African novels. To this end, the paper attempts to examine how female characters were depicted in the selected books to determine how traditional beliefs contribute to female subjugation and to explore patriarchal structures that exploit and subjugate the female characters in the selected African texts. The work also seeks to provide answers to the following questions: How are women represented in the books chosen? In what ways as African culture contribute to female marginalization and subjugation? And How have patriarchal values contribute to the discrimination of female gender in African societies? This study is different from those mentioned above

because it will bring out a kind of comparative analysis of the effects of patriarchy on women folk and their various attempts in the different regional locations in Africa to redeem the degraded image of Africa women. Therefore, this study is meant to contribute its quota to knowledge as it highlights the means to self-actualization in any patriarchal society.

Literature Review

Feminism began in Europe in the late eighteenth century due to the struggle for women's liberation. The works by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mills were the significant early contributions to feminist literature. Feminism in Europe and America suffered setback until it was revived in the 1960s through Betty Friedan. As a result of the lull in the feminist movement and a shift in emphasis, feminism has been divided into First Wave Feminism, Second Wave Feminism, and lastly, Third Wave Feminism or Ecofeminism (as argued by two renowned eco-feminists, Karen J. Waren and Ynestra King). First-wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United States. Initially, it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women towards the end of the nineteenth century, social and political action focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the rights of women's suffrage. Feminist activists in this period are Voltarine de Clylre, Margaret Sanger, Florence Nightingale, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony. Each campaigned for the abolition of slavery earlier to championing women's right to vote. In 1918, the Representation of the People Act was passed granting the right to vote to women aged 30 and over who lived in a constituency or owned land or properties. The 1928 Act extended the suffrage by giving all women over 21 years of age electoral votes equal to men. Second-wave feminism refers to the political movement in 1963, and it extends until the 1980s. It was a continuation of first-wave feminism and addressed issues such as the equality of the sexes in the workplace, woman's right to choose, feminine sexuality, and a furthering of political action to shed some light on women's issues. Betty Freidan was considered the founder of second-wave feminism, and, in her book *The Feminine Critique*, she questioned white, middle-class ideals of family life, motherhood, and particularly as domestic life has stifled women and their aspirations. Simone de Beauvoir also

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contributes extensively to the movement. In her book, *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, she asserted that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 2011, p.83). This famous statement of Beauvoir emphasizes the gradual transformation of the woman. She asserts that a woman is not fully formed at birth, but instead, she is molded continuously by her cultivation. Biology does not influence what renders a woman, but she discovers her duty from man or other members of society. The woman is not inherently born passive, insignificant, and inferior, but all the forces available in the outside world compel her to become one.

Feminism, in a simple term, is the political, social, cultural, and economic struggle aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. It can also be perceived as a branch of social theory, which symbolizes the struggle for the participation of women in a social and political formulation specifically, both at national and social levels of life; women are relegated to the background and as subordinates to their male counterparts. Mobolanle Sotunsa, in “Feminism and Gender Discourse,” asserts that “feminism is a historically diverse and culturally varied international movement probing the “question of a woman” (Sotunda, 1989, p.3). J. A Cuddon also defines feminism as “an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature” (Cuddon, 1991, p.338). Robin Barrow and Geoffrey Milburn maintain that “feminism is a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women” (Barrow and Milburn, 1990, p.128). Maggie Humm also posits that “feminism can stand for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society” (Humm, 1992, p.1). Feminism, however, concern with the female gender as a social category in society.

In African society, feminism has encountered an antagonistic and unfavorable barrier as the African culture views it with deep and unconcealed disdain owing to the widespread belief in the region that the freedom and liberty of women would diminish the core and character of manhood and influence the roles of women in their marital homes. The evaluation of female authors will contribute to the understanding of women's

perspective and counter the male perception of feminist struggle. Buche Emecheta, Sefi Atta, Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's, they present the subject of feminist realism from the perspective of the female and support the premise that women better treat women's condition. Femi Ojo-Ade, in his article "Female Writers, Male Critics," opines that "the personality of African women have been hidden under such a heap of myths...rapid generalization and patent untruths that it might be interesting to study what they have to say for themselves when they decide to speak" (Ojo-Ade, 1983, p.89). In other words, it is only the female writers who can express the views of women towards male chauvinism better.

Chibueze Orié traced the predicament of women to patriarchy. She asserts that "the effect of patriarchal lordship is silencing the woman, muffling, or muting her voice or browbeating her to remain voiceless" (Orié, 2010, p.160). In many African countries, there have been changes in the traditional roles of women. The rightful place of women in society has, for long, been a subject of discussion. The implication of this is that more feminist writers such as Ngozi Adichie, Tess Onwueme, Sefi Atta, Lola Soneyin, and a host of others have emerged. They have struggled extensively with patriarchy under the umbrella of feminism. The primary aim of feminism is to work to eliminate mistreatment and unequal treatment of women. Male domination is found in all aspects of life, and it causes social inequalities and unjust treatment towards women. Mobolanle Sotunsa asserts that feminists "seek to remove all the barriers to equal social, political, and economic opportunities for women. They object to the notion that women's worth is determined principally by her gender and that women are inherently inferior, subservient, or less intelligent than men" (Sotunsa, 2009, p.228). She further states that "Feminist scholarship is aimed at deconstructing the established predominant male paradigms and constructing a female perspective which foregrounds the female experience" (Sotunsa, 2009, p.228).

Similarly, Semebene Ousmane posits that society should abandon the way African forefather's subjected women to, but to realize the strength of women. In his novel, *Gods Bits of Wood*, his female characters attain the role of providing for their household during the strike. Likewise, Wole Soyinka, in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, puts the emphasis on women's assumption of their individual identity and

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empowerment that will prove to be essential to achieve peaceful societies, with full human potential and sustainable development. He further asserts that “when a people have been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide; they have a right to seek an identity apart from their aggressor” (Soyinka, 2006, p.110).

Gender Issues in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

Buchi Emecheta is among the writers whose works helped to transform the presence of African women writers in African Literature. Her depiction of the experiences of African women, in general, and Nigerian women, in particular, has challenged the stereotyped and idealized images of African women found in male texts. Emecheta's *The Bride Price* deals with the portrayal of the African woman focusing more in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The use of the main characters in her novels shows what it means to be a woman and a mother in Nigerian society. Her primary concern in her works is the plight of the rural and urban women whose efforts to satisfy the man are being trivialized.

The society in Nigeria is predominantly patriarchal, which happens to be a salient feature of a traditional community. It is a structure that is being regulated by a set of social relations that empowers men to exercise dominance over women. The influence of social customs in the town of Ibuza can be noticed in the name given to Aku-nna by her father. Like other women in Emecheta's novels, Aku-nna is insignificant in her patriarchal society and the only benefit she is expected to bring to her family, for which reason she is kept in school, after her father's death, is the wealth her family will get when she is married. Emecheta states, “He (her father) had named her Aku-nna, meaning literally “father's wealth, “knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her, would be her bride price. To him, this was something to look forward to. Aku-nna, on her part, was determined not to let her father down. She was going to marry well, a rich man of whom her father would approve and who would be able to afford an expensive bride price” (Emecheta, 1976, p.10). As seen, the first inequality that Aku-nna, as a representative of women folk, encountered, is the meaning of her name; father's wealth. Initially, a name should be a gift from parents to their children. However, Aku-nna was given a name that implies a father's wealth. There are two

points which show that patriarchy is in control. The first point is “father’s.” On a serious note, a child should be seen as an individual, not a father’s property. The second point is that the word “wealth” is said to forecast Aku-nna’s future in the sense that she is nothing but her father’s means of attaining wealth and the family at large.

The status of women in society is appraised through the act of child-bearing. Aku-nna's father always had arguments with his Ma Blackie over the issue of her inability to bless his household with children and continuously reminded her that “he had had to pay double the normal bride price before he was able to take Ma as his wife.....he would remind Ma Blackie that having paid this heavy bride price....And what had he to show for it all – an only son!” (Emecheta, 1976, p.9). Ma Blackie’s husband, Ezekiel Odia, spared no expense and used every means available to change his destiny. Ezekiel: “had sent her to all the native doctors he could afford in Lagos” and even “encouraged her to join the Cherubim and Seraphim sect” (Emecheta, 1976, p.8). Knowing fully-well that she cannot go against the roles that the traditional society imposed upon her, Ma Blackie obediently complies with her husband’s request and goes to the ends of the earth to prove to her husband and community that she has not failed in her duty as a woman: “In despair, she decided to go home to their town, Ibuza, to placate their Oboshi river goddess into giving her some babies” (Emecheta, 1976, p.8). This indicates that society puts pressure on women through gender politics, and women carry out their duties imposed upon them by society. To realize their gender identity, African women also undertake painstaking challenges to please their dominant patriarchy.

The novel draws attention to the bondage and subjugation of women by traditional society through its cultural norms, customs, and taboos. These norms and customs undeniably serve as the conventional form of this tyrannical male objectification. Polygamy, another common practice in traditional Africa, becomes a critical and powerful instrument to oppress women. The Ibuza region exercises its subdued and subjugating influence on the people that reside in the village and molds and regulates their destinies. The untimely death of Ezekiel Odia, Aku-nna’s father, marks the beginning of dramatic changes in the life of Aku-nna and her family. In Nigeria of that period, a family without a father either has little or no means to provide support itself. In other words, the family would be regarded as non-existent without the presence of a

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patriarchal head. Emecheta resonates with this difficult predicament of Aku-nna's family as such: "It is so even today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father, you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact, a non-existing family. Such traditions do not change very much" (Emecheta, 1976, p.28). Ma Blackie, who cannot assume the responsibility of being the head of the family, submits herself to traditional practice and resignedly accepts her destiny as the inheritance of her husband's eldest brother, Okonkwo. Eventually, Aku-nna has to accompany her mother and return to Ibuza with her mother. Upon her arrival in Ibuza, Aku-nna was reminded of the offensive customary practice by her stepsister, Ogugua when she tells her: "You still don't know the customs of our Ibuza people! Your mother will become my father's wife. My father has inherited everything your father owned, and he has 'inherited' your mother too" (Emecheta, 1976, p.64). Okonkwo already has several wives, but, by the virtue of his brother's demise, he does not pass on an opportunity of inheriting his brother's property and his wife and eventually marries Ma Blackie.

The bride price, also called bride token or bridewealth, is a payment of a certain amount of money or property paid by a groom to the bride's family before the consummation of the marriage. It is a cultural phenomenon commonly practiced in many African societies and is also one of the significant customs in the Igbo tradition. Bride-price can manifest itself as an act of buying a wife as a commodity that can trigger physical or sexual abuse towards a woman if she fails to render her value or if she tries to escape; such acts revoke the repayment of the bride price. In the novel, Aku-nna's uncle, Okonkwo, is a man of ambition and has his eyes on the title of Eze, which will demand in his lavish sacrifice to the gods. He is a male chauvinist and reveals his intention when he speaks to his sons: "Don't you know I hope to become an Obi and take the title one day"? To become an Obi and receive the respected Eze title, a man must make a big and expensive sacrifice to the gods. Then he was given the red cap those who achieved this rank of chieftaincy were entitled to wear, and the occasion was followed by days of heavy feasting and drinking; in times past, a slave would have been killed to mark the lavish celebrations (Emecheta, 1976, p.75).

Here, a girl serves as a dispensable piece of a commodity that men could swap to achieve their personal goals and social advancement. As a person and conscious being with a free-will of her own, the girl is cherished only for the amount of bride price she could bring. Motivated by his greed and desire for power, Okonkwo discloses his plans to his sons for achieving the title of Eze: “Aku-nna and Ogugua will get married at about the same time. Their bride prices will come to me. You see the trend today that the educated girls fetch more money” (Emecheta, 1976, p.75). As evidenced, Okonkwo shows interest in Aku-nna’s education only because he hopes to receive a higher sum of bride price once she obtains some degree of knowledge. However, concerning the bride price that Aku-nna will fetch, her mother, Ma Blackie, has other plans. She hopes to use it to send Aku-nna’s brother Nna-nndo to school.

Finally, Emecheta successfully conveys the core of Aku-nna’s dilemma. Her rebellion against rooted notions of female bondage through limiting social norms has not yielded any successful outcomes. In the end, Aku-nna realizes that she cannot wholly escape from the traditions of her people and sincerely believes that she could only exercise her freedom after death. Her story in the novel could be used to warn young people about the consequences if they decide to go against the customs and traditions. Emecheta ironically ends her work:

Every girl born in Ibuza after Aku-nna's death was told her story to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride's price were not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold over every girl that would continue to exist, even in the face of every modernization, until the present day. Why this is so is, as the saying goes, any body's guess (Emecheta, 1976, p.168).

Aku-nna’s brave act of revolt against tradition was considered as a taboo because it was intentional and deliberate defiance of the patriarchal system and challenged the common belief that women are not supposed to think or act on their own except they go in accordance to patriarchy system in the male-dominated society.

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Gender Issues in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Chimamanda Adichie is one of Africa's leading contemporary literary voices and an outspoken voice of feminism. Her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is a coming-of-age novel that centers around a young Nigerian woman who strives to claim her identity in a patriarchal society. The book has managed to captivate a wide range of comments due to its significance in the Nigerian literary canon. In her article entitled "Deconstructing Binary Oppositions of Gender in *Purple Hibiscus*: A Review of Religious/Traditional Superiority & Silence," Janet Ndula works from the premise that *Purple Hibiscus* "is a fresh contribution to the new generation of novels which carry implications that endorse individual effort over gender disposition, demonstrating that sex difference does not presuppose subordination" (Ndula, 2017, p.32). J. Roger Kurtz lauds *Purple Hibiscus* and further states that the novel "demonstrates how the discovery and exercise of one's authentic voice is the sine qua non for living a worthwhile life of dignity and self-respect" (Kurtz, 2012, p.27).

Adichie deals with issues that affect the entire nation, particularly the role of the female in traditional society. She also explores a salient point that has often been overlooked in Nigerian novels: the concept of gender-based violence. Adichie examines this theme as one of the significant issues that affect women in several of her works, including *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. She diverts her attention to the subject of gender violence because girls and women in Nigeria are still exposed to various forms of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination. Adichie mainly concentrates on women, the challenges that they experience in their lives, their love for their respective family members, respect they have for their husbands even though they usually subject them to physical abuse, and the determination shown by some of them to stand against all forms of violence or subjugation carried out by men. Udumukwu, in *Signature of Women*, declares that:

There is a sharp contrast between the real woman in postcolonial Africa. Far from being the source of comfort and rest (the sweet mother as she is perceived in the popular imagination), the "good" woman in sub-Saharan

Africa happens to be that woman who suffers the effects of oppression, and neglect; and who must maintain silence and passivity in order to remain good. Silence and passivity are the two principal features of the good woman. In the media presentation of images from troubled regions of Africa, for instance, it is this “good” woman who bears the wicked children of war and disaster. Apart from being passive and silent in the face of radical change, she is also the embodiment of culture and tradition. The important issue, however, is that her passivity and docility have turned out to be potent fodder for her objectification by patriarchy. In other words, she is good because she naturally fits into the mold shaped for her by patriarchy (Udumukwu, 2007, p.3).

In her novel, Adichie presented two types of women: the good woman like Mama and the real woman like Auntie Ifeoma. Mama had the strength to endure her husband’s maltreatment even when she had a miscarriage due to the brutal beatings that she received from him. Ifeoma, on the other hand, is an independent woman who is not scared of anyone and won’t mind speaking her own mind when things go wrong. Adichie skillfully portrayed Mama as a meek and submissive woman at the outset of the novel. However, she was transformed into a subversive and rebellious character towards the end to demonstrate her reaction when she was left with no choice.

In African tradition, divorce is commonly regarded as a norm, or taboo and women are repeatedly subjected to social stigma and humiliation associated with divorce. Adichie provides two contrasting portrayals of Eugene Achike, Kambili’s father, whom she calls “Papa.” To the outside world, he is a wealthy factory owner and devout Catholic who gives away considerable amounts of money to people in need and charitable organizations as a donation. However, within the family household, he is prone to explosions of violence. He subjects his wife Beatrice, and the two children, Kambili and Chukwuka, to harsh and relentless physical punishment. Eugene’s outbreaks of violence materialized in the beating of his pregnant wife until she suffered a miscarriage, the burning of Kambili’s feet, and the disfigurement of Chukwuka’s finger. At the outset of the novel, Adichie provides initial clues about Eugene’s violent nature when Kambili, the narrator, reveals details of the Achike household:

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Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion, and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the "étagère." We had just returned from church. Mama placed the fresh palm fronds, which were wet with holy water, on the dining table and then went upstairs to change. Later, she would knot the palm fronds into sagging cross shapes and hang them on the wall beside our gold-framed family photo. They would stay there until next Ash Wednesday, when we would take the fronds to church, to have them burned for ash. Papa, wearing a long, gray robe like the rest of the oblates, helped distribute ash every year. His line moved the slowest because he pressed on each forehead to make a perfect cross with his ash-covered thumb and slowly, meaningfully enunciate every word of "dust and unto dust shall you return" (Adichie, 2003, p.5).

The excerpt exposes two distinctive aspects of Eugene's: the devout Christian and the wild and cruel aggressor. His son, Jaja, openly defies his father when he refuses to receive communion in the church. His disrespectful and profane conduct is regarded as a heresy by Eugene. However, this incident does not only mark the beginning of Jaja's revolt against his father as well as religion, but also propels Eugene to employ violence, and provides him pardon for each physical punishment that he will impose. Feeling highly exasperated, Eugene "looked around the room quickly, as if searching for proof that something had fallen from the high ceiling...He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagère" (Adichie, 2003, p.7).

Beatrice Achike, Kambili's mother, is a quiet and submissive woman who, like other women in African societies, is assigned to domestic responsibilities such as being the mother of the household, providing basic needs, and even mediator between members of the family. Mama does not object to or raise her voice against her husband's relentless and unmerciful violence even at the expense of suffering numerous miscarriages due to Papa's incessant beatings, especially after Kambili's birth. Since her faith in her religion does not provide the option of getting a divorce, she endures all these physical abuses carried out by her husband and strives to maintain the image of a

good woman as expected of her by society. Udumukwu echoes Mama's predicament and specifies the characteristics that would make her a good woman as she "suffers the effects of oppression and neglect; and who must maintain silence and passivity to remain good. Silence and passivity are the two principal features of a good woman" (Udumukwu, 2007, p.3). She perceives that she cannot abandon such a well-to-do, socially respected, and even philanthropic man. In a sense, she feels indebted to him for not taking another wife when she states:

God is faithful. You know, after you came and I had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our "umunna" even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us... "Yes," I said. Papa deserved praise for not choosing to have more sons with another woman, of course, for not choosing to take a second wife. But then, Papa was different. I wished that Mama would not compare him with Mr. Ezendu, with anybody; it lowered him, soiled him (Adichie, 2003, p.28).

Although she is friends with outspoken and open-minded, Aunty Ifeoma, Mama often listens to Aunty's "university talk" on the issues of freedom and gender equality, but fails to take any action to free herself from her predicament. Mama only makes a move as Papa's physical abuse gets worse and has yet another miscarriage. It is only then that she makes her move and gradually starts to poison Papa. She only admits her scheme after an autopsy was carried on Papa's body that she confesses the truth to her children when she states: "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor" ((Adichie, 2003, p.290). However, Mama rarely spoke and looked always preoccupied after Jaja took the blame for Papa's death and was arrested by the police. As Kambili discloses, "She has been different ever since Jaja was locked up, since she went about telling people she killed Papa...but nobody listened to her; they still don't. They think grief and denial—that her husband is dead and that her son is in prison—have turned her into this vision of a painfully bony

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body, of skin speckled with blackheads the size of watermelon seeds...Most times, her answers are nods and shakes of the head...and often...she sat and stared” (Adichie, 2003, p.296). Mama’s mental health continues to deteriorate after Jaja was locked up in prison, and, with the news of Jaja’s release, it gives some implications that there will be an improvement in her condition.

In Adichie’s novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice Achike, and Auntie Ifeoma are dynamic female foils who stand on the opposite sides of the scale in postcolonial feminism. Auntie Ifeoma, Eugene’s only sibling, is a tall, smart and plainspoken woman who works as a member of faculty at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Auntie Ifeoma is highly competent in many facets of her life and demonstrates perseverance and aptitude in raising her children without a husband. Even though she struggled financially, especially after her husband’s demise, she refuses to yield to the demands that come with Papa’s support and successfully provides a much happier and blissful domestic atmosphere for her children than Papa does for his children. Her treatment of her children is respectful, and she often encourages them to challenge opinions and draw their conclusions. Auntie Ifeoma is also a source of inspiration for Kambili and Jaja with her way of life and assists them both in discovering their voices and independence. Adichie reveals details of Auntie Ifeoma’s success as a mother to her children in bringing them up as such: “It was what Auntie Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time, believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn’t” (Adichie, 2003, p.226). Here, Kambili notes the immense difference in two female role models she has in her life as she virtually borders on womanhood. Her mother is damaged and almost broken and is so scared to offend others and overstep her boundaries. She is not strong or capable enough to take charge of her life. In contrast, Auntie Ifeoma attracts her admiration because she lives passionately for her values and lets others see her light shine. She feels quite comfortable with her strength and her voice.

Auntie Ifeoma worked as a faculty member at the University of Nigeria and was married to a professor, named Ifediora, until his untimely demise. She is an independent and

outspoken woman. She speaks up her mind no matter the consequences and does not feel discouraged to criticize her brother, the university, or her government. She is infuriated that a “sole administrator” has assumed the control of the university. Lecturers are given meager salaries, and those who uphold the ideals of democracy and equality are unfairly removed from their positions at the university. At work, she shares her dissatisfaction with the management in the company of her colleague when she posits:

We cannot keep quiet, sit back and let it happen, “mba.” Where else have you heard of such a thing as a sole administrator in a university?” Auntie Ifeoma said, leaning forward on the stool. Tiny cracks appeared in her bronze lipstick when she pursed her lips. “A governing council votes for a vice-chancellor. That is the way it has worked since this university was built, that is the way it is supposed to work, oburua (meaning—it is not like that)?” the woman looked off into the distance, nodding continuously in the way that people do when searching for the right words to use. When she finally spoke, she did so slowly, like someone addressing a stubborn child. “They said there is a list circulating, Ifeoma, of lecturers who are disloyal to the university. They said they might be fired. They said your name is on it.” She replied to her colleague and said, “I am not paid to be loyal. When I speak the truth, it becomes disloyalty (Adichie, 2003, pp.227-228).

Auntie Ifeoma is a perfect example of a real woman who speaks her mind no matter the consequences. She refuses to be threatened by those who abuse their positions and defends herself at the extent of losing her job. She imparts her profound wisdom to Kambili as she states: “being defiant can be a good thing sometimes,” that “defiance is like marijuana— it is not a bad thing when it is used right” (Adichie, 2003, p.144).

Kambili Achike, the younger of Eugene and Beatrice Achike's two children, is the protagonist and the narrator in *Purple Hibiscus*. She is a fifteen-year-old Igbo girl who is devastatingly shy and inhibited and a student with excellent academic records. She admires her father, Papa, whom she calls “personal household god,” even when she is scared of his outbreaks of violence inside the family abode, and she developed a religious worldview based on her father's strictly dogmatic Catholic beliefs. The

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ignorant and misleading affection that she nurtures for her father can be manifest as she observes:

I waited for him to ask Jaja and me to take a sip, as he always did. A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved. Have a love sip, he would say, and Jaja would go first. Then I would hold the cup with both hands and raise it to my lips. One sip. The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. But it didn't matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa's love into me (Adichie, 2003, p.8)

As evidenced, Kambili is afraid of disappointing her father, Papa, and, therefore, she studies very hard at school and adheres closely to the strict and uncompromising timetable he creates for her and Jaja. She learns to lead a quiet life, hold her curiosity to avoid chastisement, and speak only in manners that Papa approves or shuts her mouth completely.

However, Kambili forms a unique and distinctive attachment with Auntie Ifeoma and learns a great deal under her tutelage. She spends a considerable amount of time away from the family residence at the home of her aunt and her family in Nsukka. She experiences a rite of passage in which she realizes that her father, whom she idolized, is far from perfect. Under the influence of Auntie Ifeoma, Kambili does not only learn to speak her mind freely but also gathers her courage and connects with other people. She receives her unfortunate share of her father's outbreaks of violence when her father discovers Papa-Nnukwu's painting in her hand and begins to kick her until she loses consciousness as she refuses to let go of the pieces of it. Adichie vigorously describes this act of violence by Papa as she observes:

“Get up! Get away from that painting!” “Get up!” Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes...Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo, and...I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery...The stinging

was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy....

When I opened my eyes, I knew at once that I was not in my bed. The mattress was firmer than mine. I made to get up, but pain shot through my whole body in exquisite little packets. I collapsed back (Adichie, 2003, pp.208-209).

As a result of beatings she received, Kambili wakes up at the hospital with broken ribs and internal bleeding and entreats Mama to call Auntie Ifeoma because she prefers to stay with her aunt after she is discharged from the hospital. Ifeoma is concerned about the personal welfare of Kambili, Jaja, and Mama and advises Mama to put an end to this inhuman treatment of Papa when she suggests: "This cannot go on, nwunye m," Auntie Ifeoma said. "When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (Adichie, 2003, p.211). Kambili ultimately maintains her Catholic conviction, which is more liberal inspired by the faith of Father Amadi and her Auntie Ifeoma. Thus, Kambili learns to think for herself, investigate and challenge opinions, and, eventually to arrive at her conclusion.

Conclusion

Gender issues, such as inequality, oppression, discrimination, humiliation, and dehumanization that women have encountered are customary and typical social phenomena that have been prevailing through society for many years, and their reflections could be observed in today's world as well as in the world of literature. Women in most African cultures, particularly in Nigerian society, have been subjected to demeaning marginalization and brutal oppression by their male counterparts. They have been precluded from social life, endured suppression, and kept within the bounds of the domestic realm due to their femininity. Thereupon, gender issues continue to occupy the public agenda owing to some social restrictions, motivated by giving preference to men over women as evidenced in several patriarchal societies, in which gender equality and women's empowerment have been continuously a fanciful and implausible dream since favoritism asserted itself in many distinctive ways and forms.

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In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta's heroine, Aku-nna, challenges the prevalent masculinist assumption of defining women as domestic properties whose personal value dwells in their ability to bear children and in their obedience to stay confined in the domestic sphere. She moves from a state of powerlessness and subjection to a state of self-awareness and maturity whereby she can make decisions for herself, to break away from all forms of oppression, and to assert her individuality. In the same vein, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie propounds female characters like Kambili and Aunty Ifeoma, who are self-actualizing and neither utterly dependent on men for their livelihood nor fundamentally attached to male characters to assert their identity. Adichie, in her literary works, particularly in *Purple Hibiscus*, praises female characters who manifest independence, a spirit of adventure, and intellectual curiosity, rather than those who are contented and indifferent in acting as an accessory to men or wish to remain as mere adjuncts to them.

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