

**THE NIGERIAN WOMAN'S LIMITATIONS:
A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF CHIMAMANDA
NGOZI ADICHIE'S FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY**

Dokpesi Timothy ADIDI

Department of Philosophy

Veritas University, Abuja

adidit@veritas.edu.ngtimshow03@gmail.com

&

Chika John UCHE

Department of Philosophy,

Veritas University, Abuja

luangelo91@gmail.com

Abstract

Women to a large extent, are dominated by men in almost every ramification in society. This is more worrisome in the African society where women face a lot of limitation on the basis of their gender; this stems from socio-cultural and political influences in a male dominated society. The consequence of this is the exclusion of women from various aspects of human life, which inhibiting the realization of the potentials of women to be what they want to be. This research paper posits that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's feminist philosophy has a lot of nutritional philosophical value to contribute to the integral formation and development of women in the African society. Although the research paper is a philosophical appraisal, it does not completely affirm her position; it further evaluates her thought through the lens of philosophy. The research paper implores a qualitative and expository research method to explore feminist philosophy; it also bears in mind to limit its scope to the African society with particular reference to Nigeria. The paper agrees with Chimamanda on the issues and problems as they affect women; but the research work deviates from her concept of equality and equity of roles. Hence, the paper does not throw the baby out with the bath water.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Feminism, Philosophy, Gender, Sex

Introduction

Women in Nigeria, to a large extent, are regarded as “second-class” human beings who are meant to be seen but not heard, or are simply a pair of eyes behind the veil; they face a lot of other limitations on the basis of their gender. These limitations are interconnected and can be seen in the economic, cultural, religious, political, and

social spheres in Nigeria. Despite the depth of this gender problem, some Nigerians still dismiss its existence; especially women themselves. In a bid to liberate women from male oppression and dominance and to better their lot in the society, women (and men) have tended to organize themselves into socio-political groups. These groups with their ideologies have metamorphosed into feminist movements. The feminist movement is specifically aimed at creating a level playing ground for both genders; and, in Nigeria, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of those on the forefronts of the positive fight to emancipate women. By means of primary research, this paper makes clear the concept of feminism, expounds on the limitations of Nigerian women, explicates on the cause of the noticeable relegation of women to the background in the socio-political, cultural and religious sphere in Nigeria, and then projects the strength of Chimamanda's feminist philosophy as a panacea to the limitations of women in Nigeria. The paper shall implore a qualitative method of research; thereby, presenting an expository and analytical framework for evaluating the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In so doing, this work shall extend to help women occupy their space in the socio-economic and political realm and help to spread their tentacles in a society where the rights of women have been depersonalized and their human dignity ignored. This paper shall add to the already existing literatures that have contributed to the dignity and rights of women in the past.

Conceptual Clarification Gender

The distinction between sex and gender is attributed to the anthropologist Margaret Mead in her book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* published in 1935.¹ Sex is the biological category; whereas, gender is the culturally shaped expression of sexual difference; the masculine way in which men should behave and the feminine way in which women should behave. Simone De Beauvoir emphasized that, in this system, a 'woman is the other'; and, the kind of person whose characteristics are described by contrast with the male norm.² Explicitly, unlike sex, gender is not given at birth; it is not a biological or natural constant.³ It refers to the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being women and men. The social definitions of what it means to be a woman or a man vary among cultures and change over time. Gender is a socio-cultural expression of particular simplest way to do it is to characteristics and roles that are

¹Simon Blackburn, "Gender," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 487.

²Beauvoir D. S *The Second Sex* (London: Alfred A. Knof, 1971) P. 32

³M. M. Uzomah, *Fundamental Issues in Gender Studies and Human Sexuality: The Philosophy of Gender Parity*, (Ekpoma: E-mesh Printing Press, 2017), 60.

associated with certain groups of people with reference to their sex and sexuality.⁴ It is a central aim of much feminist thought to uncover concealed asymmetries of power in differences of gender, and to work for a society in which the polarization of gender is abolished. Hence, this paper shall adopt 'sex' as different from 'gender' when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond with established ideas of male and female.

Patriarchy

The word 'Patriarchy' and its usage literally mean *the rule of the father*; it originated from the Greek word, *patriarkhes*, which means *father of a race* or *chief of a race*.⁵ In Gender Studies, the term refers to a social system wherein men dominate over women. Patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, cultural, political, legal, religious and economic spheres of life. Patriarchy is at the centre of the feminist discourse.⁶ The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines patriarchy as the government of a family, church, or society by the fathers.⁷ The term 'Patriarch' was originally applied to the Fathers of the tribes of Israel, and then became an honorific designation of the Bishops of the Catholic Church; and, later the official designation of the Heads of the Eastern Churches. In more recent times, it refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men. Feminists used the concept of Patriarchy in early 20th Century to expound the social arrangement of male dominance over women. The underlying ideology of a patriarchal society is all about the men possessing superior qualities or typical attitudes and traits like virility, strong will power, authority, dominance, bullying, shrewdness, maintaining confidentiality, social associations and network, action oriented, having a free will, a sense of superiority over others – outlook, race, gender – brute force, belligerence, carrier of family legacy and so on.⁸

Feminism

The word “feminism” did not gain currency until the 1890s, but individuals had already been expressing feminist views long before then.⁹ Etymologically, the concept feminism is derived from the Latin word, '*femina*' which means woman.

⁴“Gender Concepts and Definitions,” John Hopkins University Affiliate, accessed February 18, 2022, <https://gender.jhpiego.org/analysisistoolkit/gender-concepts-and-definitions/>

⁵Ibid., 114.

⁶*Fundamental Issues in Gender Studies and Human Sexuality: The Philosophy of Gender Parity*, 112.

⁷Simon Blackburn, “Patriarchy,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 735.

⁸Ibid., 116.

⁹Mc Cann Hannah, ed., *The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*, (New York: DK Publishing, 2019), 15

From this root meaning, feminism is women-oriented and concentrates on issues that concern women.¹⁰ According to Madhu Kumari, “defining feminism can be challenging, but a broad understanding of it includes the acting, speaking, writing and advocating on behalf of women's issue and rights, and identifying injustice to females in the social status quo.”¹¹ It is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although, largely originating in the west, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to act on behalf of women's rights and interests.¹² Quite simply, feminism is about both sexes having equal rights and opportunities. It is about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realise their full potentials and rights. The hating of men is actually called *misandry*. Feminists don't want women to rule over men (many people think badly of feminism for this reason); they want men and women to be on the same level. As with any movement, there are fanatics who call themselves feminists and portray it as a man-hating ideology; but, the whole movement cannot be defined by only a small fraction of its members.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Feminist Philosophy Cultural Dogmatism

In her *Eleventh Manifestoe*, Chimamanda Adichie suggests that we have to question some of our cultural beliefs; especially, those that are responsible for sustaining the hold of patriarchy in our society today. For Chimamanda Adichie, we often use biology to explain the privileges that men have, and, the most common reason being men's physical superiority.¹³ She strongly holds that biology should not be a justification for any social norm. This follows her sublime TED talk *The Danger of a Single Story Today*. According to her, there is a cultural belief that the man is greater than the woman because of the single story of a woman being physically weaker than a man; and, as she said, it is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power.¹⁴ It is the single story of biological superiority of the man that gives patriarchy power. She went further to argue that “power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person”¹⁵. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the

¹⁰ *Fundamental Issues in Gender Studies and Human Sexuality: The Philosophy of Gender Parity*, 156.

¹¹ *Fundamental Issues in Gender Studies and Human Sexuality: The Philosophy of Gender Parity*, 156.

¹² Laura Brunell, “Feminism,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Aug 27, 2021, accessed February 18, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/additional-info#contributors>

¹³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017), 22.

¹⁴ “The Danger of a Single Story,” facing history and ourselves, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-1/danger-single-story>

¹⁵ Ibid.

tell their story and to start with, “secondly”¹⁶. In almost every instance, most indigenous cultures in Nigeria begin the story of the woman with “secondly”. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. Generally, women are physically inferior, but they are largely also more compassionate than men, capable of attaining the same intellectual heights as men, and are made up of a lot more. Instead of these other perspectives that encapsulate the whole truth of the woman, the single story of the biological superiority of the man is told by modern culture, over and over again. Adichie therefore implies that if certain cultures lose their dogmatism, a child won't be said to first belong to the father.¹⁷

Gender Roles

Chimamanda Adichie has laid heavy emphasis on the boxes in which society places both genders in the name of gender roles. In her book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, she rants that gender as it functions today is a grave injustice.¹⁸ Also, in her third feminist manifesto, she states with a similar tone of rage, “Teach her that the idea of 'gender roles' is absolute nonsense”¹⁹. In her opinion, gender is problematic because it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizes how we are:

Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn't have the weight of gender expectation. Boys and girls are undeniably different biologically, but socialization exaggerates the differences, and then starts a self-fulfilling process. Take cooking for example. Today, women in general are more likely to do housework than men – cooking and cleaning. But why is that? Is it because women are born with a cooking gene or because over the years they have been socialized to see cooking as their role? I was going to say that perhaps women are born with a cooking gene until I remembered that the majority of famous cooks in the world – who are given the fancy title of 'chef' – are men²⁰.

Society has allotted specific roles to both genders; and, the first problem with this is the generalization involved in it. Using the example of cooking; according to her, women are not born with cooking genes; but, it is a skill that is learnt. It is a basic survival skill which is beneficial to anyone who acquires it²¹. However, people are different; a certain woman may be able to learn driving more easily than cooking; and, cooking may be a chore to her; but, because of the existence of gender roles

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷*Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 22.

¹⁸Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017), 10.

¹⁹*Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 10.

²⁰*We Should All Be Feminists*, 13.

²¹Ibid, 13

she'll be confined to this chore for the rest of her life in her husband's house. Hence, without second thoughts, this is a clear sign of injustice²². The second problem with gender roles is at the flip side of a coin; which is the problem of exclusion. For example, a lady will be slow to choose to venture into a cab service because men are predominantly the ones in that box; hence, excluding women like her who have the capability. This is the same story with whatever gender roles or gender sensitive jobs exist. It is a negative thing for both genders.

More so, for Chimamanda Adichie, “Because you are a girl,” should never be a reason for doing something. She recalls instances of her being told to bend down properly while sweeping, like a girl. Which meant that sweeping was about being female²³. She opines that society begins to instill some of these gender roles in us very early in life, with the “blue for boys and pink for girls” theory. Also, in allotting specific kinds of toys for boys to play with, different from the toys of the girl child; as such, children grow up with the idea of gender roles which confines them to specific fields as they grow older. Gender roles are so deeply conditioned in us that we will often follow them even when they challenge our true desires, our needs, and our happiness.

On African Marriages

Within most indigenous cultures in Nigeria, marriage is an already set goal for the woman to attain. It is seen as a culmination of her success, in that, despite the height attained in your professional field, if you are yet to add the suffix 'Mrs.' to your name, you may not be fully regarded. Adichie stresses on the expulsion of such ideologies in her seventh manifesto:

Never speak of marriage as an achievement. Find ways to make clear to her that marriage is not an achievement, nor is it what she should aspire to. A marriage can be happy or unhappy, but it is not an achievement. We condition girls to aspire to marriage but we do not condition boys to aspire to marriage, and so there is already a terrible imbalance at the start. The girls will grow up to be women preoccupied with marriage. The boys will grow up to be men who are not preoccupied with marriage. The women marry those men. The relationship is automatically uneven because the institution matters more to one than the other. Is it any wonder that, in so many marriages, women sacrifice more, at a loss to themselves, because they have to constantly maintain an uneven exchange? One consequence of this imbalance is the very shabby and very familiar phenomenon of two women publicly fighting over a man, while the man remains silent²⁴.

²²Ibid, 13

²³*Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 10.

²⁴*Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 16.

Majorly in Nigeria, from as early as five (5) years old, the girl child training will be directed to marriage; the emphasis will be made on her being nice, calm and likable, learning to cook, sweep and even care for the younger ones; all the boy child knows at this point will be the road to the football pitch. In the Eastern part of Nigeria where huge bride prices are paid, some parents see the girl child as a source of future income and not really a full part of the family; since she will end up bearing the name of another man. It is even more ironical that despite the fact that it is the woman who has been trained earlier on for the institution of marriage, it is the man who becomes the automatic 'head of the family'. Motherhood is a glorious gift, says Adichie, but women should not be defined solely by motherhood. They are to be full, whole and aspire to other worthy ideals and goals in life²⁵.

On the Girl-Child Education

It is worrisome that even though there are slightly more women than men in the world most of the positions of power and prestige are occupied by men; so, literally, men rule the world. In her thought, this made sense – a thousand years ago; because, human beings lived in a world where physical strength was the most important attribute for survival; the physically stronger person was more likely to lead; and, men in general have always been physically stronger. Today, we live in a vastly different world and the person more qualified to lead is not the physically stronger person. It is the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, more creative; and more innovative. There are no hormones for these attributes; a man is as likely as a woman to be intelligent, innovative, and creative²⁶. This is the reason behind the fifth suggestion in her feminist manifestos. We teach girls to shrink themselves; and to make themselves smaller²⁷. We say to girls, you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Adichie advised her friend to encourage Chizalum to read books; because, books will help her understand and question the world, help her express herself, and help her in whatever she wants to become – a chef, a scientist, a president, or a singer²⁸. Hence, the woman ought to be educated so as to be well equipped to pursue all her ambitions.

Masculinity

In as much as feminism is centered primarily on women in the society, it does not fail to acknowledge some problems faced by men as well. In an interview with Trevor Noah – the host of the Morning Show – Adichie said, “you can change women all you want, if you don't change men, nothing changes²⁹”.

²⁵ *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ *We Should All Be Feminists*, 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 14.

For Adichie, to create a fairer world, a world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves, we must raise our daughters differently and we must also raise our sons differently³⁰. She stresses on what society defines as masculinity:

We do a great disservice to boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way. Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage. We teach boys to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability. We teach them to mask their true selves, because they have to be, in Nigerian-speak, a hard man. ... But by far the worst thing we do to males – by making them feel they have to be hard – is that we leave them with very fragile egos. The harder a man feels compelled to be, the weaker his ego is. And then we do a much greater disservice to girls, because we raise them to cater to the fragile egos of males³¹.

In the society today, masculinity is synonymous with words like strength, ruggedness and toughness. As a result of this, the males are required to prove this 'masculinity' in many other ways. For instance, two teenagers go out to eat, both of them with meagre pocket money. Yet the boy is expected to pay the bills, to prove his masculinity. They both approach the door of the eatery on their way out, and the boy is expected to go ahead, open the door and let the girl pass, all still to prove his masculinity and his *gentlemanness*. In as much as it may seem to be a privilege or as it is called today in Nigeria, 'baby-girl treatment', such method of raising boys is rooted in patriarchy and aids in keeping women as the lesser and weaker sex. The disadvantage of this is that whenever a woman happens to step up, the man feels 'less a man'. This scenario can be seen in numerous marriages in which the woman is the bread winner; and, some husbands who are products of being trained to prove their masculinity go to the extent of asking their wife to step down or resign from her job. Society will advise her to shrink herself and be smaller to avoid emasculating him. Some single ladies do as much as selling of their houses and cars so as not to drive away potential suitors; male suitors who are intimidated by successful women.

The Ideal Feminism

Many people in this part of the world are on the fence with regards to feminism; they are neither hot nor cold; some, unsure and worried about being denied heaven if they call themselves feminists. Some say, "I believe in human rights, but not feminism. It is too extreme." In her fourth suggestion, Adichie opposes the idea of *Feminism Lite*. Feminism Lite is the idea of conditional female equality; or the incomplete acknowledgement of the natural right of women to equal opportunity with men.

³⁰ *We Should All Be Feminists*, 11.

³¹ *We Should All Be Feminists*, 11.

Adichie suggests strongly that this idea should be rejected because it is a hollow, appeasing and bankrupt idea³². Being an ideal feminist is like being pregnant. You either are or you are not; you either believe in the full equality of men and women or you do not. In her words:

Feminism Lite uses analogies like 'he is the head and you are the neck'. Or 'he is driving but you are in the front seat'. More troubling is the idea in Feminism Lite that men are naturally superior but should be expected to 'treat women well'. No. No. No. There must be more than male benevolence as the basis for a woman's well-being³³.

More so, some others in the feminism lite camp opine that man and women were not created to be equal. They give precedence to men and say that women are meant to compliment men in areas where they are lacking; hence, men become the main, and women become the other. In popular parlance, men and women are equal, but there cannot be two sailors in a marriage, one person has to stir the ship, and then, that person has to be the man; but on what basis? Just because of the singular reason of being a man? For Adichie, such method of reasoning lacks depth. One cannot claim to have an equal marriage when the woman has to take permission from her husband to do certain things or to act in a certain way. You hear comments like, 'Leave the woman alone to do what she wants as long as her husband allows'³⁴. Yet, it is not expected of the husband to take permission from his wife in this same manner, if he does, he is called weak, or a 'woman-wrapper' as most Nigerians call it.

The Nigerian Woman and Her Limitations

Feminism is one of the most controversial ideologies in Nigeria today. There are many stereotypes (especially in Nigeria) surrounding the word *feminism*. According to Adichie's definition, a feminist is a man or a woman who says, 'Yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better'³⁵.

It is nearly impossible to deny the existence of a gender problem in our country today, and it will be indeed dishonest not to agree that the female gender is at the receiving end of this problem. On the 14th January, 2011 it was announced how Mrs. Sarah Jubril a Presidential aspirant for the People's Democratic Party (PDP) got a total of one vote in the primary election. A Political Party consisting of hundreds of women; also, on the 14th October, 2016, the democratically elected President of Nigeria, gave the following response in a BBC interview, "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room".

³² *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 12.

³³ *Dear Ijeawele or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12

This can be regarded as one good instance where President Muhammadu Buhari as the first citizen of Nigeria properly represented Nigerians. Of course, not all Nigerians, but most Nigerian men and women would subscribe to the President's assertion. The limitations of the Nigerian woman will be examined in three basic dimensions: socio-political, cultural and economic limitations.

Socio-Political Limitations

Women constitute about half of the population of the Nigerian State and are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, managers, community developers/organizers etc. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres³⁶. Yet their participation in formal and informal structures and processes where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made remains insignificant. The late Kenyan Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai's put it simply and well when she said, "The higher you go, the fewer women there are"³⁷. The Nigerian society is highly patriarchal in nature and the socio-political sphere is not left out. Men are being trained for leadership activities while women are confined to domestic activities; roles ascribed to them by culture, affecting them later in life, thereby making a good number of them to lose self-confidence/worth and have low self-esteem in their career and adult lives; politics inclusive³⁸.

Religious/Cultural Limitations

Patriarchy first finds its home in culture before it extends further into other areas of life. In most cases, the culture of a people is intertwined with their religion. Generally, religion is used as an instrument in defence of a class society and Patriarchy³⁹. Islam and Christianity, which are the religions practiced by most Nigerians have contributed a great deal to the limitations of the Nigerian woman. Sharia as a religious law gives a central place to the paternalistic interpretation of a woman's appropriate roles and socio-political arrangement of the society⁴⁰.

In Islam, the inheritance of a daughter is meant to be half of that of her brother upon marriage, he is expected to present his wife with a marriage gift, *mahr*, (this could be an asset) which is her own property that cannot be taken away from her. In addition, the Muslim husband has the responsibility of sustaining his wife and children. The Muslim wife, on the other hand, has no responsibility of such; whatever asset or financial wealth she has belongs to her. Under Islamic law she is not obliged to co-

³⁶ Godiya Allanana Makama, "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward," European Scientific Journal 9, No.17 (2013): 116.

³⁷ *We Should All Be Feminists*, 9.

³⁸ "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward," 116.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

provide for her family⁴¹. This may seem to be a privilege, but no, it is a form of social control that subtly ensures that they remain below the men. Her place is primarily within the rooms of the house as the Nigerian President said (probably influenced by his religious belief). She is hardly allowed to come outside the house, when she does, she is required to dress in such a manner that she is almost invisible because she is the property of her husband. When the man wakes on the wrong side of his bed, he simply 'purchases' another wife, or teenage-wife as the case may be.

On the other side of the divide – Christianity – the story is not entirely different, and in fact, Millet posited that God is on the side of patriarchy, citing the creation story⁴². St. Paul a notable figure in the New Testament exhorted in First Corinthians 14:34 that a woman should be silent in the church and should not be permitted to speak, but should be subordinate. He teaches a very similar doctrine in First Timothy 2:12, and asks wives to be submissive to their husbands. As a result, some adherents of Christianity key keenly to these teachings and even in situations detrimental to their wellbeing, they remain submissive to their husbands, even to the point of death.

Nevertheless, coming down to indigenous cultures, in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria, a baby boy is more appreciated than a baby girl. This is because, women are unable to carry on the name of the family since they will be eventually given out in marriage. A woman is not even allowed to inherit property from her father or her husband because she is seen as an inheritable property herself⁴³. Hence, since the girl will be given out for the purpose of marriage, her formal education can be easily compromised for her to focus and master how to prepare different kinds of dishes.

Consequently, among the challenges of women arising from culture are some gruesome acts such as breast ironing and female genital mutilation. Breast ironing, though still practiced, has remained unknown to many. Breast Ironing, also known as breast flattening, is a cultural practice of flattening or crushing the breast of an adolescent girl to disguise the signs of development. According to the perpetrators of this practice, the goal of this destructive female breast mutilation is to delay the girl's development thus making them unattractive and less desirable to the opposite sex. This is aimed at preventing them from being sexually active, thus protecting her from rape, teenage pregnancy and other forms of sexual activity⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Oluwakemi D. Udoh, Sheriff F. Folarin & Victor A. Isumonah, "The influence of religion and culture on women's rights to property in Nigeria," *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, April 16, 2020, accessed May 3 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311983.2020.1750244>

⁴² Haralambos and Holborn, *Sociology Themes and Perspectives*, 7th ed., (United Kingdom: HarperCollins Publishing company, 2008), 10.

⁴³ Caroline Okumdi Muoghalu, and Chiedu Akporaro Abrifor, "Traditional Society in South-Eastern Nigeria: Implications for Women's Health," *The Bangladesh Development Studies* 43, No. 1, (2020): 127–46.

⁴⁴ Victoria Oseyande Ikearu-Udoh, "Breast Ironing: An Under-reported Violence Against the Girl Child," *ICIR*, August 31, 2016, accessed May 3, 2022, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/breast-ironing-an-under-reported-violence-against-the-girl-child-2/>

Economic Limitations

By the virtue of the population of Nigeria the potential female labour force is fifty percent (50%); but, the actual value is thirty-one percent (31%). Hence, the proportion of women in the formal sector is very minimal; and, this is noticeable in the industries and the civil services. Statistics indicate that in the Federal Civil Service – which is the highest employer in the country – women are mostly found in the junior categories⁴⁵. Women are mainly involved in petty trading, selling wares in the market and street hawking in urban areas. According to statistics seventy-eight (78%) of women are mostly engaged in the informal sector⁴⁶ and despite this, their contribution is not commensurate monetarily. The women's unpaid labour is twice that of men and its economic value is estimated to thirty (30%) of the Nation's Gross National Product. Women's self-advancement has been curtailed by the burden of reproduction, particularly in Nigeria with a very high birth rate as well as the cultural roles associated to women - role of child bearing, child raising and homemaking. Nigerian women, like their counterparts around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limits their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices. In some establishments, women are not allowed to get married or pregnant because it is thought that it will reduce their productivity and of course profit. Some women particularly the young ones are only employed as long as they are ready to use their bodies to woo customers for their business organizations. This is what is called “corporate prostitution”⁴⁷.

Chimamanda Ngozi's Feminist Philosophy: An Appraisal

A common and true precept in philosophy is that appearance is not reality; a thing may appear a certain way at first glance but, turn out to be something else upon in-depth assessment. As such, people with certain traits are labelled as inauthentic, false, and pretentious. Many Nigerians oppose Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself; rather than her feminist philosophy. Most times her critiques fall into the fallacy of Argumentum ad Hominem; and, as a result, they barely care to study and understand what her feminist philosophy is all about, but follow the bandwagon and rely on the misconceptions and different stereotypes about her such as: *She is looking for popularity, she does not know the African culture well enough, she is heavily influenced by the time she spent studying abroad, she is an extremist, no wonder she is not married*; it is quite a lengthy list. But, what more popularity would she be seeking when her works have been translated into over fifty languages and many

⁴⁵ Ajir I., *Women Empowerment and Work: The Challenges of the 21st Century*, (Abuja: ABORTS press, 2002), 47.

⁴⁶ “Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward,” 121.

⁴⁷ Salaam T., *A Brief Analysis on The Situation of Women in Nigeria Today*, (Abuja: DSM, 2003), 68.

international awards have accompanied them? How can she not know the African culture well enough when she holds a Master of Arts degree in African History from Yale University? In her TED talk *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie narrates one of the earliest motivations of her passion for feminism, and it will be vital to reemphasize it to prove the impression that her feminist thoughts are influenced by European culture, wrong:

When I was in primary school in Nsukka, a university town in south-eastern Nigeria, my teacher said at the beginning of term that she would give the class a test and whoever got the highest score would be the class monitor. Class monitor was a big deal. ... I very much wanted to be class monitor. And I got the highest score on the test. Then, to my surprise, my teacher said the monitor had to be a boy. She had forgotten to make that clear earlier; she assumed it was obvious. A boy had the second-highest score on the test. And he would be monitor⁴⁸.

Hence, it is safe to say that her feminist thoughts are indeed responses to an actual African problem, a valid problem of gender disparity in Nigeria. Some of the critics of Adichie's feminist philosophy claim that women today are in a comfortable position in society, with freedom to education, freedom to participate in politics, and more women like Adichie herself have a voice in the society. These claims are true, but there are two other truths surrounding such claims, and to avoid the danger of a single story, it will be right to tell the whole story. First of all, yes, a good number of women have education today, but was that the case five centuries ago? No! Formal education was strictly reserved for men and women held their place in the kitchen with their lips sealed and their minds dormant. Hence, the claim of the critics of feminism that women have education today is recognition of the actualization of the course that feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone De Beauvoir, etc fought for. Therefore, some accolades and appreciation ought to go together with the claims those critics make. Moreover, in as much as many women are educated today, the statistics of educated and influential women compared to that of educated and influential men shows that there is more work to be done, especially considering the fact that there are more women in Nigeria than men. There is a wide gap between the figures, one that screams of injustice. Also, there are still many cultures in Nigeria that place little value on the education and empowerment of women.

In the ending notes of her book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie made a noteworthy assertion about culture: "Culture does not make people. People make culture"⁴⁹. Culture is simply defined as the way of life of a group of people. As

⁴⁸ *We Should All Be Feminists*, 7.

⁴⁹ *We Should All Be Feminists*, 16.

rational beings that we are, with the base instinct of survival, it will be expected that what a people choose and revere as their culture should be things that are for the well-being of every member of such group. Most cultures in Nigeria today as Adichie rightly holds, are largely one sided; favoring the male gender. The culture of patriarchy would be appropriate in a society that operates on the principle of survival of the fittest. In that case, since men generally are physically stronger, it will make more sense to tell the women to spend hours, making sure that their husbands are strong enough to conquer by preparing the best dishes and paying more attention to their sons than daughters. That will be a good expression of Plato's idea of Justice, each having a role to play and doing their own jobs. The world has changed and such ideologies have no place anymore. Our world as it is today owes its progress to great minds and experts in different fields. That being the case, why does the culture of patriarchy still exist? Is the female gender incapable of reasoning as effectively as the male gender?

Decades of research has shown unequivocally that men and women are equal in general intelligence (IQ)⁵⁰. Accordingly, Adichie's feminist philosophy is an adept tool for remaking our culture in Nigeria. The cultures that have patriarchal elements have simply gone out of date and should be replaced.

Furthermore, there are concerns which arise in the minds of critics: Do you want women to stop getting married?" "Should the woman become the head of the house instead of the man?" "Should women begin to pay groom prices instead?" etc. Adichie makes it clear in her works that marriage is not a bad thing. It can be a good thing, a source of joy, love and mutual support. But, it should not be something that girls are made to aspire to; while boys are free to aspire to make life multiplanetary. Even if she dares desire to become the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, should she keep marriage in mind as the most important. No! That should not be the case. What makes Mr. A. become the head of the house automatically after marriage? Good leadership qualities make a person a competent head. Does it mean that all husbands have better leadership qualities than their wives? This is one question that Adichie's feminist philosophy poses.

More so, women bear children, and generally have an emotional attachment to them like no one else will. Hence, it is natural for them to play a motherly role towards their children. However, it is also a fact that mothers are capable of acting in other capacities just as fathers do in Nigeria today. So, confining women to just the role of home caretakers and mothers is unjustifiable. Adichie's feminist philosophy

⁵⁰ Travis Bradberry, "Why Women Are Smarter Than Men," Forbes, June 21, 2016, accessed May 5 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/travisbradberry/2016/06/21/why-women-are-smarter-than-men/?sh=4fe5e2c517e6>

acknowledges that the job of taking care of the home and bringing up children is a great and dignified task. In spite of this, as already established, women have the same intellectual capacity as men, and we will be hindering the progress of our country if we do not carry women along. Adichie does not advocate for a matriarchal society but for women to have freedom of choice, equal opportunity and independence.

Conclusion

The Aba Women's Riot in 1929 and the Abeokuta Market Women protest by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti shows that the idea of feminism is not alien to Nigeria. Despite all criticisms, the feminist movement in Nigeria has made visible and tremendous achievements. The society is sensitized on the evils of harmful traditional practices and on the need to end the domination of Nigerian women. People are getting more aware of the dangers of Female Genital Mutilation, breast ironing, polygamy and STDs, the concept of child-bride and its resultant effect of VVF, of women and children trafficking for prostitution in foreign countries, sexual abuse and exploitation both within and outside marriage, oppressive traditional rites that widows are forced to go through after the demise of their husbands, amongst others. Over the years, remarkable growth has been recorded which is evident by the presence of women in all spheres of life in Nigeria. Feminism has come a long way; nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. Patriarchy has lived among us for so long now; not as a landlord, but as a tenant. Nigerians have given it a place and they alone have the power to send it packing; it is a task for both men and women.

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