

Gender Sensitivity for Sustained Security in Nigeria: An Analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

It is often believed that when a woman is properly educated and morally trained, an entire society is educated and that brings protection in particular and security at large. However, denial of education coupled with general discrimination against female gender is glaring in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore gender discrimination; manifested in the denial of education, respect, dignity, and involvement of women in taking decisions on their children. Using radical feminist theory, this paper is based on the premise that most of the miscreants that caused insecurity in various communities in Nigeria are biologically linked, the women who in one way or the other passed through one form of gender discrimination revenge towards the society that subjected their mothers to one form of maltreatment or the other innocently. The paper uses Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* to xray how this discrimination can affect the stability and security of a home, community and society at a large. Accordingly, the paper concludes that fairness, kindness, and avoidance of any form of discrimination against women are necessary for the achievement of maximum security in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, Sensitivity, Security, Radical Feminism

Introduction

God created men and women to coexist meaningfully and for better life. Both of them need education, security, dignity, shelter, and other physiological needs. Sometimes men perform distinct roles than women and vis-a-vis; at times they perform roles interchangeably. But, in some instances, African

women, Nigeria inclusive, are forced to be voiceless on many vital issues including issues concerning the children they bear and the domestic chores they always engaged. Various studies have shown that women, more than men, are often the recipients of various forms of discrimination. Gender discrimination is manifested in the denying women freedom of speech, respect, dignity, and involvement in family decisions concerning children and other aspects of life which their contributions are necessary. Notably, it is often believed when a woman is properly educated and morally trained, the entire society is educated and education always brings about protection in particular and security at large.

Unfortunately, many women in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, including some communities in urban centers are denied the right to education and involvement in decisions making. These have consequences in the upbringing of children who depend heavily on their mother's love, care, and support; lack of which they later grow up to constitute nuisance in the society, as we are all living witnesses. Gender violence, discrimination and relegation of women usually lead to psychological trauma, economical non recognition, social destruction and lack of religious awareness. Naturally, the children they bear are their closest and on daily basis, the latter see and take note, with frustration, the negative treatment on the former; with the view of taking revenge when they become strong. Most of the miscreants that cause insecurity in various communities in Nigeria are biologically linked to the women who passed through one form of gender violence or another. This can be attributed to environmental factors such as family status like broken home; single parenting and peer influence (Curt and Anne, 2009).

Being a complex and highly encompassing problem, gender discrimination is looked at from different perspectives;

as in social welfare, security operatives, religious institutions and of caused literarily, the monster has been variously addressed in poetry, drama and prose. For the sake of justice to this paper, examples of the challenges women faced in Nigeria will be cited from different points of view. Strictly, emphasis will be based on the novel *Purple Hibiscus* by Adichie (2003). The author Adichie as a social advocate for the oppressed female in a society suffering from a myriad of problems presents these acts of discrimination in her novel. Her work portrays gender conflict as vital aspect of social experience and the struggle for power. She emphasizes the role of the female and the problems she faces in the society; portraying that freedom and individual rights are ideas the women should not compromise for they are essential in being discriminated against in the social context of development.

Authorial Background

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 in Enugu Nigeria. She studied Medicine and Pharmacy at the University of Nigeria then moved to US to study Communication and Political Science at Eastern Connecticut State University. She gained a Master of Art Degree in Creative Writing from John Hopkins University, Baltimore. After initially writing poetry and one play, for love for Biafra in 1998, she had several short stories published in literary journals, winning various competition prizes. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published in 2003 and is set in the political turmoil of 1990s Nigeria. This book won the 2005 Common Wealth writers prize (Overall winner, Best Book), and was shortlisted for the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction. Her second novel is *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), set before and during the Biafra war. It won the (2007) Orange Broad band prize for fiction. She also has a collection of short stories. *The*

Thing Around Your Neck (2009), shortlisted for the 2009 John Llewellyn-Rhys Memorial prize and the 2010 Common Wealth writers prize (Africa Region, Best Book) and her latest work is her third novel *Americanah* published in 2013.

Adichie's writings cover the genres of literature drama, prose and poetry. Like many African writers. She shows great commitment to happenings in her society. She represents fictional reality through this type of characterization and graphic use of language. Osofisan describes her, thus on the back cover of her novel *Purple Hibiscus*, she beautifully manipulates syntax and trope, as well as controls Irony and suspense to achieve great aesthetic and heighten effects.

A Brief Synopsis of *Purple Hibiscus*

The whole story revolved around the principal character Eugene who is the father of Jaja and Kambili. Eugene is portrayed as a catholic fanatic who had imbibed the Christianity under the European missionaries. He sees any action that goes against the catholic doctrine as evil and ungodly. His father, Papa Nnukwu is a traditionalist to the core. Eugene makes all efforts to convert him to the Christian religion but he failed. This led him into denouncing his father and vows not to have anything to do with him in life or death.

Eugene's strict belief in the catholic doctrine makes him to use brutal force to train his children and run his family. He becomes the only man to think for the family and his decision is always final in any matter. Jaja his son fails to partake in the eating of the Holy Communion because of poor preparation and bad presentation which often nauseates him. The father was unhappy and throws up the missal at him, it misses him and lands at Mama's figurine and shatters it.

Fortunately or unfortunately the military junta overthrows the government and Eugene is unhappy that the

elected government has been toppled by those who still misgovern the people. Eugene crafting forces Mama to accompany him to father Benedict after the service but her complain of ill health on their way to the Father Benedict's house is seen by Eugene as a mark of disrespect to God and his servant. He therefore descends on his wife and beats the child out of her womb.

The family goes home for Christmas celebration and Eugene lavishes presents on his kinsmen (Umunna) but Eugene and his wife do not pay visit to his father but rather asks Jaja and Kambili to pay him only fifteen-minutes visit. Auntie Ifeoma returns for Christmas, looking unhappy and uncomfortable with the brilliant performance of Jaja and Kambili without corresponding socialization. She therefore requests her brother Eugene to allow them to go to sightseeing which he agrees. At Enugu they attend a Eucharist Mass, Kambili and Jaja are in Auntie Ifeoma's house in Nsukka, their behavior is awkward compared to other children, Auntie Ifeoma takes them to her garden where Jaja discover more values than he is used to at home.

Father Amadi's arrival coincides with the return of Auntie Ifeoma and the children from the familiarization tour. Here also, father Amadi finds out the timidity of Kambili and decides to take her out to bring her up in the same level with Jaja. He takes her to the stadium where she amazingly discovers the act of socialization and reforms, but Amaka discovers that both Jaja and Kambili are still very weak in domestic duties and desires they effect correction.

Auntie Ifeoma's attention is sought through a phone call she receives informing her about the deteriorating health of Papa Nnukwu. Auntie Ifeoma with Obiora left for the village to fetch him to Nsukka. At this point, Eugene informed Auntie Ifeoma that he will be coming to take Jaja and Kambili back to

Enugu because he was informed that his children share a house with his father. Papa Nnukwu died before he could arrive to take his children home. Ifeoma breaks the sad news, instead of mourning; he begins to blame Auntie Ifeoma for not calling a catholic priest to pray for him before he died. Eugene discovers that Kambili lives in the same room with papa before he died. Eugene is furious, takes his children Jaja and Kambili to the bath tub and empties boiling hot water on their legs as a penalty for their sin and when Eugene sees the painting of Papa Nnukwu, he almost killed Kambili with beating and kicking until she was hospitalized.

Shortly before Auntie Ifeoma convinces Eugene to allow the children to spend their Easter holiday at Nsukka, a riot erupted in the campus and Auntie Ifeoma, a lecturer in the university is accused of being the brain behind the students' demonstration over poor water supply and irregular power supply in campus. This led to her being given specified period to vacate her flat. Father Amadu takes Kambili out for yet another socialization and as they return, Mama calls to inform that their father slumped in his office and the autopsy later reveals that it was Mama that poisoned her husband, and Jaja, in order to protect and free his mother from embarrassment claims responsibility during police interrogation; later he is arrested and sent to prison.

Radical Feminist as a Theoretical Tool

This paper focuses on radical feminist theory, which is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts. Hyden and Manssoden (2007) explain that the radical feminist theory is based on analysis of society's power structure. The theory argues that the existing power in place is a polarized patriarchy. Furthermore, the form of

oppression of women is primary form of oppression. According to Valero Bryson (1999), radical feminist see women as an oppressed group who had to struggle for their own liberation against their oppressors. The theoretical framework of radical feminism is concerned with women's right rather than gender inequality, that is why radical feminist work challenges the prevailing gender power structure and overturn it, favorably. The theoretical framework of radical feminism for the most part, consist of three key interrelated concepts; patriarchy, power and oppression. In radical feminism, like in feminism at large, the patriarchal society occupies a central place as to where and why the fundamental power struggle between the sexes takes place.

Gemzo (2012) explains that the radical feminist theory grew out of the radical feminist movement that was formed in the 1960s in the US, Europe and Australia. The theory argues that women are oppressed due to their sex and that radical feminist theory is a theory of women's position in the world, designed and made by women for women. The oppression manifests itself as men's control women in families, sexual oppression within and outside the family, violence against women and contempt for women.

From the foregoing discussion, discrimination against women gender can be attributed to gender insensitivity, lack of which the female gender are not given due recognition, privileges and are relatively discriminated. This of cause could be lead to demoralization, especially in a working place, resulting to lack of concentration and maximum input that may affect the goals of an organisation and in turn, the overall goals of the Nigerian institution. Insensitivity as apparently manifested affects mostly the female gender who due to erroneous religious perception, cultural or tradition inclination and dogmatism are seen as weaker without any reservation, the

implication of this in a country like Nigeria where everybody is needed for nation building and for restoration of peace and stability cannot be undermined. Naturally, children are more attached to their mothers than their fathers and any discrimination against the former, the children will likely be rebellious against the latter out of love and sympathy. Thus, when children protest against their fathers, it is easier to protest against others and the government at large. Therefore, the state of anarchy caused in Borno state by Boko Haram, the lawlessness in some areas of Zamfara and Sokoto, the criminal acts perpetuated under the guise of MASOB and alike could arguably be linked in their root to gender insensitivity; particularly discrimination against women.

Unfortunately, our security operatives and traditional ruling class who have a say in shaping the destiny of our country are mostly oblivious about this difference. The religious clerics who should provide the true gospel in most cases are not knowledgeable, some may be bias against women and some may be beneficiaries of the insensitivity and some may be used to the status quo and may not see any reason for a change. The ones who distinguished themselves significantly could be insignificant to make any radical impact in the society. The monster of insecurity, lack of sound leadership and other social vices has come to stay in our Nigerian society until the time the country realizes all human beings are important, all gender must coexist for the betterment of one another.

Gender Discrimination and the Plight of Women in Nigeria

Gender discrimination is when there are unfair rights between male and female (Oha, 2007). It differs because of their gender roles which ultimately lead to unequal treatment in life. Gender inequality is the social phenomenon in which

people are not treated equally on the basis of gender. This inequality can be caused by gender discrimination or sexism. The treatment may arise from distinctions regarding biological, psychological, or cultural norms prevalent in the society. Some of these distinctions are empirically grounded, while others appear to be social constructs. Gender discrimination remains a significant issue in Nigeria, as in many other parts of the world. Despite efforts to promote gender equality in Nigeria, traditional cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes persist, leading to unequal treatment and opportunities for women.

There are various forms of discrimination that hinder their full participation and empowerment in the society. The deep-rooted patriarchal norms and practices contribute to gender inequality in Nigeria. Women often have limited access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political representation compared to men. Although efforts have been made to improve access to education for the female gender, significant disparities still exist, particularly in rural areas; where early marriage, poverty, and cultural attitudes often denied them attending school. Violence against women including domestic violence, rape, sexual and emotional abuse are faced by women without obtaining proper justice and support for survivors. Women often encounter gender bias in the legal system, leading to reduced access to justice and fair treatment in cases involving family law, property rights, and violence.

Manifestation of Gender Discrimination in Nigerian Literary Works

Gender inequality in Nigeria is an epidemic that continues to disadvantage women. In the past, each gender had clearly defined roles and the issue of gender conflict never arose. This is clearly portrayed in some Nigerian literary

works. For instance, Chinua Achebe, in his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) depicts pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria and the arrival of Europeans during the late 19th century portrays this when Okonkwo, the central character brings Ikemefuna to his house and hands him over to his first wife and when she tries to clarify some issues, Okonkwo shouted at her thus:

Do as you are told woman, Okonkwo thundered,
and stammered. When did you become a
member of the Ndichie of Umofia?

The above statement reflects how women were perceived in the traditional African society, especially eastern part of Nigeria where the novel is set. Frictions, struggles, agitations, conflicts and even rebellions have been inspired and spearheaded by African women. This unfortunate situation is manifested in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) which portrays the postcolonial Nigerian society, as a country beset by political instability and economic difficulties, and about Kambili's disintegration of her family unit and her struggle to grow to maturity. Eugene, the father of Kambili is seen as a devoutly catholic father, zealot and violent figure in the Achike household, subjugating his wife Beatrice, Kambili herself, and her brother Jaja while Beatrice, Eugene's wife and mother of Kambili and Jaja is a soft-spoken woman who has been brought up in the traditional Igbo setting in which a wife is totally subservient to her husband. Eugene uses this as an excuse to beat his wife and humiliate her in the very presence of their children without her uttering a word of protest (101-110). In Sule's *Sterile Sky*, the author portrays Murtala's mother been neglected by her husband and subjugated to taking care of family and other forms of hardship as well as his sister who becomes prostitute as compelled by poverty and societal insecurity.

In *Americanah*, Adichie attempts an interrogation of violence against the female character, Ifemelu especially when she finds herself in the other country, America. According to Bello et-al (2023), violence on female characters is manifested in men's viciousness which in turn caused much suffering whose domino effects have far-reaching implication for both individual character and the society as a whole. This is the case with the central character, Ifemelu by her love story with high school classmate Obinze. The feeling of contentment that Ifemelu has with Obinze sets up the feeling Ifemelu misses throughout her time as an immigrant in America as it appears in chapter 4:

She rested her head against his and felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With Him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size. (Ch 4)

Alkali in her novel *The Stillborn* (1984) portrays Awa, Li's sister in subsumed roles as mama said;

Awa! She called from the doorway. Go and fetch some water (7)

Gender Discrimination in Purple Hibiscus

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* adopts the issue of ideology especially that of the subject and interpellation in order to achieve self-knowledge and self-expression. *Purple Hibiscus* is exemplary of the signature of women because it adopts the element of voice as a veritable strategy for the constitution of the interplay of subjects and interpellation.

Accordingly, the novel negotiates the tension between the two aspects of voice, that of who sees and that of who narrates. Through the character, Kambili, whose name means "that I too may live", Adichie presents a dialectical situation between

characters understood as subjects with the eventual emergence of Kambili to self-knowledge and condition of social responsibility. Generally, ideology is defined as a systematic body of ideas organized from a particular point of view, which can be political, scientific or racist in nature. Althusser (1970) had defined ideology as a representation of the relationship between individuals who function as subjects.

Purple Hibiscus interrogates the issue of gender discrimination, the oppression of women in the Nigerian patriarchal society. It shows how the oppression of women is represented through female character which perpetually put women in disadvantage positions as portrayed in the novel. One of the most despicable oppression among the so well-known cultural practices in Nigeria is the patriarchal oppression. There are instances in the novel where women are being oppressed and discriminated.

Eugene, a catechist is married to Mama, he does not allow her to take part in the family decision making process, rather he dictates what to do and not what to do. Her position is far below that of a maid and when she offends him, he punishes her as he deems fit and even when he hurts her, instead of an apology Eugene keeps silent about it. One Saturday morning, after mass, Eugene gathers the family and desires to visit the priest (Father Benedict). Mama becomes very weak and heavy to trek to the priest house, she begs her husband to excuse her because of her condition but Eugene disagrees and compels her to pay the visit, of which she consents. As they arrive home, he prays God to forgive the wife for refusing to visit the priest. He then locks her up in the room and severely beats her so much that she loses her pregnancy. Instead of comforting her, he orders for service or mass of repentance for her. He invites father Benedict to

sprinkle holy water of cleansing on her. Kambili describes the scene thus:

I was in my room after lunch, reading James chapter five when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parent; hand-carved bedroom door imagined the door had gotten stuck and papa was trying to open it. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true. I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open. Papa gait on the stairs sounded heavier, more awkward than visual. Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the same border. (P. 32-33).

Kambili gives vivid description of what transpires when she continues, "we cleaned up the tricks of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water colour all the way downstairs.

"Jaja scrubbed while I wiped" (P. 33).

Eugene's house is like a luxurious concentration camp where all the trappings of wealth couldn't mask the constant battery and various acts of violence that take place. His wife, Beatrice' polishing of the étagères was her way of containing her emotional and psychological turmoil after each physical assault. Not even the pregnancy of a much-awaited child is enough to persuade Eugene against executing God's imagined justice on his helpless and long-suffering wife whose physical demands as a result of early pregnancy could not be tolerated. This is how Beatrice recounts her experiences to Auntie Ifeoma, her sister-in-law, who lives in Nsukka:

I got back from the hospital today. The doctor told me to rest but I took Eugene's money and

asked Kevin to take me to the part. I hired a taxi and come here.... You know that small table where we keep the family Bible? Eugene broke it on my belly. My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to st. Agnes (hospital). My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save (the pregnancy)... (P.248).

In this incident, Eugene beats his pregnant wife to the point of miscarriage over a domestic dispute. Her inability to bear more children in the marriage attributes to the constant beating and subsequent miscarriages that follows each beating by her husband. After Eugene's regular beatings of his wife that lead to repeated miscarriages but perhaps the most revolting of these is when he pours hot boiling water over Kambili's and Jaja's ailure to inform him that their grandfather (Eugene's father whose traditional religious beliefs Eugene abhors) would be staying with them during a vacation. The terror that this incident has on Kambili is narrated very graphically. Thus:

I stepped into the tub and stood looking at him. It didn't seem that he was going to get a stick, and I felt fear, stinging and raw; fill my bladder and my ears. I did not know what he was going to do to me. It was easier when I saw a stick, because I could rub my palms together and tighten the muscles of my calves in preparation. He had never asked me to stand inside a tub. Then I noticed the kettle on the floor, close to Papa's feet, the green kettle sisi used to boil hot water for tea and garri, the one that whistled when the water started to boil. Papa picked it up. He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an

experiment and wanted to see what would happen.... I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, scalding; I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. (Adichie, 2003-194)

Eugene does not allow Mama to take part in the decision making of the house he dictate everything in the house including the ordinary choice of window and door curtain. In all these, Eugene does not show any appreciation of the value of a wife in the house; he renders her to "Zombi" unquestionable obeying him. Even Papa Nnukwu, who has benefited so much from Auntie Ifeoma and having received little care from his son Eugene, still feels that a woman does not count or play much role in a world dominated by men.

Conclusion

Gender discrimination has a deep impact on society as a whole. It does not just impact a specific section of the society but every part of it. Gender discrimination must be checked at every stage so that no person should be denied a chance to learn and grow, otherwise the discriminated personalities will turn against the society in one way or the other particularly women, who are discriminated just because of their gender and the complementary roles expected from them might not be possible and this could create a serious gap, particularly insecurity. Thus women must get a start in life in terms of education, moral training, economic empowerment, dignity, health and maternal care among others. Harmful traditional practices, should be stopped because they have harmful physical and psychological effects on female gender. If a woman receives violence in one way or the other, the trauma

she passes through has negative effect on the upbringing of the child she bears. These lead to many children, who lack socialization from their mothers become rebellious; by taking laws into their hands (Edubirdie, 2022). Consequently, such children may end up becoming miscreant like armed robbers, kidnappers and other form of nuisance and further compound security threat, as we are witnessing today in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

For the sake of a better tomorrow in Nigeria, the following consideration are deemed necessary, otherwise the issue of gender insensitivity has come to stay in our country. The majors are

- 1) The National Assembly should provide more practical and enabling laws to guard against any form of gender discrimination.
- 2) People or Nigerians with attribute of gender insensitivity should not be employed in government services nor shall they be elected into any office to serve as deterrent.
- 3) Nigerians should be properly oriented and inculcated with the norms of gender sensitivity right at tender age from home.
- 4) There should be more advocacy using governmental and non-governmental organisations against gender insensitivity.
- 5) There who demonstrate favorably towards female gender should always be commended, encouraged and celebrated for others to copy.
- 6) The female gender should be properly educated, guided and be inspired to acquire more knowledge and skills that will be used for self-defense and self-actualization.

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