

MOTHERISM AND TYPES OF WOMEN DISCRIMINATION IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S "THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK" NOVEL

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ABSTRAK

This study is aimed to reveal Motherism and Types of Women Discrimination within Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* Novel. The novel consists of twelve short stories and mostly depict Nigerian women life and struggles in reaching equality. Motherism is one of African Feminism Models that focus on the ability of women in nurturing their child, family, and environment. The resources of the data were two short stories entitled *The American Embassy* and *The Headstrong Historian*. This study was conducted through descriptive qualitative research. The data are collected by using documentary technique. Instrument for collecting the data is using documentary sheet. The technique for analyzing the data is descriptive qualitative research. There are five principals of Motherism that were found in this study, they are ; Depicting strong and Independent Women, Highlight Starvation and Political Exploitation, Showing Mother-Child Bond as The Main Theme, Preserve African Traditional Culture and Reject Imported Religion. While for Types of Women Discrimination, the writer only found Marginalization and Violence Against Women.

Keywords: Feminism; African Feminism, Motherism; Women Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

French Socialist Charles Fourier invented the term "Fe'menisme" in the early nineteenth century. The concept combines the French word for women, "Femme," and "-isme," which refers to a social movement or political ideology [1]. Feminism is simply described as a social movement of women in sought of equal rights in accessing opportunities and benefit in society.

This ideology is not static, but rather flexible, as it constantly defines itself in relation to a specific group's concern about how women's emancipation might be approved. Even in the modern women's movement, the term "feminism" has been given a variety of shifting meanings [2]. The feminism movement, which began in the United States and Western Europe, is commonly separated into many cycles or waves [3].

The first wave of feminism was also known as the "Suffrage Women Movement" in which women struggle for legal identity, including the right to own property, form contracts, vote, run for political office, and sit in the Senate [4]. The second wave of feminism was developed in the late 1960 and was deal with diverse issues that were related to inter alia access to child care, equal pay,

employment, and educational opportunities; reproductive rights; and women and children's [5]. While the first and second waves of feminism were dominated by western or white feminists, third wave feminism was initiated by black feminism, postcolonial, queer, and intersectionality theory [6]. Intersectionality is a lens through which we may observe where power comes together and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It accepts and acknowledges the layered problem that was previously unacknowledged. These layered issues stem from the complexities of one's identity in terms of ethnicity and social status. [7]. Intersectionality then perpetuate feminism theory which dealing with women from different race, ethnic, and class social. One feminism's type that is the most influential is Black Feminism. Black feminism resonates the same energy with Intersectionality in which it covers social class and race identity of women that may put them in different oppression to western women. Race and gender, according to black feminists, compound each other, making black women's experiences qualitatively different from those of both white women and black males " [8]

The struggle of women to combat sexism and patriarchy not only exist for African

American or African women, but it exist in all over the world. The acknowledgemant of multiple identity in Intersectionality helps women from different class from white feminist to establish women empowerment, because Intersectionality strongly focuses on stressing, describing, and theorizing multiple forms of inequality among different subgroups of women [9]. There is no one path to feminism. Individuals from diverse backgrounds need feminist theory that speaks directly to their lives. [10].

Following African women in diaspora who succeed in claiming their emancipation by using Black Feminism, African women who lives in African spheres start to define their own principals which more adaptable for African women. The ideas Of feminists in Africa is connected with Black feminism but emphasize somewhat different frames. By focusing on the same complexity of one's identity, African Feminists recognize the diverse identities of African women based on their cultural identities and history with colonialism. Those identities then operate as a reflection for them in upholding their own feminism principles [11].

In promoting their own definition of Feminism, African feminists are continuing to use all available media and resources as tools for spreading the ideology, so that more people are aware of the importance of gender equality. Popular culture incorporates a huge potential for politicization, and African feminists want to use this potential to empower African women within the context of social transformation. One of the most prominent popular media for African feminists is literature or writing products. African postcolonial authors have taken on the challenge of exporting Africa's culture and identity to the West, as well as making Africans understand their uniqueness. [12]. Spreading and constructing a new idea about social transformation through writing is effective as Boshego (2007) stated "authors can manipulate their readers in the manner in which they construct characters and, in the process, play a significant role in upholding certain cultural principles with regard to what and how women and men should enact their role" [13]."

Many scholars have done a study to reveal the feminism agenda, The first research done by Bergman in 2016, titled "*African Sisterhood - Conceptualizing African Feminist*

Identity." [14] Bergman's research focused on the meaning and origins of African sisterhood as a political identity project through studying papers from an organization called the African Feminist Forum. The analyzing method is content analysis guided by theory. The result of the study showed that African Feminist Forum sees African culture as strength, they employed cultural relativism since it highlights the importance of respecting their own cultural heritage, and they build their own feminism principals by using their own culture. As a result, there is even an idea of "Motherism" as an alternate for feminism in Africa.

The second study is a post-colonial reading by Ekahinu (2018) entitled "*A Post-Colonial Reading Of Selected Novels Of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie And Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo*." [12] Ekahinu analyzed the text used in those two novels using post-colonial discourse elements such as hybridity, appropriation, abrogation, affiliation, and untranslated words to investigate the profound effects of the concepts of colonialism and neo-colonialism in literary productions using the selected texts as case studies. The study concluded that the selected authors and their texts are post-colonial in the distinctive way they show their culture, question hegemony, expose misconceptions that portrayed by western about their histories , and rewrite their people's history.

From the first study, the author inspired to conduct research relate to Motherism, while from the second research, the writer was convinced to use Adichie's writing work as the object of the study. The writer chose *The Thing Around Your Neck* novel because the novel consist twelve short stories in which the plot revolve around Nigerian woman life and struggle. In addition, the writer also interested to find types of women discrimination so the result of this study could give representation how women struggle against inequalities. Furthermore there are no research which studying Mothersim principals and Types of women discrimination from *The Thing Around Your Neck* novel by Adichie.

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu (1995) invented the word "Mothersim" in her book "*Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*." [15] The concept evolves around the premise that Mother's responsibility is to heal and nurture the family, the child, society, and the environment. Motherism is not static;

both male and female can be addressed as motherist as long as they are concerned with racism, malnutrition, political and economic exploitation, hunger and starvation, child abuse and morality, drug addiction, the proliferation of broken homes and homelessness around the world, environmental degradation, and ozone layer depletion due to pollution. This concept seeks to reintroduce African-based philosophy in order to change African cultures and their mindsets nowadays. Acholonu's suggestion of African-based philosophy in this context refers to philosophy before colonialization which celebrate motherhood. Thus, the concept does not denote the term "transform," but rather suggests restoring the nature of African motherism to the present day. According to Acholonu, the relationship between males and females in Africa before colonialization did not disadvantage women. The relationship between men and women in Africa is described as "Complementary," which does not need to be changed because it already exists. From her insight, women's subordination emerges after colonialization. The colonizer introduced how to privilege men in education, religion, and education while women are being excluded. Motherism, like the previous two African models, sees Islam and Christianity as carriers of women's oppression. Oppression against women does not exist in pre-colonial African culture, then the women's subordination being carried by the colonizers by introducing new cultures and religion. As a result, she believed that colonialization destroyed the foundation of African gender relations.

While to find types of women discrimination, the writer used Mansour Fakih (2008) theory. According to Fakih (2008), gender discrimination can be expressed through Subordination, Marginalization, Stereotype, Violence Against Women, and Double Burden (Workload). Stereotyping is labelling a certain person or group which mostly implies negative notion. Subordination of women can be defined as the way society places women on a lower level than men. Marginalization is a process of exclusion that has resulted in poverty for women in the economy, law, and education. Feldman (2007), further explained women marginalization in Africa can be divided into three aspects which are Socio-cultural marginalization, Economic marginalization, Political marginalization. Socio-cultural marginalization relates to the widowhood and

women rights for legacy and property, and the notion for women as property from their male partners. Economic marginalization existed in the form of how women being refused to own land and control resources, being offered by low-wages jobs, being viewed as nothing more than reproductive machines, sex objects, food gatherers and domestic servants by their husbands. Fakih (2008) characterized violence against women as any physical or psychological assault on women, such as rapists, domestic violence (beating, murder, and maltreatment), exploiting women through prostitution, pornography, forced sterilization in family planning, and sexual harassment. While Double burden means one person's task is larger than that of another (husband) [17].

Based on the background above, the problem statement will be specified as follows: How Motherism reflected in Adichie's selected short stories in *The Thing around your neck*? And What types of gender discrimination experienced by main character in each selected short story in Adichie's *The Thing around your neck* ?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The writer employed a qualitative approach because this study focuses on the analysis or interpretation of written material in context. According to Bogdan and Taylor in *Introduction to Qualitative Research Method* [17], a qualitative approach refers to research procedures, which produce descriptive data, people's own written or spoken words, and observable behavior. This research also used document analysis to collect the data. For this research, the document was two short stories from Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck Novel* entitled *The American Embassy* and *The Headstrong Historian*. The writer chose those two short stories because among twelve short stories, their plot is the nearest to Motherism principals which is depicting children-mother bond. The writer classified carefully the phrase that represent Motherism by Acholonu (1995) [18] and Five Types of Women Discrimination based on Fakih (2008) theory. Then the data was analyzed carefully by using descriptive qualitative in which the steps that were done are ; Identifying, Classifying, Describing, Interpreting, and Making conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Motherism Principles in The American Embassy and The Headstrong Historian.

a. Depicting a strong and independent women

On *The American Embassy*, we are being told about the character Independency in her effort to nurture her son and family. Nurturing is the power that African women biologically inherit which being the main principal of Motherism.

“She had dashed out to the balcony then, climbed over the railing, jumped down without thinking of the two storeys, and crawled into the dustbin by the gate. After she heard the roar of their car driving away, she went back to her flat, smelling of the rotten plantain peels in the dustbin. She held Ugonna’s body, placed her cheek to his quiet chest, and realized that she had never felt so ashamed. She had failed him...” (Page 133-134).

The quotation shows the main character’s bravery to risking her life so that he could save her son. Her action proof how a mother can be the one one protect her child from anykind of danger which represent mother’s power to nurture.

On *The Headstrong Historian*, the independence of a woman is presented by portraying never-ending fight that Nwamgba must endure in order to protect her son’s legacy.

“It was when they emptied his barn of yams and led away the adult goats in his pen that she confronted them, shouting, and when they brushed her aside, she waited until evening and then walked around the clan singing about their wickedness, the abominations they were heaping on the land by cheating a widow, until the elders asked them to leave her alone. She complained to the Women’s Council, and twenty women went at night to Okafu and Okoye’s home, brandishing pestles, warning them

to leave Nwamgba alone.” (page 211)

Nwamgba demonstrates her tenacity in defending what her husband inherited for her children against her husband's brother's mischief in looting her property. She acts wisely by not provoking them individually, but rather seeking the backing of the elders in order to beat her husband's brother.

b. Showing mother-child bond as the center of the story

On *The American Embassy*, we are being told how a woman can be a resilient figure, even when she has to fight the government soldiers herself because she has her children with her that must be protected.

“And she realized that she would die gladly at the hands of the man in the black hooded shirt or the one with the shiny bald head before she said a word about Ugonna to this interviewer, or to anybody at the American embassy. Before she hawked Ugonna for a visa to safety” (page 139)

The main character in the story, who initially tries to find Asylum because her life is endangered and would use her child death to convince The American Embassy, discovers that her son's story is far more precious than an asylum. It shows how a mother has a very particular link with her child, which makes her stronger to tackle any challenge.

While on *The Headstrong Historian*, Nwamgba, who lives in pre-colonial and colonial Africa, is likewise a strong character because she has responsibility to protecther son.

“The first weekend Anikwenwa came home, Nwamgba saw angry welts on his back. She tightened her wrapper on her waist and went to the school. She told the teacher that she would gouge out the eyes of everyone at the mission if they ever did that to him again” (page 210)

Nwamgba as a single mother who is responsible for her son, does not show any fear to face the teacher that is the

colonizer. She comes to school and warn them that she could do anything bad if they continue to abuse her son.

c. **Highlight Starvation and Political exploitation**

The narrative of *The American Embassy* centers around Africa in its early post-colonial governance, with the setting of General Sani Abacha's military regime. Because the country's leader at the time is a tyrant, the story focuses on how citizens suffer as a result of the brutality perpetrated by the military force at the time.

“A soldier was flogging a bespectacled man with a long whip that curled in the air before it landed on the man’s face, or his neck, she wasn’t sure because the man’s hands were raised as if to ward off the whip. She saw the man’s glasses slip off and fall. She saw the heel of the soldier’s boot squash the black frames, the tinted lenses.” (page 129)

The quotation shows how the government at that moment misuse the power they have to abuse the citizen.

“She turned away from the man and watched the beggars make their rounds along the visa line. Rangy men in grimy long tunics who fingered prayer beads and quoted the Koran; women with jaundiced eyes who had sickly babies tied to their backs with threadbare cloth; a blind couple led by their daughter, blue medals of the Blessed Virgin Mary hanging around their necks below tattered collars.” (page 137)

The dictatorship of the government at that moment lead the society to life in suffer. The beggars could symbolize how the poverty and hunger exist within Sani Abacha’s tyrannical leadership.

d. **Reject Imported Religion**

Motherism asserts that there is no Patriarchy in pre-colonial African culture, and so it opposes foreign religions such as Islam and Christianity, which are regarded

as the carriers of Patriarchy on the African continent.

“She lay on her bed gasping for breath, while Anikwenwa pleaded with her to be baptized and anointed so that he could hold a Christian funeral for her, as he could not participate in a heathen ceremony. Nwamgba told him that if he dared to bring anybody to rub some filthy oil on her, she would slap that person with her last strength.” (page 216).

Nwamgba, even with her last breath is still firm on her belief to not receive Christianity in her life. She refuse to be baptized by her own son and chooses to die with traditional African faith that she holds.

e. **Preserve African Traditional Culture**

Acholonu represents the African continent as a mother since the concept of motherhood in African cultures is understood as one's ability to maintain life, nurture society with its environment in a harmonious manner, and manage leadership roles at the home, community, and national levels at large. The effort to preserve African traditional culture could be considered as the African motherist to nurture the environment.

“Nwamgba roughly yanked his ear and told him that a foreign albino could not determine when their customs would change, so until the clan itself decided that the initiation would stop, he would participate or else he would tell her whether he was her son or the white man’s son” (page 211)

The quotation exemplifies Nwamgba's persistence and bravery in preserving African culture. She serves as a role model for their clan in order to maintain African culture which reflects the power of mother innurturing environment.

2. Types of Women Discrimination in The American Embassy and The Headstrong Historian

a. **Marginalization**

In *The Headstrong Historian*, economical marginalization manifests itself into

exclusion of women from land inheritance. In this story, the main character also experienced socio-cultural marginalization in a form belief that women (wives) only serve as child bearers. The notion is in line with Ngwa (2014) which stated that some men see their wives only as reproductive machines, sex objects, food gatherers and domestic servants, and nothing else.

“It was they who urged him, after her third miscarriage, to marry another wife. Obierika told them he would give it some thought but when he and Nwamgba were alone in her hut at night, he told her that he was sure they would have a home full of children” (page 200)

The marginalization towards Nwamgba in here is not performed by her husband, but her husband's brother. When her husband's brother persuade her husband to marry again, that resembles that Nkem only being seen as reproductive machines. Nwamgba not only experienced marginalization relates to her role as child bearers, but she also being marginalized by her cousins (her husband's brother) in term of inheritance.

“His cousins, during the funeral, took his ivory tusk, claiming that the trappings of titles went to brothers and not to sons. It was when they emptied his barn of yams and led away the adult goats in his pen that she confronted them, shouting, and when they brushed her aside, she waited until evening and then walked around the clan singing about their wickedness, the abominations they were heaping on the land by cheating a widow, until the elders asked them to leave her alone” (page 204)

The quotation shows how Nwamgba's cousins from her brother looting her property. Nwamgba does not have right for her deceased husband's property, because Under the Igbo customary law, a woman cannot inherit land from her lineage. In all areas of land holding, women are excluded as land passes from the father to the male children. The only means of inheritance by a woman of her husband's estate is through her male child if such child agrees to give the mother any part of it. Nwamgba protect her husband legacy to her son, and the way her cousins try to rob it gives such a proof that they marginalized Nwamgba.

b. **Violence Against Women.**

An attack or assault on a person's physical or mental integrity is defined as violence. Violence that caused by gender bias is called gender-related violence. Gender violence is primarily caused by power imbalances in society. The main character *On The American Embassy* experiences physical violence from the government soldiers because she protect her husband who is the offender of the regime at that moment.

“She pried herself free and got up from the sofa, and the man in the hooded shirt, still seated, slapped her behind” (page 132)

The woman in this narrative has to cope with government forces who targeted her husband, a journalist who oppose the dictatorship at the time. When her husband leaves first to save his life, she is forced to face the soldiers alone, which lead her to experience physical violence.

CONCLUSION

There are five principals of Motherism that were found in this study, they are ; Depicting strong and Independent Women (Being found in both *The American Embassy* and *The Headstrong Historian*), Highlight Starvation and Political Exploitation (Being found in *The American Embassy only*), Showing Mother-Child Bond as The Main Theme (being found in both *The American Embassy* and *The Headstrong Historian*), Preserve African Traditional Culture (Being found in *The Headstrong Historian* only) and Reject Imported Religion (Being found in *The Headstrong Historian only*). While for Types of Women Discrimination, the writer only found Marginalization in *The Headstrong Historian*, and Violence Against Women in *The American Embassy*. Two short stories were identified reflected Motherism because it consisted the Motherism's principals as already being explained above. The mother and child bond in *The American Embassy* being highlighted through the main character struggle to save her son and also her sacrifice to throw her chance to get asylum by using her son's death story, instead she rather chooses to live in in danger than leaving her son's memories in Nigeria.

While for The Headstrong Histoian, Nwamgba the main character of the story reflected a strong character of women, which is Motherism principles. Her resilient to face anykind of problem is because she has her son to be protected. The story also shows how Nwamgba refuse Christianity and maintain her clan's tradition which being another strongest principals being highlighted in Motherism. Types of Women Discrimination being found in this story als relate to the Motherism's principals that being found in the story. Motherism highlighted a strong women who can sacrifice for their children, failmy, and environment. So, it is reasonable that types of women discrimination found in those two short stories are Marginalization and Violent which demand the main character to be strong and resilient, just like what being emphasized in Motherism.

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