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Confronting the Deification of Maleness: A Feministic Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Selected Prose Fiction

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Abstract

This paper highlights how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in multi-faceted ways, projects and confronts a nuanced (and blatant) understanding of the primacy of maleness over femaleness in her fiction. Adichie's fiction also depicts the verities of (Black) women living in a patriarchal and repressive world of multi-layered discrimination, marginalisation, abuse, commodification and censorship, all of which appear to be protracted by the notion that maleness is superior to femaleness. Although Adichie largely assigns 'important' roles and voices to her female characters, she still, however, projects the looming shadow of patriarchal repression and its attendant constraints which are levied on women by their femininity –psychologically, bodily and scholastically (Seanego & Mogoboya, 2022). Hence, the central thesis of this paper is that the afore-mentioned aspects, among others, propound the patriarchal ideology that foregrounds the primacy of the male, advertently leading to the detriment and repression of the female. Undergirded by the postcolonial feminist theory which is guided by textual analysis as its reading strategy, this paper relies on Adichie's prose works, namely; Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun, and The Thing Around Your Neck, for its data and analysis. Arguably, Adichie's prose falls within the purview of contemporary literary works which project women tackling hydra-headed problems of patriarchal repression, its attendant practices and ideologies, and gender inequality. Adichie's prose is thus appreciated as a literary platform upon which socio-cultural trajectories in general and gender imbalances in particular are ventilated upon in a postcolonial context.

Keywords— Patriarchy; Superiority Complex; Primacy; Maleness; Postcolonial Feminism

Introduction

Most scholars concede that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a novelist par excellence (Adeyemi, 2018; Guarracino, 2014; Mami, 2017; Satkunananthan, 2011, 2018; Sethi, 2003; Tunca, 2009, 2013, 2018). Adichie is part of what Ayodabo (2016, p. 549) views as "a recent

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and interesting period in Nigerian literature" in the postcolonial context. This period entails a treatment of issues such as "identity and displacement, political conflict, postcolonial disillusionment, multiculturalism and globalisation, cultural shock and poverty" (Ayodabo, 2016, p. 549). At its core, Adichie's prose encapsulates "contemporary issues which bother the postcolonial subject" (Yerima, 2015, p. 11), with the predominant ones being, "gender, origin, race, and age" (Tunca, 2018, p. 122; cf. Nitonde, 2017). For Murphy (2017), Adichie writes from different vantage points, which harmonise in multifarious ways, through which she manages to challenge the universal from wide-ranging quarters. In view of this, this paper deems analysing Adichie's creative oeuvre as "an entirely legitimate endeavor" (Tunca, 2018, p. 112), particularly because it "offers the unique advantage of condensing critical issues such as conflict of powers, the reconfiguration of gender relationships…" (Bigot, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, this paper argues that Adichie confronts patriarchal practices whilst promoting "a progressive view of […] gender roles." (Stobie, 2010, p. 421). For expository convenience, this paper aims: (a) to reflect on the primacy of the male as a theme that is generally embedded in (African) literature and culture; (b) to discuss how Adichie confronts the ideologies of 'male supremacy', while at the same time, repurposing the debate and the discourse on gender (in)equality within the broad spectrum of contemporary African literature and criticism; (c) to attend more closely to the antithetical stance assumed by Adichie's female characters in confronting the deification of maleness; (d) to highlight the effects of patriarchal control and intolerance in Adichie's fiction. To achieve these aims, Adichie's two novels, namely; *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and her collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), are synthesised in an endeavour to highlight both her activism in literary feminism and how she confronts the deification of maleness in what may be regarded as a postcolonial feministic context.

Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical lynchpin of this paper assumes anchorage upon Chambers and Watkins' (2012, p. 297) concession that it is axiomatic that most significant work in Postcolonial Theory and criticism deal with questions of gender and sexuality. It is against the backdrop of this understanding that the theoretical fulcrum of this paper is Postcolonial Feminism. By Postcolonial Feminism, it is meant a sketching out of "processes by which gender and sexuality are necessarily imbricated in colonialism and its legacies", which "cannot be neglected by postcolonial critics (Chambers & Watkins, 2012, p. 297). Seemingly, "feminists collide with postcolonials on the understandings of the 'third world women' and the overruling of gender hierarchies in racialized spaces" (Parashar, 2016, p. 371). Also, Parashar states that Postcolonialism and Feminism "as critical discourses have enriched the understanding and explanatory potential of international relations" where "these two theoretical approaches have grown exponentially in their capacity to embrace diversity and unpredictability of global political and social life" (2016, p. 371). Postcolonialism and Feminism merge successfully in that they both "stand resolutely in support of subversion and change in the political, cultural and social landscape; not just to bridge the distance between the centre and the margins but also to bring the knowledge of and from the margins to the centre" (Parashar, 2016, p.371). Postcolonial Feminists thus essentially "argue for the historical and geographical specificity of feminisms, and their capacity to engage productively with difference" (Chambers & Watkins, 2012, p. 299). Put more tersely by Parashar, Postcolonialism offers Feminism the

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conceptual tool box to see multiple sites of oppression and to reject universalisms around gendered experiences of both men and women (2016, p. 371). In this paper, we, in accord with Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi (2015, p. 44), purport that the quantum of Postcolonial Feminism's grouse is, at the literal level, the idea that males primarily appropriate discourse and write females as footnotes in male history, thus deifying the male while subjugating the female. Linked to this grouse is also the belief that "agency is denied female characters in male discourse where they are treated as appendages and chattels in the treasure troves of patriarchy" (Nwachukwu & UnekeEnyi, 2015, p. 44). Hence, since the 1980s when the term "feminism" was first coined, "it has sought to upturn the so-called "complacent" social order which feminists claim, is patriarchy-focused" (Nwachukwu & UnekeEnyi, 2015, p. 44). In this paper, we further contend that this feminist grouse is evinced in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's prose, where she labours to enforce a belief in sexual equality in the postcolonial context. As if in consensus with Etim, Adichie seems to view "the men-women binary" as indicative of "the relationship between post-postcolonialism and gender" where "the liberation of women is central to the liberation of Africa" (2019, p.7). We draw Adichie's prose into sharp focus also bearing in mind that feminism's theoretical-ideological stance generally yields a cacophony of voices, which basically results in an interminable list of feminisms, i.e., "Marxist feminists, Black and African, Asian, Women of Colour, American, French, Irish, Black British, Gynocritics, Gynesis, Psychoanalytic, Myth, Third World/Third Wave, Deconstruction, Misandrist, Femalist, Motherist, Womanist" (Nwachukwu & UnekeEnyi, 2015, p. 44). No wonder Nnolim (1994) posits that the feminist house is divided - a division which he further compartmentalises into: feminists, womanist/accommodationists, reactionaries middle-of-the roaders and gyandrists. Notwithstanding these, we locate Adichie's fiction under the ambit of Postcolonial Feminism, although Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi, view her as part of 'new' female voices who insist in their attempt to castrate males. Ostensibly, in their commendable efforts to corroborate the latter view on Adichie, Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi, conclude that "rather than being conciliatory, Adichie is unabashedly pensive and combative" (Nwachukwu & UnekeEnyi, 2015, p. 45). Although we concede that, for Adichie, feministic postulations entail a deployment of varied arsenals aimed at dismantling patriarchy, and thus concurrently entrenching matriarchy, even if by implicit means, we do not concur that Adichie intends to castrate males, as Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi (2015) claim. On the contrary, we argue that Adichie's feminism is geared towards exposing and confronting gender imbalances for the purposes of encouraging a reconfiguration on the possibilities of attaining the equality of sexes, as espoused by her *Dear Ijeawele or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017). We also purport that Adichie's fiction "necessitates a movement towards fashioning a newer, fresher and a more foregrounded (estranged) terminology to account for the changing complexion and habits of Africa's postcolonial criticisms, as a way of responding to emerging realities" (Etim, 2019, p.1). While there may be instances where we admit that "Adichie is yet to abandon the vindictive urge to get even with men" (Nwachukwu & UnekeEnyi, 2015, p.47), we are also not oblivious of the realities in contemporary African critique-scape which predispose one to contemplate the idea that, perhaps, there is a need for a re-assessment, refocusing and repositioning in postcolonial hermeneutics on gender discourses (see Etim, 2019). Hence, we maintain the stance that Adichie's fiction "suggests a need for

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reorientation" on gender discourse (Uwakwe & Chioma, 2015, p. 159). We agree with Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi (2015, p. 42), on the basis that "Feminism is reactionary", that is, it "is the explosion of an aggregation of bottled-up fuse of female frustrations regarding what they perceive as patriarchal; culturally-conditioned constructs where women are systematically subjugated and furiously fenced-in at the lowest rung of the social ladder". In reading Adichie's fiction, we also notice her insistence on the vocalisation of such frustrations, which span from the 1890s to the intense agitations of the 1960s to the 1980s down to the present. Thus, Adichie, as a woman 'liberationist' or feminist, vociferates "on a coterie of grievances on perceived complexes and connivances ostensibly by all males against all females" (Nwachukwu & UnekeEnyi, 2015, p. 42). Overall, our ideological premise is that the sum of Adichie's feminist activism is two-fold: a desire to work with women's issues and a political conviction that women are generally viewed in a lopsided light while men are venerated as supreme and; therefore, women need to be liberated (Mogoboya & Maubane, 2021). It is on this premise that the next section focuses on the subalternity of women and the concurrent deification of maleness in Adichie's fiction.

Adichie's Confrontation of Male Supremacy

Within the patriarchal vertigo, one of the "maladroit practices" and yet dominant prongs it protracts is the doctrine of 'the primacy of the male' over the female (Mami, 2017, p. 208). Tied to the doctrine is the belief that a male child ensures the protraction of the father' and clan's name in a male-controlled culture (Makondo, 2013). Therefore, a male child is thus deemed more important than a female child (Houndjo, 2018). Houndjo (2018, p. 18) indicates that these "social imbalances between men and women are the bedrock of injustices women encounter in the world, particularly in African societies". Among the Vhaveṋḓa in South Africa, for example, the primacy of the male is clearly highlighted in the Tshiveṋḓa play, *Hu ḓo sala nnyi?* (Who will remain?) by T.N. Makuya (1974). Read from a feministic perspective, the play falls short of imagining and portraying women beyond gendered roles. The play trivialises women to nothing but mere custodians of traditional values. In this way, the play surfaces as a prototype of the (male) literary tradition in Tshiveṋḓa (and most African) fiction that depicts women as passive and voiceless. These images serve to rationalise, and therefore perpetuate inequality between the sexes. The vignette in this play centres around the theme of inheritance, which only the male child is deemed eligible to receive. Makhado, a wealthy man, has one son, Tshiwela, who is married and has birthed only daughters. These daughters are overlooked by Makhado as eligible heiresses. Women's role in the preservation and distribution of wealth, as depicted in *Hu ḓo sala nnyi?* is to only show up either as concubines or co/deputy wives for the purposes of bearing male children; theirs is merely to be silent and submissive. Perhaps this is why "in Africa, most women are stereotyped as the submissive, while men are dominant" (Anggeria, 2019, p. 15). For Makondo (2009; 2013), among the Shona in Zimbabwe, male supremacy is evinced even in the Shona's anthroponomastic dynamics and trends. Apparently, the "Shona oral tradition has it that the Shona society used to value more male children…a mother who bore boys was proudly named *Vachizvaramachinda* (mother of boys) and was highly valued when compared to *Vamachekanhembe* (mother of girls)" (Makondo, 2013, p. 12 original italics). Makondo also states that some polygamous marriages in Zimbabwe were due to the husbands' quest for women who would give birth to baby boys. This notion is hinted at in the

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short story, “On Monday of Last Week”, when Kamara called Chimwe, who began to cry because “another woman was pregnant for Chimwe’s husband and he was going to pay her bride price because Chimwe had two daughters and the woman came from a family of many sons” (Adichie, 2009, p. 86). “Male children are ‘favoured’ “because they ensure the immediate continuation of a father and clan name” in the patriarchal society (Makondo, 2013, p.12). With this in mind, Makondo (2009, p. 65) concludes:

> *As a result, almost all given names this study found have subtle or otherwise traces of this gender influence in its bid to capture its deep feelings and thoughts against the perceived Shona patriarchal dominance. This male dominance dictates that women remain aliens in the families they married into.*

The idea that sons are the ones responsible for the continuation of a clan’s name also links with women’s quest to birth more children (sons) in marriage. Expectedly, the *umunna* (extended family members) propose to Mama (Beatrice) in *Purple Hibiscus* that Eugene (Papa) should take another wife because a man of his stature cannot have just two children (Adichie, 2004, p. 75). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which may be “read as a post-postcolonial work” (Etim, 2019, p.9), Adichie highlights why birthing a male child is essential through Anulika, who says: “I want to have a baby boy first, because it will place my feet firmly in Onyeka’s house” (2006, p.119). Birthing a male child is thus viewed as a viable means for a woman to legitimise her value in the family into which she marries. By implication, should Anulika give birth to a girl, ‘her feet’ will not firmly stand at Onyeka’s house. Birthing a girl is a cause for concern in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as evinced when “Onunna from Ezeungwu’s compound had a baby girl first, her husband’s people went to see a *dibia* to find out why!” (Adichie, 2006, p. 119). Birthing a girl child is thus viewed as a misfortune, if not inconsequential. Hence, when Amala gave birth to a girl, Odenigbo’s mother rejected Amala’s daughter (Adichie, 2006, p. 184), on the grounds that “she wanted a boy,” to which Olanna responded: “We’ll keep her” (Adichie, 2006, p. 250-251). Through Olanna’s acceptance of Baby, Adichie deconstructs the patriarchal ideology that a girl child is of a lesser value when compared to the male child.

Adichie also instantiates how the deification of the male pervades the Nigerian and ultimately the African context in *Purple Hibiscus*, when Mama had had miscarriages and the villagers urged Papa, her husband, to have children with someone else, more so sons (Begum, 2017). It is also unsurprising to learn that Okafo and Okoye, Obierika’s two maternal cousins, in the short story “The Headstrong Woman”, urged Obierika to marry another wife, after his wife’s third miscarriage. Furthermore, Amala is only promoted by Odenigbo’s mother from being a ‘helper’ to a ‘woman’ “because she would give birth to Mama’s grandchild” –a son, to be precise (Adichie, 2006, p. 238). The conception and ultimate birth of a son is such an important aspect to traditionalists such as Odenigbo’s mother that, when Amala was ill, Odenigbo’s mother believed it was her enemies who wanted to harm Amala’s pregnancy because “they do not want somebody to carry our family name” (Adichie, 2006, p. 239). This ‘somebody’ who would carry the family name was, to Odenigbo’s mother, a boy, who after being born, “her fellow women will no longer call her the mother of an impotent son” (Adichie, 2006, p. 238). Herein, also lies the fragility and anxiety of the patriarchal ego, because such a ‘glorified’ male sustains his quasi-divine status under the patriarchal gaze, only when he is able to reproduce for the sustenance of the ‘family’. Through Odenigbo’s mother, Adichie hints at the ambivalence and instability of the patriarchal

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ego in that the very maleness it worships is quickly despised (by the very system) upon the discovery of the male's impotence. This opprobrium is stressed by Nwamgba who, in the short story, "The Headstrong Woman", thought it strange of Obierika, "a prosperous man with only one wife, and she worried more than he did about their childlessness, about the songs that people sang, melodious mean-spirited words: She has sold her womb. *She has eaten his penis. He plays his flute and hands over his wealth to her*" (Adichie, 2009, p. 200 original italics). Thus, in Adichie's fiction, considerable focus is placed on how most of her female characters perceive childbirth –birthing a male child, as one of the major ways through which women can attain and sustain value in their families, communities and consequently, in the world. Adichie also depicts that in instances where a girl child is born, that is, "Baby" in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the affection she receives from her grandmother is "half-baked, half-hearted" (Adichie, 2006, p. 184). For Adichie, however, the girl child possesses equal dignity and value with the male child, and therefore should not be viewed or treated as if she is disposable.

Adichie on the Pacification of the (Fragile) Patriarchal Ego

The patriarchal ego, it seems, chiefly wants to be in charge of everything and everyone. This desire is so deeply ingrained in Eugene (Papa) that Kambili tritely knew that something was wrong when she heard Mama on the phone because "it was *always* Papa who placed the call" (Adichie, 2004, p. 146 emphasis added). Apart from the need to be in control, the patriarchal ego also seems to be pacified when women grovel at its feet. In the short story, "Jumping Monkey Hill", when Chioma's adulterous father had walked out of his marriage because his wife confronted and slapped his concubine, to his disgrace, "Aunty Elohor, Aunty Rose, and Aunty Uche", all came to Chioma's mother and told her, "We are prepared to go with you and *beg* him to come back home or we will go and *beg* on your behalf" (Adichie, 2009, p. 105 emphasis added). Chioma's mother, however, responded: "Never, not in this world. I am not going to beg him. It is enough" (Adichie, 2009, p. 105). Here, Adichie concurrently reveals how some women aid the perpetuation of patriarchy and how other women refuse to nurse the patriarchal ego. With the refusal to beg her husband to come home, Chioma's mother had to be prepared to see her business fail because her husband "always helped her import shoes from Dubai", hence, "she lowered her prices" (Adichie, 2009, p. 105). The idea that a wife must always fight to keep her husband is also held by Aunty Ada in the short story, "The Arrangers of Marriage", who tells Chinaza: "Don't let your husband eat out too much, or it will push him into the arms of a woman who cooks. Always guard your husband like a guinea fowl's egg" (Adichie, 2009, p. 178). Thus, encapsulated in the patriarchal agenda, is the need to have women "softened", "pliable" and "accepting" (Adichie, 2009, p. 40), so much so that Nkem is not free to even cut her hair. When Nkem cut her hair, Obiora (her husband) told her he liked her long hair and that she should grow her hair back because "long hair is more graceful on a Big Man's wife" (Adichie, 2009, p. 40). Adichie, however, simultaneously exposes the fragility of the patriarchal ego through Nwamgba's father. Ostensibly, Nwamgba's father "found her exhausting, this sharp-tongued, headstrong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground (After which her father had warned everybody not to let the news leave the compound that the girl had thrown a boy)" (Adichie, 2009, p. 199). Nwamgba's father eventually allows her to marry the man she wants because "it was better that he let her go with the man she chose, to save himself years of trouble when she would keep returning home after confrontations with in-

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laws" (Adichie, 2009, p. 199). The patriarchal system loathes women who resist it. Adichie considers the deification of the male as nothing but an anxious and false superiority complex because of its double standards. Adichie cogitates the confrontation of patriarchy, irrespective of its anxiety, as a worthwhile endeavour, because this "false superiority complex attributed to maleness" pervasively translates "into other spheres of influence, such as education, sport, politics and economics" (Cloete and Maḓadzhe, 2007, p. 38). Incensed by this, Adichie ably employs "exceptional artistic elaborations" to modulate "the reader's sensations by showing how the mechanisms named" patriarchy "are set up" (Mami, 2017, p. 197).

As already indicated, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the deification of the male is significantly personified by Eugene, who "is a tyrannical patriarch" (Stobie, 2010, p. 423). *Purple Hibiscus* implicitly links anxious masculinity, absolutist religion, autocracy in university and political corruption (Stobie, 2010). Stobie (ibid) thinks that "the key attribute linking all these harmful practices is an arrogant conviction of being right, a refusal to accept difference or engage in the give-and-take of reasoned discussion" with women. For example, when Aunty Ifeoma attempted to show Papa-Nnukwu that Eugene's problem was not that he followed "those missionaries," because she too had gone to missionary school, Papa-Nnukwu said, "But you are a woman. You do not count" (Adichie, 2004, p. 83). Aunty Ifeoma did not let this remark slide: "Eh? So I don't count? Has Eugene ever asked about your leg? If I do not count, then I will stop asking if you rose well in the morning," to which Papa-Nnukwu quickly conceded: "I joke with you…Where would I be if my *chi* [god] had not given me a daughter?" (Adichie, 2004, p. 83). Through Ifeoma, Adichie intends to draw from the margins to the centre, female voices who not only assert their presence but also vocalise their objection to the disregard of their existence by the patriarchal exponents. Papa-Nnukwu also exposes himself as a sexist when he tells (widowed) Ifeoma that he would intercede for her to his god (*Chukwu*) so that she "finds a good man to take care of her and her children" (Stobie, 2010, p. 424). To this, Ifeoma responded: "Let your spirit ask *Chukwu* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask" (Adichie, 2004, p. 83 original italics). Through Ifeoma's 'dry' response to Papa-Nnukwu, Adichie laconically shows that there are women whose aspirations are not solely lynched to the presence of the male for their survival; some women merely want to progress academically. Adichie bolsters this notion through Aunty Ifeka in *Half of a Yellow Sun* who tells Olanna that, "You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man" (2006, p. 226). Nwachukwu and UnekeEnyi, however, think that "by urging women to leave their husbands and live in sin and irreverence all in the name of self-assertion, independence and individuality […]" Adichie's "feminism encourages the destruction of the communal base of the society and endangers the sense in family life in which is the root of the African society" (2015, p. 49). Our premise is that Adichie does not advocate the destruction of family or marriage, she instead reveals how the very institutions can become a source of tyranny when they should be a place of harmony. Adichie's brand of feminism does not propagate misandry either.

In Adichie's fiction, one also notes that some women do not even have the volition to decide on who they want to marry. For instance, in the short story, "The Arrangers of Marriage" (Adichie, 2009, p. 167), Chinaza Okafor has no say in the selection of the man she must marry. In fact, she is expected to be grateful that the 'arrangers of marriage' found her a husband who is a doctor, something she must equate with

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winning "a lottery" (Adichie, 2009, p. 170). In this setup, Chinaza learns that in an arranged marriage such as hers, "sex was not consensual" (Adichie, 2009, p.168). Chinaza seemingly has no choice but to thank the arrangers of her marriage "for everything –finding her a husband, taking her into their home, buying her a new pair of shoes every two years". This, for Chinaza, "was the only way to avoid being called ungrateful" (Adichie, 2009, p. 170). Chinaza is expected to stay in her marriage, however repressive, because according to Aunty Ada, Chinaza ought to realise that there are many women who "would offer both their eyes for a doctor in America […]. For any husband at all" (Adichie, 2009, p.184). Connected to this confrontational tactic of male supremacy is Adichie's implicit dissuasion of women and girls from perceiving marriage as the only absolute aspiration for which they should sacrifice their lives and freedom. Viewing marriage and passing the 'marriageability test' (Adichie, 2017, p. 30), as the ultimate aspiration for which women and girls must strive, is projected by Ifeoma's student who came to announce that she was getting married because her fiancé "could no longer wait until she graduated" (Adichie, 2004, p. 234). The student did not call her fiancé by his name, "she called him "dim, my husband," with the proud tone of someone who had won a price" (Adichie, 2004, p. 234). She also said: "I'm not sure I will come back to school when we reopen. I want to have a baby first. I don't want dim to think that he married me to have an empty home" (Adichie, 2004, p. 234). Adichie also sheds light on this notion through Arize who is willing to give up her sewing, in preference of marriage because that is what would give her "a child" (Adichie, 2006, p.41). When Olanna disputed her eagerness to give up sewing for marriage, Arize said: "It is only women like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don't know Book wait too long, we will expire" (Adichie, 2006, p. 41). To combat expiration, marriage and childbirth (of sons) are the only alternatives for Arize to justify her existence in the world. In such a context, women who are unable to conceive or have miscarriages, like Arize, may have their mother visiting often in "the first, second and third year of marriage, poking at Arize's belly and urging her to confess how many abortions she had had before marriage" (Adichie, 2006, p.130). Nwamgba's mother, in the short story "The Headstrong Historian" (Adichie, 2009, p. 198), was aghast when she (Nwamgba) told her that Obierika was the man she wanted to marry. The problem, according to Nwamgba's mother, was that "Obierika was an only child, his father had been an only child whose wives had lost pregnancies and buried babies" (Adichie, 2009, p. 199). The idea propounded here is that, for a woman to have a secure, legitimate position in her marriage, she should have several children, mainly more male children. Hence, Adichie, as Stobie (2010, p. 422) argues, uses various characters to raise "questions about the possibility of change within the family, the church and the nation". Adichie's questions may also necessitate a confrontation of male supremacy in *Purple Hibiscus* where Adichie criticises "dogmas such as the infallibility of the pope and the celibacy of priesthood, and offers an alternative to patriarchal and religious absolutism, shame and body-hatred" (Stobie, 2010, p. 422).

In the short story, "Tomorrow is Too Far" (Adichie, 2009, p. 187), the entrenchment of the ideology of male supremacy and how it privileges some males while marginalising females (and other males), is highlighted when the narrator says:

> *Grandmama let only your brother Nonso climb the trees to shake a loaded branch, although you [a girl] were a better climber than he was…Grandmama taught Nonso how to pluck the coconuts, which were hard*

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to climb, so limb free and tall, and Grandmama gave Nonso a long stick and showed him how to nudge the padded pods down. She didn't show you, because she said girls never plucked coconuts…Grandmama presided over the sipping of wind-cooled milk ritual to make sure Nonso went first. [And when asked] why Nonso sipped first even though Dozie (a boy) was thirteen, a year older than Nonso, […] Grandmama said Nonso was her son's only son, the one who would carry on the Nnabusi name, while Dozie was only a nwadiana, her daughter's son (Adichie, 2009, p. 188).

With the female protagonist, who was a better climber than Nonso, Grandmama would sometimes pat her back and say, "It's good you are learning, *nne*, this is how you will take care of your husband one day" (Adichie, 2009, p. 195 original italics), because only girls are expected to pass the 'marriageability test', Adichie (2017) says. When Nonso died, Grandmama felt betrayed by him, "asking him who would carry on the Nnabusi name now, who would protect the family lineage" (Adichie, 2009, p. 189). Within this patriarchal giddiness, there is still Dozie, of whom it is unknown whether "he felt anything about being the wrong grandson, the one who did not bear the Nnabusi name" simply because he was born by his grandmother's daughter (Adichie, 2009, p. 192). Tactfully, Adichie highlights how the proverbial 'patriarchal tree' is climbed by the male from an early age, while the female is denied such a privilege. According the narrator, Grandmama may well have "asked Nonso to climb to the highest branch of the avocado tree to show her how much of a man he was" (Adichie, 2009, p.194). Here, Adichie still seeks to expose the fragility of patriarchy because, when Nonso climbed to the highest branch, he fell and died, and with his fall, patriarchy had metaphorically been dealt "a dull, final plop" (Adichie, 2009, p. 194). Adichie shows how riled she is by patriarchy through the narrator who says she "knew that some people can take up too much space by simply being, that by existing, some people can stifle others" (Adichie, 2009, p. 195). Fed up with the imbalance, the narrator eventually conceived the idea of scaring Nonso when he had climbed to the highest branch. She needed to "get Nonso maimed, his legs twisted, to mar the perfection of his lithe body, to make him less lovable, less able to do all that he did […] less able to take up your space" (Adichie, 2009, p. 195). Apparently, it was easy to get Nonso to climb to the top of the avocado tree; you only had to remind him that you were the better climber" (Adichie, 2009, p. 195). Seemingly, Nonso was unaware that "the branches [of the patriarchal tree] were weak", and so, "Nonso climbed the tree. Higher and higher" (Adichie, 2009, p. 196). At this juncture, the narrator reveals that there are many ways of killing patriarchy. Among such ways, was the superficially detached but nefariously effective nonetheless, where, "you waited for that short moment when he [Nonso] was between motions. An open moment […] Then you screamed, "A snake! […] in those few seconds, Nonso looked down at you and let go, his footing slipping, his arms freeing themselves". In the end, she could absolve herself through a dismissive conclusion, "maybe the tree simply shrugged Nonso off" (Adichie, 2009, p. 196). Through this tactic, Adichie aims to deconstruct the absolute stance of traditional (cultural) assumptions that have for long protracted male dominance through an indoctrination of gendered prohibitions which also tabooed interrogation. Simoes da Silva (2012, p. 455) observes that, Adichie's prose, precisely her novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), "express a unique aesthetic focus that combines post-colonial, feminist and ethical concerns". Simoes da Silva avers further that, "thematically topical and polemic, the writing in both texts is raw and

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confrontational" (2012, p. 455). Adichie's brand of feminism then, not only "comes in variegated templates" (da Silva, 2017, p. 2), but aims to espouse "harmonious mutual relationships across genders as a means to creating a better world, with relationships defined along capabilities" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 3).

Adichie imagines varied spheres where women are no longer repressed and censored. One such a sphere is academia. We learn through Amaka, for example, that at university, "they are telling Mom [Ifeoma] to shut up" because "if you don't want to lose your job, you shut up" (Adichie, 2004, p. 224). Such repression and censorship seemingly compel Obiora to recommend to his mother (Ifeoma) that she be fired so that they could "go to America," where "her work will be recognized, without any nonsense politics" (Adichie, 2004, p. 224). Through Obiora's recommendation, Adichie hints at some of the causes of the brain drain, particularly the migration of female academics from their home countries to the diaspora. Ifeoma, as we learn from Obiora, "should have been senior lecturer years ago," but "they have been sitting on her file" (Adichie, 2004, p. 224). However, migrating to America, which according to the narrator of the short story, "Imitation", is a place permeated by "the abundance of unreasonable hope" (Adichie, 2009, p. 26), one soon realises that Ifeoma is still likely to suffer from alienation, repression and discrimination. This is a dilemma faced by diasporic women such as Philippa. Apparently, Philippa who then lived in America, was treated "as a second-class citizen". At first, Ifeoma dismisses this statement as "sarcasm", until Chiaku informs her: "…It is true. All my years in Cambridge, I was a monkey who had developed the ability to reason" (Adichie, 2004, p. 244). Also, in the short story, "Ghosts", Ebere, a doctor in America, was interested in a post advertised (for a doctor) by the hospital board, but when she came for a job interview, the hospital board "took one look at her medical degree from Nigeria and said they don't want a foreigner" (Adichie, 2009, p. 68). Also linked to Ebere's experience in America is the stereotypic condescension that women like Kamara in the short story, "On Monday of Last Week", face in the diaspora. Kamara speaks good English and Neil is surprised upon learning that Kamara was Nigerian, implying that proficiency in English is not coterminous with being African. Through Tobechi, Adichie also reveals that diasporic women like Kamara are warned to never mention their education because disclosing this, even the fact that she has a master's, might spoil her chances of securing a babysitting job in America.

Although Chiaku's assertion may seem alien to the repressive dynamic of patriarchy, Adichie reveals that the postcolonial female academic generally lives in a repressive and alienating environment; environments where they are also commodified. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Kainene discloses how her parents used her and her sister, Olanna, as sexual baits to procure business contracts: "My sister [Olanna] and I are meat. We are here so that suitable bachelors will make the kill" (Adichie, 2006, p. 59). Here, Adichie pointedly highlights the refraction of the repressive dynamic of patriarchy, revealing how it ultimately links with the commodification of the female body (Nkealah, 2008). In foregrounding women's commodification in a patriarchal world, Adichie also takes aim at the way women are perceived in various spheres of discourse in society –often highlighting "society's complicity in such" perceptions (da Silva, 2017, p. 7). For Nkem in the short story, "Imitation" (Adichie, 2009, p. 31), commodifying her body appears to be the only means for survival in a world where the men who help her do so in exchange for sex with her:

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She [Nkem] dated married men before Obiora [her husband] –what single girl in Lagos hadn't? Ikenna, a businessman, had paid her father's hospital bills after the hernia surgery. Tunji, a retired army general, had fixed the roof of her parents' home and bought them the first real sofas they had ever owned. She would have considered being his fourth wife –he was a Muslim and could have proposed –so that he would help her with her siblings' education.

Tunji did not propose. There were other men after Tunji, "men who praised her [Nkem] baby skin, men who gave her fleeting handouts, men who never proposed because she had gone to secretarial school, not a university" (Adichie, 2009, p. 31). Out of gratitude for what Obiora did, which other men she had been with did not do, like taking her siblings to school, introducing her to his friends and moving to a flat in Ikeja, when he asked if she would marry him, "she thought how unnecessary it was, his asking, she would have been happy simply to be told" (Adichie, 2009, p. 32). Through Nkem, Adichie locates women who resort to the "use of sex and their bodies as instruments for survival" (Nkealah, 2015, p. 15). Needless to say, debates about the women's use of sex and their bodies for survival abound within the feminist discourse (Nkealah, 2015). Nkealah (ibid) reveals that in such debates, there are scholars who view women's use of sex to their own advantage as subversive, because it dismantles notions of sexual inequality as women re-appropriate sexual power. For these scholars, Nkealah further asserts, "women's survival under difficult conditions, social or economic, is therefore linked to sex and the body as the primary locales of female power" (2015, p. 63). On the other extreme of the debate, "there are scholars who argue that prostitution further deepens sexual inequality because it places men (the buyers of sex) in a position of power while women (the sellers of sex) remain in a subordinate position, depending on men for their survival" (Nkealah, 2015, p. 63). Thus, by locating Nkem, Adichie intends to sustain the debate on whether women's use of sex for survival subverts patriarchal dominance and control or reinforces them.

For Ujunwa's fictional character, Chioma, in the short story, "Jumping Monkey Hill", the conditions set for her commodification are different. She is sexually harassed when she hunts for a job. Upon being called for a job interview, Chioma learns, "after the first few questions, the man says he will hire her and then walks across and stands behind her and reaches over her shoulders to squeeze her breasts" (Adichie, 2009, p. 99). When Chioma finally gets a job at a bank, and is told if she can bring in ten million naira during her trial period, she will be guaranteed a permanent position, she does not quite understand what the deputy manager means by going out to get new accounts for the bank. Two weeks later, Chioma and Yinka visit the home of an *alhaji* in Ikoyi. He (the alhaji) looks at Chioma and says, "This one is too fine" and asks Yinka to come and sit on his lap, asking if she does not think he is "strong enough to carry her", to which Yinka agrees and smiles. Chioma learns that this, assenting to the sexualisation of her female body by males such as the *alhaji*, is what the deputy manager meant by bringing in accounts to the bank. When Ujunwa's story ended with Chioma walking away from the alhaji's suggestive remarks which were meant to solicit her consent to sleeping with him for the procurement of a contract, Edward thought the ending "to be implausible" because Chioma was "a woman with no other choices" (Adichie, 2009, p. 114). The whole story was to Edward, "implausible, agenda writing, it isn't a real story of real people" (Adichie, 2009, p. 114), until Edward learnt from Ujunwa that Chioma was actually

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Ujunwa, who had walked out of the alhaji's house and went home. Linked to Edward's remark is the idea that women can only succeed by sleeping their way to the top. In espousing a confrontational stance against this view, Adichie's female protagonists begin by demonstrating "a stoic refusal to contribute to cultural commodification" (Satkunananthan, 2011, p. 41). This is where "they fight against cultural commodification by refusing to contribute to the stereotypical expectations about their country" and themselves (Satkunananthan, 2011, p. 41-2). In the short story, "Jumping Monkey Hill" (Adichie, 2009, p. 95), such an oppositional stance against stereotypical expectations about Africa (held by Edward Campbell) is maintained by Ujunwa Ogundu. In this short story, Adichie (through Ujunwa) not only subverts Europe's desire (as personified by Edward Campbell) to lord over African literary productions, but also confronts Edward's suggestive remarks to the Senegalese woman about how "he had dreamed of her naked navel" (Adichie, 2009, p. 111). Upon hearing this, Ujunwa asked the Senegalese woman what she said after Edward told her this, but the Senegalese woman had said nothing. Ujunwa interrogates this: "But why do we say nothing? Why do we always say nothing?" (Adichie, 2009, p. 112). And yet in such a space there are still men such as the Black South African, who dismiss Edward as "just an old man who meant no harm" (Adichie, 2009, p. 112). To the Tanzanian, there was no need to antagonise Edward "because Edward was connected and could find them a London agent; no need to close doors of opportunity". Both the South African and Tanzanian tacitly regard Edward's ogling at women as something that should be seen by the women writers as "[their] due" (Adichie, 2009, p. 111), and therefore should not confront it for the sake of 'the greater good'.

When Ujunwa read her story, which was about "the realistic portrayal of what women were going through in Nigeria", Edward retorted: "It's never quite like that in real life, is it? Women are never victims in that sort of crude way and certainly not in Nigeria" (Adichie, 2009, p.113). Edward's basis for this assertion is that, "Nigeria has women in high positions. The most powerful cabinet minister today is a woman" (Adichie, 2009, p. 113-14). At first, Ujunwa "tried not to notice that Edward often stared at her body, that his eyes were never on her face but always lower" (Adichie, 2009, p.106). Implicit in Edward's gawking at Ujunwa is not only his sexualisation of Ujunwa's body, but also a projection of a sense of entitlement to her body. This is evidenced when Edward was looking for a seat, and Ujunwa offered him her seat saying, "I don't mind sitting in the sun…already getting up" and asking, "Would you like me to stand up for you, Edward?" to which Edward responded, "I'd rather like you to lie down for me" (Adichie, 2009, p. 106). Edward's gawking at Ujunwa's body made her feel "a self-loathing". Augmenting Ujunwa's enragement was also the realisation that Edward "would never look at a white woman like that because what he felt for Ujunwa was a fancy without respect" (Adichie, 2009, p. 109). Here, Adichie intends to show how patriarchal dominance stretches even into women's creative and artistic expressions. Adichie's literary vision thus encapsulates the conviction that when women are actively involved in the deconstruction of stereotypical expectations about their country, they will eventually succeed in deconstructing stereotypical expectations ascribed to their gender in a patriarchal society. Thus, Adichie captures the raft ways the manifestations of the patriarchal ego's sense of entitlement to the female body. This resonates with the narrator of the short story, "The Thing Around Your Neck" (Adichie, 2009, p. 115),

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who speaks about how life and living in America was like home at first because your uncle's wife

> *called you nwanne, sister, and his two school-age children called you Aunty. They spoke Igbo and ate garri for lunch and it was like home [...] until your uncle came into the cramped basement where you slept with old boxes and cartons and pulled you forcefully to him, squeezing your buttocks, moaning; he wasn't really your uncle; he was actually a brother of your father's sister's husband, not related by blood. After you pushed away, he sat on your bed –it was his house, after all –and smiled and said you were no longer a child at twenty-two. If you let him, he would do many things for you. Smart women did it all the time. How do you think those women back home in Lagos with well-paying jobs made it? Even women in New York City? (Adichie, 2009, p. 117 original italics).*

Adichie also indicates, however, that even in instances like the one detailed above, there are women who refused to give in; they "left still" (Adichie, 2009, p. 117). In the short story, "The American Embassy" (Adichie, 2009, p. 128), one of the men who broke into "Ugonna's mother's" house and killed her son, slapped her "behind" and laughed, "saying how soft her body was, waving his gun" (Adichie, 2009, p. 132). With this, Adichie still shows how some men feel entitled to a woman's body, and therefore can do whatever they want to it. Adichie's notion of feminism thus assumes a unique and a "significant paradigmatic visage," in that she consistently "dramatises the imperative of valuing all human beings irrespective of age, race, class and *gender*, if society must survive" in her creative oeuvre (Etim, 2019, p. 5,7 emphasis added). Adichie is aware "of the necessity of complementarity between the sexes if the war against unprogressive forces in society must be won" (Etim, 2017:7). And so, in trying to define the ideological premise of Adichie's writing, we recognise Adichie's recurrent motif of women often living "in the face of stark, unyielding masculinity" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 2). Among such women is the unnamed narrator of the short story, "Cell One", who lived in fear of the notorious thief, "Osita", about whom she discloses: "I used to look across the hedge and see him and close my eyes and imagine that he was walking toward me, coming to claim me as his" (Adichie, 2009, p. 6). Attendant to the masculine ego, Adichie implies, is a sense of ownership of the female. Hence, Adichie's artistic vision is aimed at "transforming women's identities from a position of controlled submissiveness to that of empowerment" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 4). To attain this, Adichie purports that, "concerted efforts must be made to remove all barriers and structures which tend to disempower women" (Etim, 2019, p. 7). Thus, Adichie's fiction sets out to disencumber (African) traditional cultures of their internal repressive practices and ideologies, which have over the generations structured themselves along the points of gender power. Adichie's fiction describes the challenges of Igbo people from the viewpoint of women who [are] rescued from their lower positions" (Üyesi, 2020, p. 380). Although other works by Adichie, i.e., *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), deal "with Nigeria's civil war and military coup" (Üyesi, 2020, p. 380), one still realises that "the theme of war expands into the broader theme of [a] society in which we see people struggling over problems such as gender, wealth, sex, occupation and family" (Üyesi, 2020, p. 388). Thus, apart from revealing "the continuing effects of colonisation even after independence," Adichie also "brings women into the forefront through characters [such] as Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, reflecting women's solidity (sic) during war" (Üyesi, 2020, p. 389). Connected to the latter view may also be Adichie's realisation

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that, "the incorporation of a full section on the roles of Biafra women during the war, […] as most literature on the topic is dominated by the experiences of male soldiers who fought in the war," ignores "the important roles played by women" (Bello, 2017, p. 324-25). "During the war", Üyesi further avers, "these women sought better conditions for themselves and their communities" (2020, p. 389). Hence, the women in this short story, "A Private Experience", are projected as capable of staging a protest against the military and General Abacha, calling for democracy. Chika's sister, Nnedi, is said to be one of the organisers talking to the students about the importance of "having our voices heard" (Adichie, 2009, p. 45). In the short story, "The American Embassy", the female protagonist had stories she could tell "of her own journalism, starting from university in Zaria, when she organised a rally to protest General Buhari's government's decision to cut student subsidies" (Adichie, 2009, p. 136). Adichie's literary vision thus entails valourising girls and women. This is also notable in the short story, "The Headstrong Woman", where Nwamgba looked for the valiant spirit of Obierika in her son, Anikwenwa, but did not see it. When Mgbeke gave birth to a girl, "Nwamgba held her, [when] the baby's bright eyes delightfully focused on her, she knew that it was the spirit of Obierika that had returned; odd, to have come in a girl" (Adichie, 2009, p. 214). With this, Adichie not only valorises women and girls, but also ascribes equal value to men and women. All in all, Adichie, a feminist voice, challenges the supremacy of maleness as a means of demonstrating the need for the reconfiguration of gender discourses. With this, she impresses upon women and girls, in particular, the need to pride themselves in the distinctiveness of their gender while also prompting them to interrogate and confront patriarchal ideologies and practices. This confrontational dynamic that inflects Adichie's work also serves a decolonising aim –a sort of implicit and explicit feminist critique of debilitating traditional and modern mores which propagate female repression and marginalisation.

Conclusion

Adichie adeptly confronts patriarchal ideologies and practices that perpetuate the marginalisation of femaleness for the purposes of deifying maleness. Adichie's fiction probes into the ways in which "sensibility is engineered to" either "remain anesthetized to the suffering of the vulnerable" or to prod contemporary discourse into challenging the "various instantiations of patriarchal repression" (Mami, 2017, p. 205). Pertinent for this paper to highlight was that, linked to the "complex machinations" (ibid) of the patriarchal system is the deification of maleness. This deification of maleness and its attendant spiral of male dictatorship in Adichie's fiction, reinforced the notion that a girl or a woman is perceived as of a lesser value when compared to a boy or man.

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