

CHAUVINISM IN NIGERIAN PROSE FICTION: AN APPRAISAL OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*

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Abstract

Literature is part of our cultural heritage which is freely available to everyone, and which can enrich our lives in all kinds of ways. It is a means of impacting lives and documenting the past for the future to create a new vision. Through a comparative study, we will be able to understand chauvinism and its impact on the Nigerian culture to the extent that it culture still strives to do away with it. This paper looks to expose and rehabilitate a confused culture of chauvinism. A male who patronizes, disparages and denigrates females in the belief that they are inferior is a chauvinist. Chauvinism is an attitude that the members of your own sex are always better than those of the opposite sex, it is the belief that your country, race, etc is better than any other and this confers undue partiality or attachment to a group or place to which one belongs or has belonged in time past. It is an attitude of superiority toward members of the opposite sex; also behavior expressive of such an attitude. This study examines by looking at the Nigerian prose fiction particularly Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Keywords: Chauvinism, Culture, Sexism, Attitude

Introduction

In Nigeria like other parts of the world women suffer various form of discrimination contend that women's discrimination include the provision operation powerlessness poverty and hopelessness Nigeria's gender policy listed the discrimination against women to include widowhood practices rights inheritance rights the land tenure system and female genital mutilation amongst others gender stereotype is a cultural creation which place is 16 above the other the story focuses on male chauvinism and social religious program in the niger Delta he discusses male children as a cultural construct in the niger Delta is also consider the ripple effects of this custom on the main female folk as it relates to marriage widowhood title to land and here it is finally Norman Fairclough (2001) points out that ideological power plays an important role in manipulation. He further posits that violence, especially physical violence, is exercised by those who have power. He opines that those who have power can exercise it and keep it: through coercing others to go along with them, with the ultimate sanctions of physical violence or death; or through winning others' consent to, or at least acquiescence in, their possession and exercise of power. In short, through coercion or consent. (Fairclough 33)

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The world over, women suffer several practices of discrimination. Aganwu (2011) citing Osakwe (2010) argues that “women’s discrimination includes deprivation, oppression, powerlessness, poverty and hopelessness”. The Nigerian gender policy states the discrimination against women to comprise widowhood practice rights, inheritance rights, the land tenure

system and female genital mutilation, among others” (FGN, 2006). Obodoegbulam (2011) posits that “gender stereotype is a cultural creation which places one sex above the other”.

Another term closely related to chauvinism is sexism but mostly related to the disposition that tends to discriminate against women on the social stream. Thus, it is easy to say that Sexism of men against women is the problem of Feminism. Urgan (2004) citing Virginia Woolf (1928) talks about the philosophical concepts that give modern feminism some legitimacy, equally dwells on this issue of chauvinism. Ultimately what one sees is many cases of unfavourable social values that exist against women in our social systems.

The concept of chauvinism deals with several aspects of human interactions, these aspects includes, male chauvinism, female chauvinism and also, chauvinism as nationalism. All the arguments on male chauvinism are based on extrinsic factors while women’s indispensability in the society are based on intrinsic qualities. Agbakuru and Opara (2011).

Obodoegbulam (2011) describes male chauvinism as relatively new to literary discourse mainly considering how extensive feminism has been in existence. Since the 1960s, Gender equality has progressively improved in work places Tanimu (2009); Male chauvinism largely designates behaviours that portray famous views on gender role in the workplaces, societies, religions etc. This research is basically about Male chauvinism, which is closely associated with sexism and misogyny, and other forms of believe male superiority of women in the context of intellect. Female chauvinism is the symmetrical attitude that women are superior to men; this form of chauvinism is very rare, especially in African continent where some cultures and traditions include females’ subjugation to the males.

Statement of Problem

We have often talked about oppression, subjugation of the women folk but most times we overlook the salient aspect where discrimination is taken to a new level-chauvinism. The society is highly chauvinistic but not much is said about it because the Nigerian society sees nothing wrong in the assertion that women are inferior to their men in aspects of human endeavours hence this work is coming out to interrogate this aspect of the culture which dictates that women are eternally subservient, inferior to men.

Significance of the Study

The study aims at showing how women are being subjected to men or are being dominated by male. This work is significant as emphasises how women can take up major positions in the society too and how their contribution on such position would make an effective positive result, and also how being not seen as inferior would give them the joy of being among.

Scope of the Study

The study will focus on Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* with emphasis on how the author reflects our past and present societal happens on gender.

Aim and Objectives

The study is aims at enlightening the ignorant females in the society that power can be attained by any one, irrespective of the gender. This study also elaborates the importance of female's contribution both intellectually, and other forms of proving female intelligence. The objectives include to:

1. Examine deprivation and suppression of women as portrayed in Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* .

2. Investigate strategies deployed by women to combat male oppression as depicted in Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus*.
3. Discuss the Chimamanda's apparitions on gender in the Igbo society advanced in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Methodology

This research utilizes Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* novels as the main source of primary data and cross-textual analysis, steered by the belief of Womanism. The text being mirrored from Womanist context and analysed based on complementation, conciliation, collaboration and consensus achieved through several characters in the novel. Also, examination of events and scenes, analyses of characters and language serve as data for this study and are used to establish the key arguments of the study. Through close textual reading of the piece, changing circumstances of the characters, plot and the narrators' view point, we explore methods used by the author point out the pathway for emancipation of her characters.

Analysis of the concept of Chauvinism in the Nigerian Prose

Literature helps us to mirror the society so that human's experiences far and wide are captured often used prose works to sustain the belief that men are superior to women. This line of reasoning is supported by Esther I. Jamgbadi when she says;

The traditional role of the women in Africa has been that of a wife and a mother and any women who does otherwise is labelled a failure. This is the representation of the female character in African the female character in African literature especially the novel since the late fifties (138)

Male superiority injected into male writers portrayal women in their works. often time, male prose authors are guided by their chauvinistic ego when depicting their female characters.

Women in works by Nigerian male authors hardly enjoy good roles. They are presented as gossips or kitchen martyrs. The negative ways men employed in the presentation of their female characters have forced many women into writing. Women now write with the view to correcting certain impressions male authors attach to the characterization of women in their works. In his comment, Helon Habila at the back cover page of *Everything God will Come* commends the effort of Sefi Attah. He sees a new light in the characterization of Enitan when he says “This is a courageous story about friendship and self-discovery.it is a rallying cry to women to speak out in a world that tries to muzzle them”.(text cover page).

In conclusion, the portrayal of women in prose works by men is based on chauvinistic position of men. Women are treated both in reality and literature with contempt. A possible explanation of this gender abnormality can be traced to men’s effort to keep dominating the society. However, women under the guide of feminism have rejected their portrayal by male authors. *Everything Good will come* by Atta and *Purple Hibiscus* by Adichie give a new diirection to the depiction of chauvinism and women’s reaction. This assertion is captured by Yetunde Akorede:

The works of African female writers endeavour to recreate women as they are in history, in life, and in their own realities. Being female themselves help them to reflect the deep feelings, desires and the hurts that the female experiences. The portrayal of the female characters by the female writer is usually more authentic and is usually a

departure from the male writers' image of women. (128)

What Akorede say is exactly the situation that leads many women into writing. They write to correct men's chauvinistic view about the female folks and press for women liberation.

Women in Nigerian Female Authored Novels.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* are departure from male prose authors' characterization of women. The two vibrant female prose authors use their novels to deconstruct bias depiction of female characters by male authors. This assertion is captured by Yetunde Akorede:

Purple Hibiscus, a female authored prose work carefully debunks male chauvinism by highlighting its destructive effects on homes. Adichie uses the homes of Uncle Eugene and Auntie Ifeoma to show the weakness in patriarchy and the strength in matriarchy.

In his bid to ensure patriarchy and chauvinism are upheld, Uncle Eugene, the father of the heroine Kambili uses iron hand in raising his children and brutality to correct and love his wife. For example, after a church service, mama kambili refuses to follow her husband to the priest's parish house. It is a Pentecost Sunday; a day Uncle Eugene is expected to be filled with the Holy Spirit. After lunch that day, and he punishes his wife with violent swifts. This costs mama her pregnancy for she suffers an instant miscarriage after the beating. Uncle Eugene's addiction to violence anytime he faces his family members shows the weakness of chauvinism. He cuts off Jaja's finger nail for not taking the first position in his catechism class. He dips Kambili's legs into hot water for staying in the same house with a pagan (papa Nnukwu) his father. The double standard of Uncle Eugene shows the mockery of chauvinism.

While Adichie portrays men and chauvinism in her novel as destructive agents, she presents her female characters as fountain of love and stabilizing factors at home. For example, during the lunch on Palm Sunday, Jaja who is sick of his father's domineering attitude walks out on him. This rebellious act which is a direct consequence of Eugene's over disciplinary act on Jaja fuels his outrageous mind. He moves to beat him but Mama Kambili pacifies him. Mama's submissiveness and motherly affection shows that women saviours of most homes guided with chauvinistic drive. The character of Mama Kambili demonstrates the fact that women save most homes with chauvinistic doom.

In a similar way, Adichie uses the home of Auntie Ifeoma to show that women are good home makers. Auntie Ifeoma all alone plays the role of father and mother to her children. She grooms her children well with her limited finances. Unlike her strict brother Eugene who is consumed in his chauvinistic ego, Auntie Ifeoma is able to control her home well with great measure of respect for her children. As against iron hand, Auntie Ifeoma recognises the need to raise well informed children and she gives them the right freedom to grow into individuals. As a good home maker, she sees her children and people around her from their own points of view. This really helps her to manage her home very well. During their visits, Kambili and Jaja notice a difference between a home governed by chauvinistic rules and that under control of a women:

Laughter always rang out in Auntie Ifeoma's house, and no matter where the laughter came from, it bounced around all the walls, all the rooms. Arguments rose quickly and fell just as quickly. Morning and night prayers were always preppered with songs, igbo praise songs that usually called for

hand clapping. Food had little meat, each person's place the width of two fingers pressed together and the length of half a finger. The flat always sparkled.
(148)

It is amazing that a woman is the head of this home and everything there is rosy. Adichie presents a stable home under the headship of a woman and contentious home under the headship of a man who is blinded by his chauvinistic ego. Indeed, the comparative study of the two homes shows that chauvinistic driven homes often bring ruin to their family. On the other, women can build a happy home free from any form of chaos we see in Eugene's house.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to look at how male chauvinism is depicted in Nigerian prose. Chauvinism deals with male superiority and how women are perceived in a society ruled by men. Attention is given to how male prose writers depicts the image and status of women through their female characters. To have a balanced view of this study, the way Nigerian female prose writers characterize their female characters are examined. This is done from the perspective of Sefi Atta's women in and that of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

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