



From double colonization to double commitment: A study of Chimamanda ngozi adichie's *purple hibiscus* and buchi Emecheta's *in the ditch*

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Abstract

This paper addresses the female subjugation in two African female writers' works, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Buchi Emecheta's *In the Ditch*. It hinges on the issue of women through the major axes of patriarchy, as a whole, and the counterbalance of women as regards their empowerment, but beyond that, the social agenda they come up with in the building and fostering of female leadership thoroughly ingrained in postcolonial feminism. The novelty of the study resides in its aim to give insights in how the two writers connive, through female characterization, to define a prototype-literary discourse woven from self-development, friendship and solidarity to a fuller socially-oriented discourse.

Keywords: female subjugation- empowerment-postcolonial feminism-solidarity

1. Introduction

History has shown that the condition of women has wavered up and down if we consider the position they held in the olden times and that they have now in modern societies. The derogatory status that is generally attached to them is intrinsically correlated to various restrictive powers that ranged from the triptych: tradition, law and religion. In her book, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, Sally G. McMillen recalls this historical reality that tormented American women's lives and the beginning of a new consciousness in gender equality, even though Black women were not concerned:

Female submission was proclaimed to be part of God's order. In Church, women were to sit in silence and never dream of occupying the pulpits. Numerous examples from scripture supported this [...]. These biblical tenets and the use of them to sustain women's inferior status would galvanize those like Lucretia, Elizabeth, and Lucy. (McMillen, 2008:18) ^[11]

Analysing the woman question from An African-sociologist perspective, the Nigerian theorist, Franco Atto, insists on the double subordination of women through the categories of religion and patriarchy as naked social inventions:

Gender, religion and patriarchy are foundational social constructs operating at the basis of social organization of society. The three social constructs are inter-woven in the Nigerian society. (Atto, 2017:158) ^[4]

Atto corroborates African feminist mainstream tradition regarding gender as social construct. But Ajayi-Soyinka's standpoint on the issue gives more food for thought. She aligns the submission of African women on colonial imperialism, which conceptualizes the twofold paradigm of women as subjects:

[...] African women on the continent and the diaspora become subjected to what I term double patriarchy. Double patriarchy is a system under which sexism, the weapon of patriarchal power and its various manifestations, politically, socially and economically oppress women twice. (Soyinka, 1993: 162) ^[16]

From the above, we can safely say that the subordination of women is generally theorized as being socially "invented" by men with enacted codes of conducts, traditions, cultures and more still with the crowning achievements of decades of colonial rule that persist to impede their self-worth and personal growth.

Even though the theorists give insightful analyses and facts on the scourges of women, the two Nigerian writers' works, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Buchi Emecheta, are more inclined to the double colonization of women through traditions and patriarchy, but also the fight they put up for their empowerment and the social stability of their own countries.

This basic premise helps surely frame a line of argument centered on *Purple Hibiscus* and *In the Ditch* for the two writers' conception and literary commitment on the issue at hand. One earthy aspect in the two novels is the lilt of self-development, but also of womanhood and nationalism the two plots provide woven from the principles of African *bildungsroman* and postcolonialism. Besides, for some critics like Abioseh Michael Porter, it is erroneous to sum up Buchi Emecheta's work as being "only within the feminist protest tradition". (Porter, 1988: 123) ^[15] Likewise, in her article, "(Re) Writing Postcolonial Bildungsroman in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*", Nilima Meher concludes that:

Geography is another important element which is connected to culture, language, the ability to hear, and to speak.... Home is portrayed as a place of alienation and family to suppress women". (Meher, 2014: 207) ^[12]

The choice on the two writers is evidenced by the fact that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Buchi Emecheta are two African feminists who bring the issue of women to the forefront of their works. It can also be justified by the congruence of the theoretical framework and social commitment with the two novels under review. As a structure, we divide our study into two major points. In the first point, we will be discussing the structural and intersecting marginalization and exploitation of women and in the second point, the self-redefinition of women through the nation-wide struggle.

1. Structural and Intersecting Marginalization and Exploitation of Women

Many African feminist scholars such as Charmaine Pereira^[1] and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie^[2] contend that the societies that emerged in post-colonial Africa are univocally and exclusively characterized by an unequal dualism between two categories. The duality mainly manifests itself through male dominance and the subordination and peripheralization of the female subjects at all the levels of the social organization. (Dogo, 2014: 263)^[6]. Women are as a result barely visible. Thus, this imperceptibility of women places them in a position of “*subalternity*”.

It is no wonder that the literature produced by both the first and third generations^[3] of African women writers is fraught with the image of oppressed and subjugated female figures. These women are caught up in the net of a system, patriarchy, erected to choke them. As a system, it incorporates and operates with other assorted sub-systems which mostly deprive women of their freedoms, i.e., freedoms of choice, movement and being. Although they belong to different generations, the works of Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are centered on the myths, roles and status of African women within their milieu. They decry the social conditions and realities women are confronted to in African and Western societies. In fact, there is an attempt from them to de-construct and unclasp throughout their oeuvres the aggregate of the different factors that marginalize and enthrall women. As such, the authors avail themselves of a variety of female characters they bring into being to highlight how the various social mechanisms yoked together and function as an oppressive and compact system purposed to maintain women at the bottom of the social ladder. In one word, one can descry from the arguments thereof that women’s conditions and lives are central to the content of Emecheta’s and Adichie’s major knowledge productions.

Although set in a different temporality and spatiality, *Purple Hibiscus* and *In the Ditch* deal largely with the complex intertwinement of different social-related situations and determinants such as femaleness, race, poverty, religion, patriarchy, cultural norms, motherhood, divorcement, and

joblessness that reduce women to subservience and make them dependent. Therefore, the two female writers’ novels critically discuss how the circumstances mentioned thereof keep women in an everlasting obsequiousness and vulnerability. It holds up the light on how the aforementioned elements rationalize the use of psychological and physical violence meted out to women. Moreover, emphasis is laid on the traumatizing experiences of women as a result of the different abusive situations they go through along the way. Using a comparative approach, the different issues therein are perused through the lives of the female characters portrayed in *In the Ditch* and *Purple Hibiscus*.

In the above-mentioned novels, the authors narrate the stories of exploited, oppressed, and ostracized women. Even though the women depicted in the two novels seemingly share the same fate that is relegated to the margin of their respective societies, still, they come from different social backgrounds and have different status. In addition, they live in different societies with different social realities, values and norms. Therefore, it is obvious that they are exposed to different types and levels of hardships and oppressive situations due to the cultural differences in their societies.

Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* is centered on the plights of a mother, Beatrice, and her daughter, Kambili. They live in an Igbo society where the male is the essential and the subject while the female is considered as the inessential and the object. Not only is there patriarchy as a constraint to women’s empowerment, but religion and cultural norms yoke together to form a suffocating system that puts women at a considerable disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. Adichie’s novel is set in modern Nigerian society, but entirely shaped around cultural norms. Nigeria as presented in the novel is at the confluence of traditions and modernity, whereas Emecheta’s *In the Ditch* points out the dolefulness of a young African woman, Adah, struggling to find her own life trajectory with her five children in a highly racialized Western-capitalist system in London after the quietus of her parents. In addition to being an orphan in a country traditionally and historically grounded in racism, Adah is bereft by her husband with her children without any type of financial assistance. Even though the female characters, Beatrice, Kambili, and Adah live in different worlds, they present some commonalities. Undoubtedly, some of the common points that bind them together are their subjectivity on the one hand, second-class citizen, and exploited status because of their identities as females and blacks on the other hand. In this case, identity becomes quintessential in exploring and understanding the why and wherefore of the sufferings of Beatrice, Kambili and Adah. After contextualizing the spatio-temporal framework of the two novels, it is noteworthy providing useful insights.

Ostensibly, the two writers are both writers committed to the exposure and the denunciation of the circumstances that considerably and negatively impede women’s lives. They are also sheer advocates of oppressed women’s rights, namely African women, whether living on or outside of the continent. For that reason, Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* gives an account on how women in a typical Nigerian Igbo culture are naturally and purposefully conditioned to follow a specific life trajectory and certain values informed by submissiveness, blind obedience, and self-annihilation through the character of Beatrice, tamed to the extreme by her husband Eugene. Adichie further argues that women’s

¹ Charmaine Pereira, “Locating Gender and Women’s Studies in Nigeria: What Trajectories for the Future? CODESRIA Gender Series I, Chapter I, p. 1.

² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “We Should All Be Feminists”, TEDxEuston, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc

³ African women writers are classified into three generations according to their seniority and epoch in writing. The first generation consists of women whose works are set between 1950s and 1980s. These women whom Buchi Emecheta is part of are considered as the pioneers of modern female African literature. The second generation alludes to those whose oeuvres are situated in between 1980 and 2000 and the last wave from 2000 to the present. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a key figure of the third generation.

tractability is made possible on the basis of the misuse and manipulation of religious and cultural norms by men to silence and exert their domination on the latter. For instance, Eugene is a wealthy businessman and orthodox Catholic who uses faith as an excuse to abuse his wife, Beatrice, physically and psychologically. He astutely uses religion to account for and enshroud his brutal and paranoid attitudes towards his wife and his daughter. As a result, Eugene Achikie savagely batters his wife and daughter, Kambili, on the ground that she breaks the mandatory Eucharist fast because of stomach cramps caused by the sudden apparition of her period. Without any attempt to know the reason why Kambili breaks her fast, Eugene ill-treats young Kambili:

He unbuckles his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather covered buckle. [...] Mama [Beatrice] raised her hands as it landed on her. I put the bowl that down just as it landed on my back (Adichie, 2009: 58).

Adichie implicitly avers through the passage the way in which men take advantage of religious norms infused with patriarchal ones to subjugate women and violate their physical integrity under their authority. Furthermore, Beatrice is gradually assaulted by Eugene over trivialities and these ceaseless beatings result in Beatrice's miscarriage twice. The vileness of Eugene's violent behavior is at the crossroads between religion and patriarchy. Women are then subject to a double marginalization, patriarchal system mingled with religion, an outcome of colonization:

You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, me? Your father [Eugene] broke it on my [Beatrice] belly. She sounded as if she were talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood. My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it [baby]. (Adichie, 2009: 135)

In the same vein, Emecheta in *In the Ditch* highlights the triple marginalization of African women immigrants in the Western societies, mainly in England through the main protagonist Adah. Emecheta shows the discrimination and blackballing of Adah as a divorced black woman with "must-feed five mouths" living in a country built up on racism. Added to her "otherness/foreignness" that is her blackness, status of divorcee and motherhood, Adah notwithstanding her job lives in extreme poverty and exhibits the sources of her ordeals and misfortune:

[I]t is curse to be an orphan, a double curse to be a black one in a white country, an unforgivable calamity to be a woman with kids but without a husband. (Emecheta, 1972:171) [7].

Adah explicitly epitomizes the difficulties and harsh realities African migrants, particularly the female ones, are faced with on a daily basis. Being a defenceless and poor Black, Adah is constantly rejected and belittled by her White neighbors, the Smalls in Pussy Cat Mansion. As a result of these incessant attacks on her personhood, Adah feels stripped of her humanness and continuously shrinks on herself. She starts to develop a complex of inferiority as she

surrenders on the different attacks against her. Emecheta confirms the racialization and the "superior status" of White people compared to Blacks in England: A Black person must always have a place, a white person already had one by birthright. (Emecheta, 1972: 18) [7].

This passage alludes to the derogatory status of Black women migrants in the Western societies. It also points out that the fate and rank of black people, namely women, in white-dominated societies are already sealed and decided before they are even born. It is innate, which accounts for their inferiority status.

Erel and others aver that: "racial inequality remains central and is socially pervasive in the [British] society." (2016: 1340). Therefore, Black women like Adah are regularly ignored as if they are sub-humans, i.e., people who do not deserve to be humanly treated. In fact, disregarding Black migrant women is a way of showing them their otherness and inferiority and at the same time their second-class status. They live in the margin of White-dominated societies like England. The protagonist Adah experiences the rebuff with a social clerk who turns a blind eye to Adah's complaints due to her foreignness, but at the same time pays attention to other White women's grouses. On top of brushing Adah aside, the clerk replies her condescendingly:

Trouble with Adah was that she could never speak good London English, or cockney. Her accent and words always betrayed the fact that she had learned English via English for Foreign Students. 'Well, I know about the dogs, but let's get the rent paid for a start,' said the clerk in a carelessly low voice. (Emecheta, 1972: 70) [7]

After being subjected to such terrible experiences, women develop and go through severe psychological traumas. The multiple mental breakdowns they suffer from bring them on the brink of despair and hopelessness. During these moments, women begin to ask existential questions such as the meaning of life for an individual living in the margin and why one should desperately cling to life if one's whole existence has always been full of sorrows, anxiety, and endless bitterness. *In the Ditch*, the continuously discriminatory acts directed against Adah sends her into a labyrinth of existential torment and self-doubt. The unremitting harassment of the landlord, the rejection of the Smalls and society to a larger extent, the condescending attitude of the clerk, and her poor living condition altogether affect her psychologically:

'Another crashing noise jarred into her happy thoughts from the outside. "Oh, not again! She [Adah] moaned to herself, nearly in tears.' (Emecheta, 1972: 2-3) [7].

In the same respect, Mama Beatrice is mentally terrorized through the use of fear, intimidation, and physical violence. Beatrice's psychological trauma is situated at two levels. On the one hand, she is so oppressed and silenced so much so that she has lost her *raison d'être*. She can no longer voice out for herself nor for other people. Her quietness is grounded in her double marginalization. Because, women are not supposed to speak out in the Igbo patriarchal society as well as in Christianity as they are traditionally and divinely deemed to be inferior to men. This fact is corroborated through a conversation between Beatrice and

her husband Eugene:

‘May be, anam asi,’ Mama said, ‘they should not visit Ifeoma’s house empty-handed.’ Papa [Eugene] stared at her [Beatrice] as if surprised that she had spoken.’ (Adichie, 2009: 61-62)

Like Adah in *In the Ditch*, Beatrice’s terrible experiences such as beatings break her into pieces. Just like Emecheta, Adichie also exhibits the depths of the trauma of battered women through Beatrice. Because of the incessant physical assault, Mama is plunged into a total abyss when she experiences two miscarriages. The violent mental breakdown of Mama Beatrice is deeply captured by the narrating voice and her daughter, Kambili:

She cried for a long time. She cried until my hand, clasped in hers, felt stiff. She cried until Auntie Ifeoma finished cooking the rotting meat in a spicy stew. She cried until she felt asleep, her head against the seat of the chair. (Adichie, 2009: 136)

The anaphora “*she cried*” exemplifies the harshness of Beatrice’s nervous collapse. On the whole, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie show through the female characters in *In the Ditch* and *Purple Hibiscus* the double marginalization of women in the Igbo society and many-folds in the English society. They reveal how the oppressive conditions they endure thrust them to a severe depression.

2. The Self-redefinition of Women through the Nationwide Struggle

Indeed, a close scrutiny of the two novels under study shows the naked truth of female subordination. The structural violence perpetrated upon women is portrayed through sexism. The subjugation of women is a double-edged pattern and heralded in pure social inventions. As such, it appears as a double “colonization” of the female subject, by not only structural categories such as tradition, cultures, religion and law, but also colonialism. These entities work in cahoots, with patriarchy as a weapon, to subdue women.

As regards the question of injustice, the dilemma that hangs on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s and Buchi Emecheta’s every word is the direction their female characters are offered to choose or create to reinvent themselves. In other words, what is their inclination in the crossroads between their fate and identity? Do they take their condition as a divine decree or merely understand it as a human feat to hold off?

Given the two writers’ deep-rootedness in the principles of feminism and their commitment to the empowerment of women, they cannot afford to dodge the option to restore their status. More interesting still, they gift their heroines with the might they need to counterbalance patriarchy and hoist them as almost role models in their social milieu.

More still, another noteworthy comeliness and hallmark of the two female writers’ works is the various threads of *bildungsroman* that are intertwined in postcolonial feminism and in the twists and turns of the plots to achieve self-redefinition.

Bildungsroman is a literary German concept: *bildung* which means formation or apprenticeship and *roman* which stands for novel. A good analysis of the concept ultimately justifies the assimilation of *Purple Hibiscus* and *In the Ditch* as

female *bildungsroman* as they lilt the two characters’ growth, apprenticeship and personal development.

‘The growth process, at its root a quest story, the process has been described as both ‘an apprenticeship to life’ and a ‘search for meaningful existence within society’ [...] The process of maturity is too long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist’s needs and desires and the views and judgements enforced by an unbending social order. Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who is then accommodated into society.’ (Noome, 2004: 126-127)^[13]

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the female protagonist, Kambili Achike, and her mother, Beatrice Achike, are good examples of female subjugation whose stories abide by the principles of *bildungsroman*. Kambili Achike is conscious of her “voicelessness” and disrespectful attitude of her father, Eugene, towards her. She does not have the strength and boldness, nor is she given free rein to express herself, but instead extols the virtues of her father as he treads down the whole family’s freedom of expression. Unlike Kambili, her cousin, Amaka does not beat around the bush to speak herself out as speech is almost innate in her and in their family. Their mother, Ifeoma, has educated them to listen and speak out the still small voice of conscience. For instance, Amaka does not hesitate to give her impression about the juice manufactured by the brewing company of the Achike family while her cousins fail to: she draws the attention of Kambili’s father to the excess sugar that is added to the juice and does not mince words to satire the lifestyle of her cousins:

It’s a little too sweet. It would be nicer if you reduced the sugar in it. Amaka’s tone was as polite and normal as everyday conversation with an old person. [...] Another knot formed in my throat, and I could not get a mouthful of rice down. [...] wondered how Amaka did it, how she opened her mouth and had words flow easily out. (Adichie, 2000:56)^[11]

Through the character of Amaka, the writer hints at the importance of women’s say and voice about their condition, but more importantly about their concern regarding the ongoing issues that ultimately influence their lives. Adichie joggles the “voicelessness” and submissiveness of Kambili and her own mother, to a certain extent, with the assertiveness and innate rhetorical gift of her cousins who do not fail to raise a query about issues like sexism, male hegemony, freedom, culture, the relationship between wealth and happiness and also religion. In actual fact, she hoists young Amaka as an archetype of female heroism and role model for her main protagonist to inspire from through the process of apprenticeship.

Similarly, *In the Ditch* provides a binary opposition between women’s silent acquiescence and voice. The self-redefinition of the main protagonist, Adah, is gradual. She becomes more confident in herself after she has experienced countless sad stories, perpetrated to her by her own husband, Nigerian nationals, the British people and the social system based on the categories of class, race and sex. Adah’s greatest personal feat is firstly the recognition of her

husband as an impediment to her personal growth and secondly, the decision she takes to part with him and start life anew with her five children in the social housing, the Pussy Cat Mansions, no matter how challenging and acute the situation has been for her and them to cope with there.

Just like Adichie's female characters, Amaka and Kambili, who are antipodes in terms of freedom of speech and truculence, Emecheta's female protagonist shares the same commonality. Even though Adah has the merits through the way she has mustered the courage to break loose from man's bondage, she still needs the help of fuller-assertive women, the like of Whoopey, to achieve self-realization. For instance, the latter does not mince words to tell the unvarnished truth to the clerk who comes to collect the rents from the different tenants at the Mansion. Whoopey reminds the clerk that if he refuses to take the four pounds she has come to give him for her rent, he judges not enough, she will not hesitate to hold it back and use it for her other expenses, which Adah fails to do, i.e., she needs the money for rent more than anybody, yet she gives it away candidly. To some extent, Emecheta juxtaposes the truculence of Whoopey with the acquiescence of Adah as a catalyst for her in the long journey of self-definition and reinvention:

'If you don't take that four pounds, you won't see it again. I'll go and spend it, and there'll be nothing for you to take from me and I'll tell them at the Town' all that you refused the money. You'd better take it and just mind your bleeding business [...] Okay?' It was pointless arguing with Whoopey. (Emecheta, 1972: 69)^[7]

As the stories of the two novels under review unfold, they waver from female intellectual "impotence" to self-realization. But what stands out is the growing fulfilment of some female characters' freedom and dream. Their reinvention is daily perceivable. In other words, the two female protagonists become aware of their subordination and incline to change their status through the mentorship of other emancipated women. From then on, it becomes obvious for them to set their goals and find the means and ways to achieve them. In fact, this is what accounts for the crucial need for education and acute sense of struggle for the most daring ones, but also solidarity and friendship in their personal and social agenda:

What is problematic is the exclusion of sisterhood as another basis for organizing social groups in a system where kinship is the context for the delivery of social welfare formally and informally and where associational life is very dynamic and could take different forms at different times. An exclusive model of women's solidarity groups as suggested [...] may undermine existing groups and the agency. (Afonja, 2005:13)^[3]

In fighting patriarchy, the two writers' novels provide vivid examples of emerging women. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Aunt Ifeoma constantly challenges her overzealous brother, Eugene, who uses his fortune, willpower and religion as a pretext to subdue his family. Eugene treads down people's dignity who end up being victims of their low social class:

'You know that the members of our Umunna, in fact everybody in Abba, will tell Eugene what he wants to hear. Do our people not have sense? Will you pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you.' (Adichie, 2000: 54)^[1]

But even though, the social status of her brother is not comparable with hers, Aunt Ifeoma is a tireless advocate of rightness and women's self-worth in front of Eugene, the patriarchal archetype. She is astute enough to understand her brother's psychological instincts and his smartness to compel people to do what he wants them to or even to blackmail them, if need be. He is a generous *benefactor*, but only to those who are loyal to him or worship the same God as him. Aunt Ifeoma and her late husband, Ifediora, are not hooked by his so-called altruism:

Ifediora was not afraid to tell the truth. But you know Eugene quarrels with the truths that he does not like. (Adichie, 2000: 54)^[1]

The self-development of some women is intrinsically related to their dedication to education. Even though they are seldom given the opportunity to go to school, the most ambitious often choose it as a medium to lean on to see their dream come true. The two novels provide useful insights regarding the importance of education in the realization of their personal growth. The two protagonists' life trajectory and age group are not the same, Adichie's heroine is coming of age and Adah still copes with her studies, but they understand the stakes of education in the formation of the self, which betokens their resilience and commitment to emancipation. Undoubtedly, Kambili and Adah do not delude themselves, they strongly believe that the only outcome on the borderline between school and poverty is emancipation. A flashback to Adah's young girl dream in *Second-Class Citizen*, embodies her inclination to school as the pinnacle of hope and last resort-she had to go to the Methodist High Girls' High school or die. (Emecheta, 1974: 21)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the protagonist's father, Eugene, believes in religion and school as the ways in which his children, Jaja and Kambili, can use to keep a high profile in their society. The fact remains that, he develops a sense of inferiority towards everything that is Western or White in comparison with his cultural background. He does not have the guts to query the value of education and religion that are given to his children. Analyzing the education of Black people in her essay, "The MIS-education of the Negro", Carter Godwin Woodson questions the dearth of relevance in the type of education Negroes were given in the industrial sector and the different types of training that were given to white people. She merely comes to the conclusion that chances are that the Negroes ended up to be unskilled to do well:

Negroes attended industrial schools, took such training as was prescribed, and received their diplomas; but few of them developed adequate efficiency to be able to do what they were supposedly trained to do. The schools in which they were educated could not provide for all the experience with machinery which white apprentices trained in factories had. (Woodson, 1933)^[17]

Besides, the ways in which women realize their dream and emancipation by way of sisterhood and solidarity hold a particular share. In the final analysis, we can ask whether their endeavors are uniquely calibrated to fight female subjugation or are they more committed to the spirit of nationalism and social equity sustainability.

The answer to this question lies in the nationalist perspectives that rebound in the two novels. Adichie and Emecheta dig deep in African feminism with a view to highlight the structural violence of African women with good examples and portrayal of emerging African women, but also draw the readers' attention to the contribution of female writers in the crystallization of African postcolonialism, the spear point that puts first the African cultural, political and economic integrity before any other. Therefore, the recognition and validation of women writings' nationalist discourses that stand out beyond the scope of feminist discourses should be seen as a pure social commitment from their part and not as a daring stance for them.

In the two novels under review, there are constant twists and turns, and displacement of purposes on the issue of nationalism. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the story puts under the spotlight the disillusionment that follows after independence, the issue of corruption, endemic poverty and war. The author succinctly hints at the Biafra war that broke out in the sixties and coups, which account for the restlessness of the protagonist's mind as it cannot escape the violence in the streets and the unfolding corruption of the police:

Papa told us, the politicians were corrupt, and the *Standard* had written many stories about the cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads. What we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. (Adichie, 2000:16) ^[1]

The author seems to satirize colonialism, the presence of missionaries on the African continent and its contribution to the indoctrination and cultural alienation of indigenous people with colonial schools and churches. At the mission school Kambili and her brother, Jaja, are taught to recite the pledge, blindly, abide by the Catholic precepts and behave like "civilized" children: I pledge to Nigeria my country/To be faithful loyal and honest. (Adichie, 2000:29) ^[1]

In fact, Kambili does not find it easy to recite the pledge, word for word. To her, the fact of reciting the pledge appears like a rejection of her own roots and a recognition of her acculturation, which denotes her attachment and love to her country. In this respect, Adichie and Emecheta have similar nationalist lilt in their novels.

The two writers talk about nationalist issues with the same commitment and vigor as their male counterparts. These more pronounced issues take into consideration the entire realm of postcolonialism as advocated by male pioneers in their literary works. In fact, the same stamina about the war for independence and liberation is perceivable in women's literary discourses as it is in male writers' works:

'[w]e want you to tell the world how the very people who fought for freedom in Zimbabwe are not yet free. We are just seated at home while others are enjoying. 'We are becoming fed up'. (Kilgore, 2009:135) ^[10]

In *the Dictch*, Emecheta talks about the trials African immigrants encounter and insists more on the category of class and its relationship to Black women's integration into the western capitalist system. Adah's family is typified as "a problem family". A family in which the woman generally plays the role of the father and mother and is not in a position to meet the daily vital needs of her children, the cases of Nigerians and African immigrants in precarious living conditions in Europe. The comeliness in Adah's situation is that; although, her life in the dole is beset with scourges, in no way does she want her low social status to strip her off her role of mother, but more importantly the love her children should have for their country:

She had tried to paint rosy pictures of Nigeria to her kids, the grateful palm trees, coconut-lemonade and all that [...] 'Don't tell them you are not proud of your country. (Emecheta, 1972: 66) ^[7]

The beauty of the passage lies in the fact that Adah seems to extol the natural wealth of her native land with its resourceful fauna, but actually only educates her children on African values and the virtues of retaining one's own cultural roots. This shows the author's concern about postcolonial realm and her astuteness to balance feminist issues and social commitment. Besides, this explains the importance of "activism" in the female characters' formation of self-identity. For example, in *Second-Class Citizen* the character of *Bill* is a central figure in the intellectual and behavioral reinvention of Adah as she is under his mentorship to become more committed and demanding in the genres of books she reads if she wants to have a better outlook on the world:

"He (Bill) liked Black writers. Adah did not know any Black writers apart from the new Nigerian ones, like Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa, and she did not know that there were any other Black writers. Bill tut-tutted at her and told her what a shame it was that an intelligent Black girl like her should know so little about her own Black people. (Emecheta, 1974: 152)

Another female writer's work that digs deep in the postcolonial discourse and spreads its tentacles to nationalism is Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The female protagonist, Tambudzei, can be likened to Emecheta's main character who nurtures their social and personal fulfilment. The relationship of Tambudzei with her cousin, Nyasha, is of one based on emancipation and culture-based consciousness. Even though, Nyasha wavers in the western and African cultures, she remains adamant that women's ignorance is degrading and the unique knowledge that prevails is an African-based one:

[s]he said, you had to know the facts if you were ever going to find the solutions. [...] And she helped me to enjoy my heady transition by pointing out books that were worth reading. (Dangarembga, 1989: 93-94) ^[5].

From the above, we can say that the personal growth of women is a long journey. More still, their emancipation is gradually achieved and succinctly woven from sisterhood, friendship and solidarity before it branches out and reaches

nation-wide issues. *In the Ditch* provides a more committed discourse to social matters. As the story unfolds, the female protagonist becomes more confident to gain ground in the fight against social injustice. Her friendship with the social worker, Carol, is a good instance. Adah does not hesitate to keep herself aloof from Carol and mount a protest against her dirty tricks and the British social system when she feels that the injustice exceeds all bounds. To realize this, the dwellers of the Pussy Cat Mansions stand as one and support one another under what they have in common, their dignity, freedom and adherence to social equity.

Conclusion

This paper uses the postcolonial feminism to debunk the various mechanisms that work as a system to keep African women on the margins of their societies thrived to unravel the different types and levels of African women's marginalization. It is woven from the African and Western societies as they are demonstrated in *Purple Hibiscus* with Beatrice and Kambili and *In the Ditch* through the main protagonist, Adah. It demonstrates that, although the two protagonists live in marginality, they are for different reasons due to the fact that they evolve in different societies with different social expectations and values. Women in African societies like Beatrice face a double marginalization characterized with patriarchy and religion while their black counterparts in European societies, namely in England are marginalized for multiple reasons: femaleness, blackness, motherhood, and loneliness. In addition to exposing the two-fold and multiple marginalization of African women, the paper also examined the capacity of these women to not only transcend their conditions but also to engage nation-wide social problems that go beyond their only emancipatory struggles. We explored through the female protagonists the various ways and means used by the subjugated women to re-invent themselves through the categories of friendship and solidarity. On the whole, the work demonstrates the different forms of oppression African women on the African continent as well as in the diaspora are faced with. It also maps out how these once subjected beings raise from their ashes embedded from their conditions to develop new transcending selves informed by leadership, entrepreneurship, self-redefinition, freedom struggles, and concerns for national questions.

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