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# Gender, Identity and the Manifestos of Liberation in Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the veracity of some African feminist manifestos in empowering African women negotiate around patriarchy in Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele.* The paper adopts some aspects of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity as theoretical position and relies on close reading of the text for analysis of some extrapolations. The paper reveals that the society's biased and lopsided prescription of gender-typed roles and behaviours has not only perpetuated inequality, but has provided a premise that has historically oppressed and made some African women totter on the verge of complete self-realisation. This accounts for the upsurge of feminist fireworks, by some African female writers, aimed at helping the women renegotiate gender expectations in order to restore confidence in their abilities to assert their potentials. The paper concludes that the sundry feminist manifestos may not provide solution to female oppression and subjugation, but could help in revolutionising the consciousness of women concerning how they conform to the inimical and denigrated societal roles that perpetually push them to the fringes of the society's schema.

**Keywords:** Womanhood, Oppression, Renegotiation, Gender roles, Women writers.

## Introduction

Gender identity has been one of the fundamental aspects of self-identity and constitutes an identifying factor and a primary category differentiating different types of individuals. According to Monica Udoette and Kufre Akpan, "Gender is evident in the social world, shaping how we think about ourselves, guiding our interaction with others and influencing our work and family life" (56). In gender development, there has been a substantial controversy on the role of 'nature' and 'nurture'. While few agree with either factor, many tilt toward evidences favouring one influence over the other. It is against the backdrop of this controversy that Richard Stenberg avers that: "…as we pose the question of the relation between gender, environment, and biology in intricate ways, our answers become more sophisticated and further removed from the idea that there is a single, definitive answer to the gender question" (quoted from Brogle, 1). It is also as a result of this controversy that different theories and opinions are fabricated to explain why men and women are different from one another outside physical reproductive differences.

Despite the apprehensions and uncertainties characterising sex and gender, many societies are still strongly fixated on the idea that sex and gender are relatively stabled components of self-identity. This eventually becomes a parameter that defines the expectations for each sex. These expectations, among other things, include how men and women, as well as boys and girls should behave and look like, and what they ought to do and also not to do. It further explains why children prefer gender-typed toys, chores, clothes, and choose playmates that are of the same sex.


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However, in the past decades, gender roles have considerably shifted, as girls and women have been allowed to explore those areas of life traditionally reserved for boys and men. Angela Brogle, however, notes that: "Although girls and women have increasingly been allowed expanded expression of traditionally masculine behaviours, boys and men have been discouraged from exploring behaviours and activities considered feminine" (2). In spite of the obvious positive effects of a-more elastic gender roles, males who express gender-typed behaviours that do not conform to their biological sex are seen as queer and are seriously sanctioned.

In all these, girls and women have been at the losing end. The society's strict insistence on prescribed gender-typed roles and behaviours for men and women in society has historically provided the unfortunate premises for denigration, suppression and exploitation of women. For example, in some Ikwerre communities in Rivers State, South-South Nigeria, there is a cultural reality that demands that if a woman must inherit any property, she must remain single and will forfeit such property anytime she marries. However, a man can marry as many wives as he is capable to, and still inherit the properties. Widowhood rite is another demeaning and denigrating practice that has always lowered the heads of many women.

In those African societies where this practice is in vogue, there is this misleading traditional belief that a man does not die a natural death. The wife is always responsible and, to absolve herself from this allegation, she has to accept to be subjected to a whole gamut of obnoxious widowhood rites. However, it is never the same thing when a woman dies. In other words, "she is indirectly asked why she should survive the man" (Orabueze, 111). Thus, in the religious, socio-political and economic calculus of society, women are consistently stereotyped and denied positive identity, through coercive norms that define and restrict what they are and can do. According to Helen Chukwuma," Most African women are trained and oriented from infancy to realise themselves and their true worth outside themselves, thereby negating any knowledge of self" (x). Kufre Akpan and Isonguyo Akpan argue that:

Even the worst forms of this violence continue to be tolerated as inevitable, and women bear the brunt of these threatening acts in silence and with apathy as part of their tradition. In some highly civilised and technologically-driven western nations where equality of mankind is emphasised, one still find some forms of infringement on the rights and privileges of women, mostly orchestrated by culture and tradition, especially, the non-educated and low income women (29-30).

This explains why self-realisation is at the core of the women's quest for equality.

This conditioning has constituted one of the greatest barriers toward their self-fulfilment, in terms of competing in those areas of endeavours society reserved for men. However, gender roles vary from one culture to the other, even with neighbouring cultures. Margaret Mead reveals startling variations of gender roles in three Guinean communities where she lived. According to her:

The Mudungumor were cannibalistic tribe of head hunters in which both men and women were warlike and aggressive. The women scorned childbearing and raising children because it interfered with their ability to fight with neighbouring villages. The people of Arapesh tribe were peaceful and gentle, and both women and men care for and nurtured their children. Tchambuli women brought home the daily catch of fish and were more aggressive, while the men spent most of their time caring for children (quoted from Brogle, 7).

The most unusual is the tribe of Tchambuli. Unlike in some Western and African cultures where the men go out and fend for what the family eats, while women administer the home and care for children, the realities in Tchambuli society negate the popular stereotypical gendered behaviour assign to women. Generally, the roles women play in the three societies mentioned above are antipodal to the widely-believed notion that sex and gender are natural and stable. Douglas Kenrick

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and Melanie Trost equally admit that “there are diverse cultural differences in the manifestation of gender but, point to the underlying consistencies in behaviour patterns across societies” (Brogle, 6).

In some parts of Nigeria and other parts of African societies, gender imbalance and the conditioning of women seem to have been entrenched in the cultural and traditional practices of the people. For example, in some parts of Nigerian society, it has become almost natural for women to seek first ‘marriage and motherhood’ and every other thing will be added to them. This arises from the fact that, in these societies, marriage and motherhood seem to be very significant in a way that some women see them as the means through which they can attend relevance in the society.

Thus, some women hang on to abusive and asphyxiating marriages, as long as they remain married, and also rationalise childlessness as female inadequacy. The unedifying slot of inferiority allotted to some women bereft them of the necessary confidence in their ability to compete in fields men are traditionally believed to perform more strongly in. Although some women are competing very favourably in all areas, there are many who are still being conditioned in a way that, even when they have the talent and are actually told they can blaze the trail in all areas, they are more likely, than men, to shrug off the praise and lowball their abilities. This inevitably limits their capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and/or make choices about their lives.

The above development has triggered different forms of feminist fireworks and other polemics to help them renegotiate their individuality. In Africa, female writers have shown enormous commitment to this cause. Through their literary oeuvres, which cut across all genres, these writers have shown marked resentment of the limitation and subjugation to which culture and society condition some African women. They crave for a wider platform, for another form of self-realisation other than what is stereotypically assign to them. Chukwuma further posits that: “…women developed and became more aware and so questioning. Their discontentment is predicated on the state of the society where roles are worthwhile only if they stand up to the harsh dynamics of economics” (“Feminism in African…” x). James Okpiliya and Kufre Akpan corroborate Chukwuma when they argue that: “…no writer has ever written in isolation. His inspiration is always sharpened by the drive to expose and bring to the fore all the contradictions and apprehensions that engulf his society” (52). This in essence means that women (especially writers) have started evolving a new sense of self, charting a course for self-actualisation and demystifying the inferiority complex culture had imbued them with. In the light of the above, Monica Udoette argues that: “The idea of female consciousness is part of the process of redefining the woman‟s place within her society and culture and this re-definition has been the concern of many female writers including Black female writers in Africa and in the Diaspora” (74).

It is in this spirit that Adichie conceived *Dear Ijeawele* to lend her creative voice to other sundry voices, aimed at rejecting the all-pervasive questioning of the validity of a woman’s existence outside the expected gender roles assign to them by the society.

**The Writer, Gender Question and Renegotiation for Equality in *Dear Ijeawele***

The monotony of the woman’s day to day life and the narrowness of her operational space, designated by the culture and society has, no doubt, limited her to a relegated position in the society’s scheme of things. This peculiar condition of women in African societies has placed women writers almost perpetually on the defensive and, has also triggered an upsurge of different models of feminist manifestos, aimed at questioning the slot of an all-time complexes of inferiority designated for women by society, on the premises of sex and gender.

For example, Chikwenye Ogunyemi’s ‘womanism’ emphasises the four Cs; conciliation, collaboration, consensus and complementarity as a means of negotiating a balanced relationship for

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men and women in the society. In her opinion, " African 'womanism' aims to establish healthy relationship among people, despite ethnic, geographical, educational, gender, ethical, class, religious, military and political differences" (123).

\Mary Kolawole; another exponent of womanism, claims the theory is the most suitable to most African writers and activists because it is rooted in African cultural and traditional values. According to her, "womanism manifests and enhances African women's collective grouping and positive bonding as opposed to ideological bondage" (27).

Catherine Acholonu also propounded 'Motherism' to advance the cause of women in the predominantly male-defined society. The major tenet of this theory, according to her, is to "empower African women as mothers" (178).

Chioma Okpara's 'Femalism' and Obioma Nnaemeka's Nego-Feminism are also worth mentioning, as they contain significant tenets that chart the course for women liberation and quest for relevance. There is STIWA, an acronym for 'Social Transformation Including Women in Africa' by Lara Ogundipe-Leslie. This framework seeks to incorporate women into the contemporary socio-political permutations in Africa.

Also, there is Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's 'Snail-Sense Feminism', a model that emphasises complementarity of gender roles between men and women. According to Ezeigbo, "the theory derives from the habit of snails which most Nigerian women adopt in their relationship with men" (27). Despite the perceived loopholes in these theories, it could be attested that they have contributed significantly, though marginally, in arousing the society's consciousness to the women predicament and have also embolden them to confront questions that bother on their identity and individuality.

However, it is noted that despite these quantum of theorising and pontificating, leading to marginal progress in this direction, the problems women face in the society still persist. Ezeigbo asks a barrage of questions that vividly describes the helplessness and hopelessness of the situation. "If after all the theories that have been formulated, the problem still persists, are we not to look for new models, seek new solutions? Besides, must we dress these new models in feminist garbs? Must any attempt to solve women's problem be conceived in feminist terms? (26).The above questions were part of the reasons Adichie conceived and birthed *Dear Ijeawele*. This is another model of feminist manifestos that seeks to renegotiate gender roles and bridge the gender gap that has always provided the leverage for exploitation and suppression of women in the society.

As stated above, *Dear Ijeawele* is a recent model of feminist manifesto, couched in 'suggestions' which serves as sub-topics, and also contain different feminist concerns and how they could be engaged. It contains fifteen suggestions written on the heels of a request by Adichie's childhood friend, now a married woman, who asked to be told how she could raise her baby girl Chizalum a feminist. Adichie in the introduction of the text confirms that: "In response to my friend's request, I decided to write her a letter, which I hoped would be honest and practical, and also serve as a map of sorts for my own feminist thinking" (v). Although there are some changes of details in the text, *Dear Ijeawele* is a version of that letter the author wrote, in response to her friend's request.

A letter being an epistolary form, demonstrates a subtle shift from the conventional approach adopted by earlier models of feminist manifestos and their exponents. The title is not garb in the usual feminist isms and, perhaps, this may fit in the description of the new model Ezeigbo envisages in the excerpt below: "Therefore, new feminist models are needed, especially those that are realistic, practical and functional (26). This paper therefore interrogates some of Adichie's suggestions and highlights how they could further sensitise women on their rights as women and compel attention to their plight in the society.

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In the "First suggestion", Adichie admonishes women to embrace motherhood but not to see their relevance as revolving around it. She puts it thus: "Motherhood is a glorious gift but do not define yourself by motherhood" (3). This suggestion arises from the society's patriarchal monologue that a barren and childless woman is a failed women, a perception that has over the years, plunged many women into an abyss of despondency. As captured by Grace Okereke, this is because:

In Africa …, children are crucial in the continuity of a lineage, a clan, a society. Children are the base that hold up the structure and ensure the perpetuity of a family and the larger traditional society….Thus, culturally, inability to procreate signals tragedy not only for the individual but also for the larger society because it undermines the continuity that defines the interrelated worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn (12).

This attitude to motherhood and children differentiates Western feminism from African feminism. Some Western feminists see motherhood as a tether, and this explains why some of them refuse to marry and bear children. Okereke further posits that: "… African feminism does not share the seemingly anti-child ethos of Western feminism. It is for this reason that infertility is regarded as a tragedy in traditional African society" (13). Therefore, Adichie's first suggestion sees the centrality of motherhood and children as a positive aspect of African culture that is desired by both men and women, but expresses reservation when women are being questioned for childlessness or when motherhood is seen as woman's sole relevance in life.

Adichie, still in the first suggestion, emphasises dignity of labour and frowns at the unfortunate development, where women are made to forgo their professions and careers to assume full administration of the home, but rely on their husbands for sustenance. "Everybody will have an opinion about what you do, but what matters is what you want for yourself, and not what others want you to want. Please reject the idea that motherhood and work are mutually exclusive" (4). It is noted that economic and financial empowerment is one of the ways through which women burst the cultural fence of subjugation and nihilism.

Their ability to confront marginalisation and exploitation lies in their self-reliance and this buttresses Filomina Steady's assertion that: "True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and determination to be resourceful and reliant. The majority of the black women in Africa and the diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not always by choice" (Quoted in Okereke, 12). In other words, the relevance of an assertive woman is felt both in and outside the home, as she contributes economically to the family's budget. Thus, barring a woman from pursuing her career because of motherhood is not out of genuine concern but a grand conspiracy to perpetually subject her to dependency and subjugation.

In the "Second Suggestion", Adichie emphasises complementarity and neutral gender roles for a balanced relationship between a man and a woman. Through this suggestion Adichie questions the society's insistence on certain inexplicable roles for women when men could equally handle same as well. One of the moments women are really sacrificed is during child birth. After going through the rigours of labour room, the society still expects her to do the bathing, washing and babysitting and cooking while the man walks around announcing the arrival of his baby. It is against this backdrop that Adichie suggests thus:

Chudi should do everything biology allows—which is everything but breastfeeding. Sometimes mothers so conditioned to be all and do all, are complicit in diminishing the role of fathers. You might think that Chudi will not bathe exactly as you'd like, that he might not wipe her bum as perfectly as you do. But so what? (6).

The situation seemingly arises from the traditional view of women as care givers which supposedly means that child care responsibilities often fall exclusively on them.

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As stated earlier in this paper, although girls and women have been allowed to broaden their expression of traditionally masculine behaviours, boys and men have been discouraged from exploring behaviours and activities considered feminine. Despite the overwhelming evidences pointing at positive effects of a more-flexible gender roles, the society still scornfully relates with males who exhibit gender-typed behaviours that do not align with their biological sex. This explains why Judith Butler protests "the compulsory order of sex, gender or desire" (5). In other words, Butler rejects the idea that gender is stable. This, according to her, implies that: "assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of men will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that women will interpret only female bodies" (*Gender Trouble*, 9). Gender is seen as a multiple interpretation of sex and not a fixed thing. Thus, apart from breast feeding, anybody can attend to a baby. There is nothing special about how women take care of babies. Most times, it becomes ridiculous when society pours praises and special gratitude to a man who ventures to bath a baby, as if it is something out of what he should do. Adichie further admonishes thus:

Chudi does not deserve any special gratitude or praise, nor do you—you both made the choice to bring a child into the world, and the responsibility for that child belongs equally to you both. It would be different if you were a single mother, whether by circumstances or choice, because 'doing it together' would then not be an option. But you should not be a 'single mother' unless you are truly a single mother (7).

The society should not see this as a weakness on the part of man, but a way of renegotiating and bridging the gender gap for a healthy union and for the development of the society, for the benefit of all. According to David Udoinwang and Kufre Akpan, "This is part of the issues that continue to beat the waves of gender and social negotiations in African literary sphere" (189).

In the "Third Suggestion", Adichie dismisses gender roles as "absolute nonsense" (8). This idea of gender roles has over the years conditioned many women and girls and reduce their individuality to a trivialised status. Gloria Chukukere avers that these values and roles are so strong that: "…the respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaptation to these roles" (7).

The extent to which these roles are internalised, for example, is strongly communicated in Okonkwo's beating of his wife in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* for failing to provide his lunch. This is one of the consequences for women who try to exhibit unorthodox behaviour. Adichie wonders why cooking should be seen as a kind of marriageability test for women and posits that "The knowledge of cooking does not come pre-installed in a vagina. Cooking is learned—domestic work in general—is a life skill that both men and women should ideally have. It is also a skill that can elude both men and women" (8-9). It is therefore nothing but, a patriarchal power-play for Okonkwo to physically assault his wife for not providing him meal, as if she went away with the kitchen and cooking utensils. This may have also informed Chukukere's submission that: "a woman's honour and dignity often consist in her adherence to idealized norms of wifehood and motherhood" (7). Thus, Adichie is of the opinion that women should not be allowed or restricted to do anything on the basis of sex or gender. "Do not ever tell her that she should or should not do something because she is a girl" (8).

Another factor that generates the absurd debate about women needing to cook for their husbands is simply the unfortunate conditioning of women to see marriage as a grand prize they should aspire to. They have been conditioned to swallow the ridiculous adage that the easiest way to a man's heart is through the stomach. And because women have been made to operate from this defensive angle, always trying to win the man's heart especially in a polygamous setting, they happily embrace these roles of a wife and home administrator, and undertakes all domestic duties including cooking, feeding the family members and keeping the home tidy, in order to win a man's heart, not

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minding the enormity of these roles. It is for this reason that Adichie suggests that: "we also need to question the idea of marriage as a prize to women, because this is the basis of this absurd debate. If we stop conditioning women to see marriage as a prize, then we will have fewer debates about a wife needing to cook in order to earn the prize" (9). In other words, there should be equal mode of socialising everybody in the cultural norms of the society and not to make a particular gender or sex a scapegoat.

In the "Fifth Suggestion", Adichie emphasises educational advancement for women as an intrinsic part of the strategy to address the gender based discrimination against women and also as a potent means of renegotiating their selfhood that has been repressed by culture and tradition. An educated woman exhibits a new spirit of radicalism and liberation from social, sexual and economic constraints that inhibited her in the past. Through this, she approaches female reality and the "woman question" with her head high. According to Theodora Ezeigbo, "one discovers in women in this group growing self-respect, autonomy, and assertiveness" (146). Debbie Ogedemgbe in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* vividly typifies the above picture of an educated woman. Ezeigbo further describes her as "intelligent, independent, assertive, and highly educated. Her ideas about women roles transcends the age-old prescribed gender roles" (146). The narrator describes her thus:

She wanted to do something more than child breeding and rearing and being a good passive wife to a man whose ego she must boost all her days, while making sure to submerged every impulse that made her a full human….Surely every person should have the right to live as he or she wished, however different that life might seem to another (Quoted in Ezeigbo, 147).

Through this, Emecheta revolutionises women passivity and docility and blazes a new trail in female consciousness. Also Li, in Zaynab Akali's *The Stillborn,* achieves relevance because she is educated and earns money, a feat that accords her the phallic position of 'a man of the house'. Thus, Adichie, in this suggestion, reveals to her friend that reading will help her daughter ":…understand and question the world, help her express herself, and help her in whatever she becomes—a chef, scientist, a singer, all benefit from the skills that reading brings" (17). This corroborates Uzoma Aja-Okorie position that "The achievement of girls' right to education can address some of societies' deeply rooted inequalities, which condemn millions of girls to a life without quality education – and, therefore, also all too often to a life of missed opportunities" (272). In other words, a woman that is economically viable, as stated earlier, will be less dependent on a man and this will empower her to confront some of the denigrating practices that restrict her individuality.

In the "Eleventh Suggestion", Adichie vehemently questions the society's selective application of biology as sole reason for social norms. It has been noted that many privileges men enjoy, at the expense of women, arise from the society's biased and erroneous perception that men are physically stronger and superior than women. "So teach Chizalum that biology is an interesting and fascinating subject, but she should never accept it as justification for any social norm. Because social norms are created by human beings, and there is no social norm that cannot be changed" (37). This informs why Butler, in 'Gender Performativity' protests the dependent on physical attributes for individuals to be categorised as male and female, at the expense of innate ability. To her, gender is not a fixed phenomenon and sex does not depend on gender. In Butler's submission, "gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (13). In other words, gender is nurtured which implies that one is not necessarily born a man or woman but simply become one.

It is also as a result of this development that the society regards children as belonging to a man, ignoring the incontestable fact that the father is who the mother says the father is. Through this

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wrong perception, children and other properties are stripped off women in the circumstance of divorce. Adichie reveals how she suggested a Yoruba name to a Yoruba woman married to an Igbo man, who was thinking of a name to suggest to her husband, for her first child, since the child would still have his father's Igbo surname. Her response was that: "A child first belongs to the father. It has to be that way" (36). In some societies, this conditioning is so overwhelming that some women themselves think of children exclusively as the father's and, this informs why those societies view naming of child by the mother as a taboo. Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, strongly establishes this superior/inferior patriarchal monologue through a dialogue exchange with Nwoye's Mother, when he brings Ikemefuna home. "He belongs to the clan….So look after him" (10). When she inquires further to know how long the lad is going to stay with them, Okonkwo snarls and barks at her, for trying to subvert the silencing agenda of the patriarchy. "And so Nwoye's mother took Ikemefuna to her hut and asked no more questions" (11). This in, a way, buttresses the subjectivity, centrality and power culture imbues on a man to operate within the domestic and other spaces.

In the "Fourteenth Suggestion", Adichie suggests that women should draw a line between oppression and saintliness. The suggestion arises from the ugly scenario where women embrace oppressive tendencies from men because they want to create a picture of being good. Thus, the author advises: "Saintliness is not a prerequisite for dignity" (44). Most times, women are allowed property and other fundamental rights because they refuse to confront oppressive manoeuvres, even when they go against their dignity. For example, some widows accept some devilish widowhood/post widowhood rites because they want to be seen by society as virtuous and also prove by all means that they are not culpable in the demise of their husbands. It is for this reason that Adichie draws the attention of women to the fact that: "People who are unkind and dishonest are still human and deserve dignity" (44).

Flora Nwapa in her *Efuru* and *Idu* creates heroines who acquiesce to the traditional values as a means of being accepted by the society. Efuru, in *Efuru*, operates within the designated traditional framework and embraces the codified norms of the society and, this equally is recognised and accepted by the society. Chukukere notes that:

In spite of her wealth and economic independence, she recognizes her husband's role as the titular head of the family. Thus, she kneels to receive a drink from Adizua, declines to take decisions about money in his absence and arranges a wife for Eneberi when it becomes obvious that she is barren (123).

In *Idu*, Idu is humble to a fault, hardworking, industrious and kind and even tolerates Adiewere's adulterous behaviour, without complain. These virtues, in return, earns her a blissful marriage. She even suggests polygamy due to her childlessness. Her conformity to traditional modes of harmony is endorsed by the community and that is why the people use her as a point of reference. According to Chukwukere, "In a community where the individual's privacy and communal collective perception become interchangeable, Idu's goodness is both heightened and humanised, for even the prying eyes of people are unable to detect any tensions in her marriage" (122). Adichie, here, frowns at, and questions this unfortunate conformity and condescending of women in their quest for relevance. She questions the assumption that women are supposed to be morally better than men. According to her: "Women are as human as men are. Female goodness is as normal as female evil" (44).

Adichie also in this suggestion harps on love and synergy among women as one of the ways of confronting and questioning the exploitation of women in the society. She reveals that "…there are many women in the world who do not like other women. Female misogyny exists, and to evade acknowledging it is to create unnecessary opportunities for anti-feminists to try to discredit

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feminism" (45). Her suggestion here corroborates Chukwuma's assertion that "…it is the women who lend an edge to the maltreatment and subjugation of their fellow women by men" (44). This may also have been part of the reason Charles Nnolim describes feminism as a 'house divided against itself'.

Nnolim may be seen as speaking from a chauvinistic angle, in support of his gender, but the disagreements and discrepancies that infest the concept of feminism and the evolution of sundry models are proofs to the fact that women's idea of liberation in the context of feminism seems to be, as one perceives it. Instead of uniting the women against certain societal norms that trivialise the identity and individuality of women, feminism rather pitches the women against themselves. The consolation is that despite these apprehensions and contradictions, "… it makes us see the extent of the problem, the successful reach of patriarchy. It shows us, too, that not all women are feminists and not all men are misogynists" (Adichie, 45). Adichie's message here is clear. The inherent contradictions characterising feminism could be turned into a robust process of achieving a common front towards the renegotiation of the identity and individuality of women in the society. After all, this is a world of diversities and choices.

**Conclusion**

The marginal and restricted social space with which women are allowed to operate has attracted enormous literary and critical attention, especially from women writers across literary genres, who deploy their creative vision to demonstrate marked resentment on the historical slot of subjugation and exploitation allotted to women through male defined norms and values. In different capacities, these writers evolve and experiment different models of feminist theories, aimed at questioning the society's insistence on the natural correlation between sex and gender and its expected roles. The paper argues that since these roles are patriarchal-defined, and seem to have been entrenched in the culture and tradition, they are not only hostile to women, but provide an unfortunate altar where their rights and privileges are sacrificed. Thus this paper interrogates gender roles as the bases for subjugation and denigration of women and also advocates a renegotiation for equality, for a healthy co-existence in the society.

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