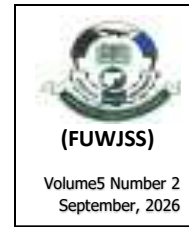


**FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN NGOZI ADICHIE'S
PURPLE HIBISCUS AND SEFI ATTAH'S
*EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME***

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Abstract

This paper discusses how human society is microscopic, especially in Africa where there is a sharp line of difference between the feminine and masculine gender which shows male's superiority and female's subordination. Using Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism* as the theoretical framework for analysis, the paper examined cultural restrictions to the success of the female gender, the effects of discrimination and marginalization on them which necessitates female activism and culminates at the reproductive and productive roles of women as established in Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. This work aims to unravel some untapped resources of the female gender, like women empowerment, female subjugation, and the possibility of non-violence approach, especially in the area of activism. The paper concludes by highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of women's experiences in patriarchal societies and equally portrays the struggles of women against oppressive structures and their quest for self-discovery, empowerment and social change.

Keywords: Women empowerment, social change, gender, patriarchy

Introduction

The concept of silencing the woman is a common phenomenon across the shore of Africa. It is believed that the woman should only be seen but never heard. According to Orie (2010, p.169) "the summary of patriarchal lordship is silencing the woman, muffling or muting her voice or browbeating her to remain voiceless". Hence the need for scholars to put more efforts in advocating for the course and welfare of the female gender. Emenyi (2005, p.117) submits that "silence is not a female virtue, but rather a covert way of destroying humanity." The woman is also short changed in the area of education. It is a common practice in most African families to prefer to send male children to schools and neglect the females with the wrong mind-set that the females will soon be married out to other families.

Investing in female children's education, to some African men, is like a wasted investment.

The feminists see men as their basic enemies. Feminism is therefore an attack on sexism while Africana Womanism is an attack on racism. Chukwuma (1994, p. 34) It seeks to end racial domination and suppression through its activities. Females are basic targets of kidnappers and ritualist in African society. Emenyi (2005, 127). Africana Womanism recognises the place of the man in its activities of seeking gender equality. Africana Womanism policy rejects white domination and intends to achieve this by fighting along with their male counterparts. Self-naming, self-defining, female integrity, ideal family or home, flexibility, desire for positive male companionship, wholeness, adaptability, genuine sisterhood, male compatibility, ambition, strength, respect for elders, nurture, mothering, spirituality, marriage, girl-child education, migration, child abuse, marital abuse and so on mostly constitute the thematic preoccupation of most female African authors. Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta are contemporary African feminist authors who believe so much in the course of African women as exemplified and entrenched in their literary works. The female subjugation, the migration, the oppression, the subtle awareness of identity and the cultural conflicts being witnessed by the feminists of the twenty first century actually impacted the lives and literary outputs of the selected author. It is the societal condition that pervades the entire African communities, witnessed by the authors, that necessitated the birth of these books.

Feminism and Womanism

Feminism evolved into womanism in Africa as a result of African women trying to look for a brand that will suit them best. They feel feminism is racial and western oriented. This means they feel the women activists of the advanced countries do not fully understand the plight of African women. Therefore, women like Alice walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems and Ogunidipe make up theories that will breathe the air of feminism better on African soil. Theories like Africana womanism, womanism, motherism and others are what they came up with. Ezeigbo (1996, p.78), states that Hudson-Weems is, in fact, "the founding theorist of Africana womanism [and] holds a central place in contributing to the discourse on African-centered Womanism within Black Studies and the National Council for Black Studies" (32). Here, the history of Africana womanism is credited to Clenora Hudson Weems. It is important to take note of the historical precepts of the theory "womanism". However, this study is not focused on tracing the history rather, the effects, achievements, concerns and hopes of the theory. Going further in the trend of womanism, "the term Africana Womanist itself is the first step toward

defining ourselves in setting goals that are consistent with our culture and history. In other words, it is the 1st step toward existing on our own terms” Ezeigbo, (1996, 401)

It is of importance to note that a person must define himself properly before he can present himself to the world and be accepted. The excerpt above discusses the fact that the theory is a way of African women defining and identifying themselves. This of course is true and a basic fact. However, this study examines the identification of the black woman through the eyes of the novel selected for the purpose of this research work. Clenora Hudson-Weems, the profounder of Africana womanism in her quest to encourage and find a befitting identity for the African woman asserts that:

As we approach the last hour leading up to the next millennium, I cannot stress enough the critical need today for Africana scholars throughout the world to create our own paradigms and theoretical frameworks for assessing our works. We need our own Africana theorists, not scholars who duplicate or use theories created by others in analyzing Africana texts. Indeed, developing paradigms and critical theories, which is our true mission, makes possible for better monitoring interpretations of our works in an effort to keep them both authentic and accurate in order to maintain their originality in meaning and value.(74)

Clenora Hudson Weems on her own part sees feminism as a European thing and that it is Africana womanism that best identifies the African woman. This is of course true in the general sense. However, this study is not out to draw a line of difference between Feminism and womanism or African womanism. This is because the womanist tenets is an offshoot of the feminist’. Therefore, it cannot for any reason isolate itself from feminism. Hudson Weems in another sense of her work opines that African writers, scholars and critics should device ‘Africanly’ theories of evaluating African works. According to her, the Europeans are not interested in evaluating their works using African yardsticks. It is therefore necessary for us as a continent to device our own theories in evaluating our literature. This of course will help project Africa better and help identify the pressing needs in African society.

Going further in the trend of Clenora Hudson Weems’ idea of African womanism, there are some African female writers who will not identify themselves with feminism. They prefer to be called womanists instead. The reason is because they are possibly afraid of being seen as conspirators who conspire with the western world to disrespect their men. Ogundipe-Leslie for example is among the scholars that would not want to associate themselves with feminism and derives their own words. She prefers using womanism. She defines feminism as movement that:

smacks of rebelliousness, fearlessness, political awareness of sexism and an unpardonable (from the male view point) drive for equality and equity between sexes. It therefore instils fear in men though it thrills many women. The radical feminist can go as far as doing without the macho male to enjoy her liberty. (61)

She posits further that “Womanism, with its myriad manifestations, is therefore a renaissance that aims to establish healthy relationships among people, despite ethnic, geographical, educational, gender, ethical, class, religious, military and political differences”. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, p. 123) On the same note, she describes “Womanism as the Nigerian woman writer who is constantly aware of the negative connotations of feminist; the fear of being accused by the Nigerian males of allying with the white outsider has turned most Nigerian women writers towards womanism; a black outgrowth from feminism” Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, p. 124). Ogundipe and her co-African female writers and critics believe feminism is not the best for African women. They opine that womanism and other African oriented theories are the best for African women. This is true to an extent as African women need a grass root policy that will capture the essence of women’s rights in relation to African culture. She further states that Womanism is black centred, it is accommodating. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, p. 65).

Ogundipe-Leslie in the assertion above tries to draw a line of similarity of function between Feminism and Womanism, stating however that womanism is black oriented. Furthermore, she says womanism is accommodating as against the opinion of radical feminists who have zero tolerance for men. Writing in the context of feminism in Africa, Mehta (2000) reminds us that feminism, ‘both as an activist movement and as a body of ideas’, underscores the necessity for a “positive transformation of society” where women are not marginalised but recognised and respected as “full citizens in all spheres of life” Mehta (2000, p. 11). The writings of African women go a long way to reflect the true identity of the African woman and her conditions.

This paper is however out to prove that the reproductive nature of the woman is not a curse at all. It is rather a blessing to humanity. No man no matter how powerful or energetic he is can get pregnant and father a baby all by himself. He relies on the reproductive ability of the woman to do that. This means therefore that women are not only useful in other areas, they also help to ensure continuity through procreation. In the aspects of women and education, it is also observed that the woman also suffers a lot of

discrimination. Many societies believe there is a particular type of education that suits girls and another that suits boys. Africans, especially, believe that “domestic education” is the best for girls. The education that trains them in performing house chores such as cooking, washing, sweeping and general housekeeping etiquettes. On the contrary they believe in giving western education to their male counterparts because they believe they are better off. Some women are even commodified, that is forced into unwanted and sometimes early marriage in order to use their bride price to pay the school fees of their brothers. Some African institutions of learning also restrict admission into some particular course to male alone. This is a pain in the eye, a bane in the flesh and a major hindrance to academic advancement and national development as well.

Chukwuma (2003, p. 1) also observes a similar trend and submits that:

Women’s rights and women’s being have always been taken for granted, nicely and safely tucked away under the bed of patriarchy. Silence was the virtue of women and passivity their garner, but it was not always so. Traditional societies in pre-colonial times had spheres of power and influence for women in closely-knit organizations that helped them maintain a voice. Colonialism has its merits but its new culture of ascendancy through education, white-collar jobs and money-driven economy relegated women down the ladder. (1)

With women education came exposure and awareness and the inevitable reaction. Feminism is a reaction; it is an assertion of being, rights and status. Literature has proved a worthy tool in interrogating the female condition. The silence was broken by women writers in the mid-sixties in the continent which correspondingly was the era of political independence of quite a number of African States. The decade, that followed, witnessed shades of feminist writing by African women and has advanced the women’s cause of recognition and relevance. This paper theorizes women’s writing in Africa and shows how a pattern of women assertion has emerged and has impacted the canon of African Literature. The need for scientific and technological education for girls has been summarized by Chukwuma as she argues that:

no nation can progress if half of her population is left behind, neglected. This of course accounts, for why with all our national endowments in mineral and human resources, Nigeria continues to remain on the fringes of greatness, full of potentials still slowly developing or stagnating. This missing link on the on the plane of human resources is the female factor; women still marginalized, still subsumed... (4)

Scholars speak more on educational marginalization and suggest that young girls should be encouraged to pursue scientific and technological careers and

to have self-esteem and confidence in their ability as we are in the era of science and technology. There is the need to catch the girls young starting from their homes. The types of work they do at home, their games and toys should be gender neutral. Boys and girls should be allowed to play computer games and handle electronic gadgets. They should see themselves as equals. Let every mother, as Chukwuma suggests, creates in the mind of every daughter the desire for knowledge- the spirit of competition, dauntlessness and an enterprising spirit. Chukwuma (2003, p. 5). The submissions above are the considerations of inequality in the access to education by both genders. This brings to mind that gender inequality is inherent in most parts of the society. This is the fault discovered in the unavailability of science and technology education to girls thereby hindering development. The submissions are very relevant in the study of feminism, however, the aim of this study is to examine the issues of gender in the society at large. So, the decry on the denial of proper education is just a part of it and not covering the general aim.

The turning point in the above view of the woman and politics is that this study is out to agitate for gender equality in all spheres and not in the arenas of politics alone. Also, this study limits itself to the concerns of African women and not beyond. In her view concerning the plight of women, Amina Ghofarti is of the opinion that:

After a long suffering and discrimination of woman to find limited recognized place in the society, she is nowadays playing an important role in society as a politician, socialist and economist. Those achievements emerged by the coming of feminism which granted woman's rights. (11)

Amina approaches feminism from the achievements that it has made. This is true as the concept of feminism since its inception has not been a total waste. There have been few achievements. However, the concern of this study remains the unreached female subjugation. The fact that the woman is regarded as inferior is still very much a common idea the purpose of this research is therefore to emphasize the feminist and womanist' concern to bring about the rights of the woman. Furthermore, Orjinta (2011) defines feminism as:

In a word, Feminism is a word that stands for all efforts made by women and their male sympathizers to correct all injustices meted out over the centuries to women because of their sex. It began as a movement in the late sixties aimed at the awareness of the injustice perpetrated by the patriarchal society and the urgent need for a change in the status quo. The feminist critique, which began in the university, is a socio-political and cultural theory, which opposes oppressive and repressive patriarchal systems. As a literary critique, feminism analyses texts on the basis of Gender. It aims at

politicizing Literature with the goal of deconstructing patriarchal cultural hegemony. (86)

He also said this about womanism. “Womanism is the name of the socio-cultural awareness of Africans existing from time immemorial, which highlight both the negative and the positive experiences of African women in Africa and in the Diaspora. Womanism, understands Woman (English) as the mature, adult, honest and responsible woman. Womanism abhors the idea of a female sex, which is characterized by girlishness.” (83) Aloysius Orjinta in his works above is set in drawing a line of difference between womanism and Feminism. The ties to outline the differences between the two theories. His is however not the central focus of this study. This study is designed to use the yardsticks of feminism and womanism hand in hand to examine the rights of the African women. African womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black woman freedom ... Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power).

Womanism dwells on the duels of non-incorporation of African women's experience locally, nationally, and globally, stressing that it should incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations. In a slightly different contribution, Walker's stress is on the peculiarities of the African-American woman in contrast to the Africa-African woman's plight of Ogunyemi. Alice Walker's feminism and/or Womanism generally does not challenge men's ego but rather lures them into accepting living in harmony by abandoning their self-pride as women's superior. Womanism is fighting a course that it is equally guilty of. This is astutely so because Womanism, like Western feminism, is indirectly a racial affront by being Afro-American and African centred only. It has no sympathy for White woman; very restrictive to African agenda. Simply, if Western feminism is a commodity of the middle class White woman, Womanism is so peculiarly so with African woman. The author of Womanism herself, Ogunyemi incisively observes that Womanism is an ideology, philosophy, or theory used in Nigerian literatures which—celebrated *black* roots, the ideals of *black* life (192). There may not be any significant difference then between the middle class white woman orientations in as much as the restrictive black woman agenda of Womanism is implanted, they are both racially tailored.

Theoretical Framework

Womanism Clenora F. Hudson-Weems is an African American scholar and Professor of English at the University of Missouri. She coined the term Africana womanism in the late 1980s as a distinct paradigm for women of

African descent, arguing that existing frameworks did not fully capture their historical, cultural, and political realities. Africana womanism is a family-centered, Afrocentric paradigm that describes who Africana women are and how they live in both the home and the workplace. Hudson-Weems states that Africana womanism is “not an addendum to feminism, Black feminism, African feminism, or Alice Walker’s womanism”. It was developed to focus on race, class, and gender for Africana women, with race and family survival as the primary focus. The theory emerged from her 1985 research paper “The Tripartite Plight of the Black Woman—Racism, Classism and Sexism” and was later published in the *Journal of Black Studies* in 1989. Her main text is *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, first published in 1993 and now in its 6th edition.

Hudson-Weems argues that Africana women’s experience differs from that of white women, making Western feminism inadequate. The Africana woman does not see the Africana man as her primary enemy. Historically, Africana men lacked the institutionalized power to oppress Africana women in the same way white men oppressed white women. Rejection of the label “feminism”: Many Africana women reject “feminism” because it is associated with white women’s struggles and does not address racism and colonialism as primary issues. Partnership with men: Africana womanism emphasizes working in concert with Africana men in the liberation struggle against racism and colonialism, rather than positioning them as adversaries. She states some characteristics that define the Africana womanist. The core ones include: Self-naming and self-defining, Family-centered, Genuine sisterhood, In concert with male in the liberation struggle: Collaboration with Africana men against racial oppression. Spiritual and respectful of elders, Mothering, nurturing, flexible role player. These characteristics are grounded in African cultural values and principles of truth, justice, harmony, and reciprocity. Hudson-Weems argues that women of African descent have always lived as Africana womanists, even before the term existed, tracing the practice back to women in African antiquity. (Hudson-Weems, Clenora. 2024)

Feminist Activism in *Everything Good Will Come*

From the opening of the narrative, we get to know the type of person Enitan is during her childhood days. She believes in fairness and freedom. That a child should be allowed to have some period of personal reflection alone without interruption. She submits that:

from the beginning, I believed whatever I was told, downright lies even, about how best to behave, although I had my own inclinations. At an age when other Nigerian girls were masters at ten-ten, the game in which we stamped our feet in rhythm and tried to outwit partners with sudden knee jerks, my favorite moments were spent sitting on a jetty pretending to fish.

My worst was to hear my mother's shout from her kitchen window: "Enitan, come and help in here." I'd run back to the house. (Attah,2006, P.5.

Sefi Attah develops female characters who are able to stand up for their rights despite the dictates of the society. Enitan is a woman who stands up for herself. She learns to challenge her father's masculine-laden authorities. When she discovers her father has a son Dedayo Taiwo outside wedlock, she gets upset. She challenges his unfaithfulness to her mother. Though she later realises that the quest for a male child is what makes her father to marry another woman. The confrontation affects their relationship for a while and she puts up with her friend, Sheri.

As the story progresses, Enitan becomes more and more aware of herself which helps in unveiling the central tenet of the novel which is self-discovery and assertiveness. Most of the things that would later change Enitan's perspective on things emanate from her friend and next door neighbour, Sheri. Sheri lives in total freedom from her parents. She sleeps and wakes when she likes. She reasons on her own unlike Enitan's reasoning that is conditioned by her father and mother. Sheri thinks of becoming an actress while Enitan's father insists Enitan must read law. The following conversation between Enitan and Sheri is revealing of how children perceive things that would later shape their lives: "I want to be something like... the president" "Eh?" "Women are not president" "Why not?" "Our men won't stand for it. Who will cook for your husband" "He will cook for himself" "What if he refuses?" "I'll drive him away" "You can't" she said. Yes I can. Who wants to marry him anyway?" (p.33). This conversation later helps in shaping Enitan's life. Later she becomes aware of the political landscape of Nigeria and how it affects the woman. Sheri is exposed to things higher than her age. Sheri dissuading Enitan from her dream of becoming the nation's president is an example of patriarchal brainwashing of the woman. Sheri's role as Enitan's friend cannot be overemphasized. We can submit that Sheri sets the pace for Enitan's social and moral education, which contributes to the advancement and swift unravelling of the actions. The actions that lead to greater transformation in Enitan. Her meeting with Sheri, as stated earlier, is of great significance, as it marks her transition to an entirely new stage of life. All efforts by Enitan's mother to stall this relationship with Sheri fails. Enitan's father asks: "What is this? She can't make friends anymore" Again he says, "You're her mother, not her junior" (p.40). Enitan's father imbued in her a revolutionary spirit by telling that "anyone who bullies you, beat them up" (p.42).

As a married woman, her husband Niyi encourages her to resist any man who tries to take advantage of her by overlaid her with too much work.

Later on, the sexist male in Niyi rears its ugly head as Enitan gets interested in activism. It is during the military regime and people get arrested indiscriminately for speaking the truth. Enitan's father gets arrested too. She is interested in involving in any activism that would ensure the release of her father. This means womanists are not selfish at all. They are equally interested in the affairs and welfare of their male counterparts as represented by Enitan's father. When Enitan decide to grant Grace Ameh an interview, Niyi scolds her for that action because he feels that she might get herself into bigger troubles. This sharp rebuke from Niyi does not go down well with Enitan because she believes that she must always stand for what is right. In her visits and discussions with Grace Ameh, Niyi further tells Enitan to focus on activities that concern women folks. Niyi believes that women should keep quiet and stay at home.

Enitan attends a reading with Grace Ameh. She gets arrested and spends a night in the cell. This further heightens her husband's resistance against her involvement with activism. She however does not desist. Grace Ameh later becomes her friend and they are both happy going on together with their activism. The aim of their agitations is to influence the government to free prisoners, including Sunny Taiwo, Enitan's father, Peter Mukoro the journalist as well as women prisoners. Grace Ameh invites Enitan to join a group of women of like minds, fighting for their rights. She agrees to join the group, but surprisingly she becomes fed up with her marriage and leaves her husband's house after giving birth to her last child. She asserts that the reason for leaving her husband is his lack of support for what she perceives is right. Enitan does not believe that a man is better than her and she therefore agitates that women should be able to choose and also live a life of freedom. When Sheri's uncle tries to seize her father's house from them, Enitan being a trained lawyer tells her to take him to court. At the end, they are able to retain the house due to the combined efforts of Enitan and the law.

Apart from Enitan, Sheri is another character that the author develops into a feminist activist. She has a terrible experience of being raped at a tender age. The experience that leaves her traumatic. Initially, she believes that men are always better than women, therefore, women are expected to depend on men all the days of their lives. She becomes a mistress to a brigadier who feeds her and rents an apartment for her. She is to continue enjoying all these as long as she submits to the brigadier's rules and regulations. This situation continues for about two years before Sheri realises that she could do more for herself. She takes to catering on the advice of Enitan. She begins to make money and the Brigadier orders her to stop the business. She disagrees and this leads to a scuffle between them. On a fateful night, they fought and she beats up the Brigadier. That empowers her to understand that she is no longer interested in living her life under the

burden of masculine domination. She desires her freedom. She will no longer sell her freedom, which include her body and mentality for Brigadier's money. She returns to her father's house where she makes a lot of money from her catering business. She, at the end of the story, joins the feminist's group in which Enitan is a member. They all work together to fight for their rights and everything they believe is right.

The novel reveals an unbroken growth pattern of Enitan who comes of age as a self-conscious and assertive woman. Enitan's process of growth comes with self-realization which prompts greater response and reaction to the activities which go on around her. These processes motivate her sexuality and individuality. Atta is of the view that if women come together, they could fight for the common goal of the women and the society at large. "A group of army wives had founded a program for women in a village. They promised to train the village women to eradicate infant dehydration" (p.211). Here Atta calls on women to adopt female friendship, bonding or sisterhood as these would be one of the ways they can win the war against inequality, tradition and all other patriarchal dominations. Once this is achieved, the advancement of women in the society would be achievable. When Enitan's father is arrested, she does not allow his business to fall, she fills the void. She combines efforts with uncle Fatai to fight for the release of her father and others. Activism is a dimension of feminism that has not been adequately explored. Enitan has to suffer incarceration as a price for activism. She is ready to give up her life for the survival of her society, in spite of her pregnancy which she would not want to lose, societal struggles are more important to her. Despite the fact that her mother fails to support her fighting for her father's release, Enitan is determined to fight on. Her mother says "not for a man who showed me nothing but wickedness" (p.219). In another instance Ariola, Enitan's mother, argues that "too bad for your father ... he can't keep a family together, now he wants to save his country" (p.220).

All these did not discourage Enitan. It is at this point that she meets Grace Ameh, a journalist and human right activist. Grace Ameh writes for the Oracle Newspaper. Ameh uses that paper to enlighten the public on the evil of military dictatorship and as a medium to fight oppression. For Enitan, the fight to save her father would not come from the kitchen; "how can I decide what to do about my father from the kitchen" (p.245). If the woman must fight for her right and that of others, she must move out of the kitchen space. This autocratic and tyrannical empire ruled by the man must be challenged and this can only be done through activism. African women have always participated in political activism. Imo Emenyi (2005:49) posits that: "This assertive spirit has brought the privileging of the male under scrutiny as well as present the modern woman as the disenchanted individual.

Consequently, the self-conscious in literature is often regarded by the male elites as an individual who is corrupted by Western civilization. Grace Ameh inspires Enitan as the latter continues to tap from her experience. "I visited Grace Ameh, hoping for some impartial advice on what to do about my father" (p.250). Ameh encourages Enitan to fight on not minding what the society is saying. The society would always silence the woman telling her to "shut up and face your family" (p.252).

Silence has become another form that patriarchal domination explores in this novel. Ameh's activism inspires Enitan with a fearless spirit and Enitan becomes very vocal. Ameh admonishes her to use her voice: "yes, yes, but you have a voice, which is what I always try to tell people. Use your voice to bring about change" (p.253). The woman must align with other women, because standing alone, the woman becomes another victim. Feminist activism is not about isolation but association. Revolution is not about a single identity but a collective struggle. What is a single man in a revolution? Ameh invites Enitan to join the Rights Group which is made up of "people who are involved in the campaign for democracy, human rights and civil liberty organizations" (p.253). Enitan and Ameh attend the first meeting and they are later arrested by the oppressive instruments of the state and are subsequently incarcerated. In the detention cell, Enitan meets other women, some of whom their minds are lost and have become insane; Doremi and Mother of the Prison are insane. Another woman has sores all over her body. One of the women in the cell narrates her ordeal: "the fool touched my breast, I slapped his face. He pushed me to the ground. I grabbed a big stone, whacked his head. I couldn't stop whacking.... Before I knew it, he died there on top of me" (p.265). This woman does not regret her action "it is my children I miss. Not him." (p.265). Grace Ameh and Enitan are released the following day. These experiences remain stamped in Enitan's mind. She continues her life smiling, believing "that everyone smiling or not, had overcome adversity" (p.284). Enitan has overcome many adversities and she emerges stronger from all of them. Enitan keeps fighting until her father transfers the estate to her mother. She fights for her father's release from detention. She remains strong even when her mother dies, she continues to fight for her family. "I've always said, men fight for land, and women fight for the family" (p.288).

Joining the human rights group makes Enitan to become a crusader for the well-being, not only for women, but for every oppressed individual, irrespective of the gender. "With the military in power without a constitution, there was no other recourse besides protest, peaceful or violent. I was thinking of my country..." (p.293). The personality of Enitan as a crusader negates the arguments of some critics that African feminists are more concerned with sectional interests that affect women only. Enitan's

fight for democracy rather than fighting only for the women establishes the African women's struggles transcend sectional limitation. Enitan become so bold that she has the audacity to declare to the military dictators to "get out of my country" (p.293). Enitan's activism pays off with the release of her father from imprisonment. Enitan has convincingly become that particular woman that the society cannot compel to be just a sitting duck without the rights to propel shape her own life.

Enitan's mother initially belongs to the school of thought that the woman must not cook for the man. She threatens to stop cooking for her husband Sunny Taiwo. In return, the husband blackmails, threatens to stop giving her the feeding allowances, and upon the whole, he calls her "kitchen martyr". Enitan's mother invariably fails to see other options for a married woman like her but to surrender her well-paid job to the cooking for the family. Another example is Mrs. Franco who cooks for her entire family. "Sheri cooks for her brigadier man-friend, who runs around collecting girls" (87). It is only Enitan who refuses to follow this trend of adding her name to the list of cooking women. She keeps asking Niyi, her husband, to go to the kitchen and find himself something to eat whenever she is tired or too occupied to cook. When her mother-in-law insists that she stays out of the kitchen because of her condition, Enitan replies by saying that the kitchen is a lonely place and another prison. The author uses Enitan's refusal to cook all the time for Niyi to refute the obnoxious claim or belief in African traditional society that the place of the woman is in the kitchen. We need to understand, based on the narrative of the novel, that the kitchen kills the aspirations women, and if the women must achieve their dreams, they must move out of the kitchen space. Commenting on Enitan's journey to adulthood and selfhood, Florence Orabueze (2010:86) argues that "at that tender age, she (Enitan) sees events and, people, situations and actions naively but as she grows up, she interprets them and puts them in their proper perspective". Orabueze's position is that between adolescence and adulthood there is a great transformation in Enitan's life. Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is a novel that explores the imprisonment and various forms of incarceration of African women, both at home as a child, and in school as a girl; in society as a woman and in marriage as a wife. It is of note that all the women in this novel transcend the limitations placed on them by this incarceration and herein lies the feminist matrix in this novel.

Review of Feminist Activism in *Purple Hibiscus*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* presents a family which is a typical replica of an African family with male dominations and female subjugation. While the novel presents some weak female characters, there are still some strong female activists in the novel who know their onions and

how to defend feminist concerns. These female characters can be classified as passive and active, dependent and independent, subjugated and freed female characters. The passive, dependent or subjugated characters in the narrative are represented by Beatrice, known as Mama, and Kambili. They are subjugated, they lack the will to fight back and they endure the brutalities against them in silence. Mama is an older woman, the mother of Kambili and wife to Papa Eugene. Kambili, a major character in the novel, is Mama's daughter and a younger version of her mother. Their main oppressor is Eugene under the guise of religion. He erroneously believes that by inflicting pains on members of his household, he is helping them to be religiously pure and prepared to make heaven in eternity. He oppresses every member of his household and publicly criticizes the tyranny and dictatorship of the ruling military government.

The active, independent freed or enlightened women in the novel are represented by Aunty Ifeoma and her daughter, Amaka. Ifeoma is in control of her household knowing her rights, privileges and duties both to the society at large and to her family. She is never oppressed and always ready to fight for her rights and to defend the cause of women around her. Aunty Ifeoma's husband, though dead, has a record that he never for once lifts a finger against his wife or any of his children throughout his life time according to the references made to him by the author. This is a sharp contrast to the picture presented about the Papa Eugene's family where the household members, especially the women, are constantly subjugated. Mama Beatrice cannot defend herself against her husband let alone her children. The day Jaja refuses to go for communion, Eugene flings a heavy missile at him. "He picked up the missal and flung it across the room towards Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass ... which Mama polished often." Adichie (2004, p.15)

One would have expected Mama to speak up for her son here, but she prefers to keep quiet. She is supposed to question her husband for making an attempt to injure their son. The missal missing Jaja destroys the glass. She may as well have questioned her husband for destroying an item of high value due to anger. Fear, is actually the reason for her silence. Her husband has injected, over a long period of time, too much fear into her and that has stolen her independence, self-will and courage to stand for the right from her. Another instance is when Papa asks the family, on a particular Sunday, to visit Father Benedict. Mama feels unwell and suggests to stay back in the car.

"Let me stay in the car and wait, biko," Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. "I feel vomit in my throat." Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. It seemed a long moment, but it might have been only seconds. "Are you sure you want to stay in the car?" Papa asked.

Mama was looking down; her hands were placed on her belly, to hold the wrapper from untying itself or to keep her bread and tea breakfast down. "My body does not feel right," she mumbled.

"I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car." Mama looked up.

"I'll come with you. It's really not that bad." (p. 37-38)

This scenario presents a weak female character who is unwillingly willing to jeopardise her health in order to please a male character. Mama feels like vomiting due to the pregnancy symptoms she is experiencing at that moment which are expected of any pregnant woman to have at that stage. However, instead of her words to attract pity from her husband, Eugene forces her to come with them. This means he has no respect for her the pregnancy. She may fall sick for all he cares, all he wants is that she must come with them to visit Father Benedict. Later on at meal time, he prays that God should forgive his wife for her initial reluctance to go out for "visitation and follow-up", because according to him, she has committed a "sin". After taking the lunch, the so-called prayer warrior, the 'Saint' Eugene, beats his wife severely until she miscarries the pregnancy. She is finally hospitalised where the miscarriage is confirmed.

"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 over before I even got to twenty. I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open. Papa's gait on the stairs sounded heavier, more awkward, than usual. I stepped out of my room just as Jaja came out of his. We stood at the landing and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border. He opened the dining room door. Then we heard the front door open, heard him say something to the gate man, Adamu.

"There's blood on the floor," Jaja said. "I'll get the brush from the bathroom." We cleaned up the trickle 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. Mama did not come home that night, and Jaja and I had dinner alone. (p. 41)

The weakness in Mama is equally presented here as she fails to report the husband to law enforcement agents or social workers for adequate punishment. But rather, she calls the beaten "an accident" (p. 43).

"Her eyes were vacant, like the eyes of those mad people who wandered around the roadside garbage dumps in town, pulling grimy, torn canvas bags with their life fragments inside. "There was an accident, the baby is gone," she said. I moved back a little, stared at her belly. It still looked big, still pushed at her wrapper in a gentle arc. Was Mama sure the baby was gone?" (p. 43)

Mama refuses to talk about it. She neither rebukes, resists nor renounces him by leaving because she believes a woman must stay in her marriage in every situation, good or bad, and in accordance with the good cultural beliefs in the society she finds herself. The fanatical adoption of western religion of 'one man one wife until death do us part' makes Eugene to continue to brutalize his wife. Eugene does not believe in African culture, but the same African culture keeps Mama a captive in that family, enduring sufferings because the society frowns at divorce. If she divorces him, she believes that she will be seen as an irresponsible woman. Therefore, she decides to stay and endures all the sufferings, both physical and psychological torture. The thoughts of her lost unborn sibling prevents Kambili from concentrating fully on her studies. She is psychologically traumatized. She fails to take first position at the end of the term's examination which infuriates her father seriously. "The words in my textbooks kept turning into my blood each time I read them. Even as my first term exams approached, even when we started to do class reviews, the words still made no sense." (p. 45). Due to her inability to concentrate and read well, she gets second position and her father takes her to school and embarrasses her in front of the whole class.

"Where is Chinwe Jideze?" Papa asked, when we got to the front of my class. A group of girls stood at the door, talking. I looked around, feeling a weight around my temples. What would Papa do? Chinwe's light-skinned face was at the center of the group, as usual.

"She is the girl in the middle," I said. Was Papa going to talk to her? Yank at her ears for coming first? I wanted the ground to open up and swallow the whole compound.

"Look at her," Papa said. "How many heads does she have?"

"One/" I did not need to look at her to know that, but I looked at her, anyway.

Papa pulled a small mirror, the size of a powder compact, from his pocket.

"Look in the mirror."

I stared at him.

"Look in the mirror."

I took the mirror, peered at it.

"How many heads do you have, gbo?"

Papa asked, speaking Igbo for the first time.

"One."

"The girl has one head, too, she does not have two. So why did you let her come first?"

"It will not happen again, Papa." (p. 54-55)

Kambili is highly insulted before her classmates because of her second position instead of first. This is another form of terror unleashed by Eugene on his daughter. This act is enough to destroy her self-esteem forever and it definitely makes her a laughing stock among her peers. She tells her mother and they are not bold enough to confront Eugene, instead they do what they know best- keep quiet. Even at school, Eugene's masculine dominance restricts Kambili from associating with her peers. She is not even able to communicate well when the need arises. The air of intimidation she breathes at home influences her everywhere. After school, her mates stay behind to gist and play a little before going home. Instead of her joining them, she runs to the gate to meet Kevin the driver. Her friends think she is proud and they nickname her "backyard snob". Ezinne the only girl who appears to be friendly with her asks her why she does that, but she does not give any rational explanation. But truly, the reason behind that is her father's tyranny that stereotypes her life to schedules. If she gets late to the gate for Kevin to pick her, her father will beat her.

"Once, Kevin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days". (p. 59)

Another woman who is an indirect victim of Eugene's dictatorship is Yewande Coker, the wife of Ade Coker. Ade Coker is the editor of Eugene's newspaper called the Standard. He insists that Ade Coker reports the news of the coup in details against the will of the state. This in the first instance leads to his arrest. Yewande, unlike Mama and Kambili, quickly comes to protest her husband's arrest. She comes to inform Papa Eugene about the arrest of her husband. Stating it indirectly that Eugene should look for a way to bring her husband out of detention.

"They have taken him! They have taken him!" she said, between throaty sobs. "Yewande, Yewande," Papa said, his voice much lower than hers. "What will I do, sir? I have three children! One is still sucking my breast! How will I raise them alone?" (p. 45)

Aunty Ifeoma's approach to life and freedom is different from that of Mama Beatrice and her children. She accepts no nonsense from anyone. When at Christmas, Beatrice asks her if she will take the children to her late husband's family, her reply shows that although her in-laws treat her badly, she knows how to defend herself.

I don't have the strength for Ifediora's family right now. They eat more and more shit every year. The people in his umunna said he left money somewhere and I have been hiding it. Last Christmas, one of the women from their compound even told me I had killed him. I wanted to stuff sand in her mouth. (p. 82)

This is the attitude of many African societies. Whenever a man dies, accusing fingers are pointed at the wife but when a woman dies, nobody will accuse the husband for killing his wife. The way Africans treat women, especially daughters-in-law is wrong. It is however, defensive women like Auntie Ifeoma that can defend themselves against such harassments that fit into the African society. Her initial intention to stuff sand into the in-law's mouth shows that she is not a passive woman.

On the issue of women validity in the society, African women are not counted as important, it is only the male child that is relevant. Papa-Nnukwu stylishly tells Auntie Ifeoma that she does not count because she is a woman. "But you are a woman. You do not count." (p. 91) In African societies, male children are the pride of the family while female children have no value to the family. Auntie Ifeoma is portrayed as a woman who will not sell her freedom for anything. When Mama persuades her to ask Eugene for gas cylinders, she rejects the offer and reminds her of the many conditions her brother has postulated in the past to help her. According to Kambili, the narrator, Mama and Ifeoma "went into Jaja's room. I sat on the sofa, watching my cousins play with the cards. I did not understand the game, nor why at intervals one of them yelled "Donkey!" amid laughter. The stereo had stopped. I got up and went into the hallway, standing by Mama's bedroom door. I wanted to go in and sit with Mama and Auntie Ifeoma, but instead I just stood still, listening. Mama was whispering; I could barely make out the words "there are many full gas cylinders lying around in the factory." She was trying to persuade Auntie Ifeoma to ask Papa for them." (p. 103)

"Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But first he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, numnye m, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima's trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things." (p. 103)

Ifeoma is the opposite of Mama who always runs around to the dictates of her husband just to please him. Ifeoma from the excerpt above shows she will rather remain poor and ride the old rickety car than accept all the conditions of Eugene. Amaka, Kambili's cousin makes bold to tell the much revered and feared Eugene that the drinks his factory makes is too sweet. This is something that neither Kambili, Jaja nor their mother could ever make any attempt to say. They always say something that will make Eugene pleased and happy.

"Does your factory make this, Uncle Eugene?" Amaka asked, squinting to see what was written on the bottles.

"Yes," Papa answered.

"It's a little too sweet. It would be nicer if you reduced the sugar in it." (p. 106)

This is the way Ifeoma trains and educates her children. To be confident enough to say what they feel about a phenomenon in a polite way. The confidence with which Amaka tells her uncle Eugene about the taste of his juice is in sharp contrast with that of Kambili and her mother. Another instance is the situation on Christmas Eve, it is Sunday and Kambili has menstrual cramps. Her mother tells her to take cornflakes in order to take a pain relief. Jaja prepares the meal for her. Her father sees her eating it and flogs all of them- Kambili, Jaja and Mama, because of a dogmatically instituted religious rite of fasting. The Igbo words burst out of Papa's mouth. "Has the devil built a tent in my house?" He turned to Mama. "You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharistic fast, makannidi?"

"He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder." (p. 110)

Right there on a Sunday morning, he beats up the members of his family under the guise of religion. Although Jaja claims responsibility for the action, he still beats all of them. This and many more are the untold mysteries he inflicts on the members of his household. Mama here is seen as an example of a liberal feminist. She just sits and folds her arms to suffer, even though she knows what her husband is doing is very wrong. After Christmas, Jaja and Kambili visit their aunt at the university in Nsukka. During the period of their stay, Papa Nnukwu falls sick and aunty Ifeoma brings her to her home in order to take care of him properly. When Eugene hears, he quickly retrieves the children. He sees Papa Nnukwu, his own father, as a traditionalist and fetish because he is not a religious fanatic like him and because his father does not attend Catholic church like him. When they return home, in order to remove the supposed evil spirit from the children as a result of their contact with their grandfather, Eugene soaks Kambili's leg in hot water while her mother stands there crying. She cries instead of her to take action against her husband's evil way of doing things. (p. 200)

Yewande Coker also shares in the hard heartedness of Eugene. He goes ahead to ask Ade Coker to publish the story of Nwakiti Ogechi against the will of the military government. The head of state retaliates by sending Ade Coker a parcel bomb which blows him off. (p. 212) Yewande becomes a young widow. Although Eugene gives her much financial assistance and moral encouragement, yet that can never replace her husband. Ade Coker meets his untimely death because Eugene persuades and orders him to

publish the news. Another earlier brutality of Eugene against his children is when Jaja as a little boy misses a line in his communion class and is not named the best. He cuts his little finger and leaves Jaja permanently disabled in one hand. The painting of Papa-Nnukwu that Amaka gives Kambili is also found on her and Eugene beats her to a state of coma. Mama Beatrice keeps quiet and stomachs all of the maltreatments against her very self and her children.

However, there is an unexpected drastic change in character of her much passive and liberal feminist character, Mama, when she decides to end her husband's tyranny. She goes to the extreme and poisons him by adding rat poison little by little into her husband's tea every day. Silencing him once and for all. The transformation demonstrated in the character of Beatrice from a liberal feminist to a radical one is breath taking. Eugene is poisoned and he dies a sudden death. The post mortem reveals the poison. The sudden death is to be investigated as a result of the post mortem discovery, Jaja quickly owns up to the crime and ends in prison. He decides to take that action because he does not want his mother to suffer again in the prison despite the suffering and all forms of imprisonment all of them have suffered in the hand of Papa Eugene. Jaja becomes the sacrificial lamb for the family, especially for Mama. He is released after sometimes in prison and a new ray of hope looms over them all.

The Concept of Male Feminist in *Purple Hibiscus*

The concept we call 'male feminist' refers to male characters with special concern for female characters and they are ready to fight the cause of women, preventing them from undue subjugations and threats from domineering male personalities. Feminism is not a woman's affair alone. It requires the support of the male gender who understands the worth of women in the society. African womanism does not demand to contest with their male counterparts. African women seek to be recognised, respected, rebranded and re-valued. The author systematically presents some male characters who care and support the concept of African feminism and are willing to support the struggles of women in the society. They cherish the women around them and desire the best for them, trying as much as possible to protect them from the antagonistic characters.

The first of such characters is Jaja. His real name is Chukwuka but he is popularly called Jaja, a childhood nickname that sticks to him. Jaja lives by the name he is called. The historical African Jaja of Opobo, was an astute freedom fighter against the colonial government. He resisted the Whiteman's rule during his days and at the end, he was exiled. The character of Jaja as presented in *Purple Hibiscus* matches perfectly with his name and that of historical Jaja of Opobo. Jaja feel uncomfortable with the way his

father treats everyone at home, especially Mama and Kambili. He wishes to help but he is also a victim of the circumstances. His mother and sister are very precious to him. Many times, he owns up for their faults and offers to take their punishments upon himself.

An instance is their visit to Abba when Papa Eugene categorically instructs them not to spend more than fifteen minutes there before returning back home. Kambili refuses to leave at the expiration of the fifteen minutes because she still has some things to attend to. Kevin, the driver, reports the children to their father. Immediately Eugene raises the issue of overstay, Jaja quickly claims that he is the reason for their lateness to arrive back home as earlier instructed.

Kevin said you stayed up to twenty-five minutes with your grandfather. Is that what I told you?" Papa's voice was low. 'I wasted time, it was my fault,' Jaja said." (P. 77)

Jaja owns up to Kambili's offence to prevent her from being punished by their father. Likewise, when the painting of Papa-Nnukwu is discovered in Kambili's room, Jaja owns up to the crime as well.

"Who brought that painting into this house?

Me, I said.

Me, Jaja said" (p. 216)

On the Sunday that Kambili breaks the Eucharistic fast due to her cramps, Jaja takes the blame on behalf of his mother and sister.

"What are you doing, Kambili?

I swallowed hard. "I ... I ..."

"You are eating ten minutes before Mass? Ten minutes before Mass?"

"Her period started and she has cramps--" Mama said.

Jaja cut her short. "I told her to eat corn flakes before she took Panadol, Papa. I made it for her." (P. 110)

Again, when Mama poisons Eugene to death and the police comes to the house to arrest her, Jaja owns up to the crime.

The policemen came a few hours later. They said they wanted to ask some questions. Somebody at St. Agnes Hospital had contacted them, and they had a copy of the autopsy report with them. Jaja did not wait for their questions; he told them he had used rat poison, that he put it in Papa's tea. They allowed him to change his shirt before they took him away. (p. 295)

Another male character who despite being a man shows sympathy for womanhood is Father Amadi. He takes his time to train and teach Kambili things she needs to know while growing or developing as a woman. He makes her to believe in herself. His show of love makes Kambili confident

and able to express herself. She discovers true happiness as she comes out of her shell and state of intimidation. This means the love her father denies her is found in Father Amadi.

Obiora the first son of Auntie Ifeoma is another male character whom we can call a feminist. He is young but quick to defend his mother and his siblings. When the police barge in roughly into his mother's apartment, he stands up to them to query them. He only keeps quiet when his mother asks him to. He is not afraid to confront any challenging personality who wants to infringe on the rights of female characters around him. Obiora is a developing strong young male character who believes in the cause of women who is qualified to be called a feminist. Jaja, Obiora and Father Amadi are examples portrayed in the novel as feminists. Though they are men, but they support the course of women through their actions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The society, especially African societies must put aside gender biases and recognize the fact that both males and females have vital roles to play in the society. Furthermore, religion should not be used as weapon of terror, rather, as an instrument of peace and love. Religion in every sphere should be used to make people's lives better, especially in protecting women's rights. This paper has demonstrated the pivotal role of feminist activism in selected African novels, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of women's experiences in patriarchal societies. Through a critical analysis of the novels, we have seen how Sefi Attah's *Everything Good Will Come* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* portray the struggles of women against oppressive structures and their quest for self-discovery, empowerment, and social change. The findings of this research underscore the significance of feminist activism in challenging dominant ideologies and promoting women's liberation and social transformation. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on feminist activism in Africa, emphasizing the need for continued exploration and amplification of women's voices and experiences in literature and beyond.

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