

# Deflating Gender and Patriarchal Labeling: A Comparative Deconstruction of Abuse of Power in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Mohammed's *Habiba*

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## **Abstract**

*This paper sought to interrogate the portrayal of men as the architect of sexist exploitation and women as mere victims of patriarchal oppression in African literature. Oftentimes, gynocentric writers tell stories of women who are exploited by their male counterparts. The feminist writers blame men for the woes of women in patriarchal society. This paper employed womanism, one of the strands of Feminism in analysing the abuse of parental power in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Razinat Mohammed's Habiba with the view of unveiling the complicity of women in domestic violence, abuse of power and exploitation of weaker men and women within the household. The analyses of the focused texts reveal that men and women are jointly responsible for the continued subjugation of women in the society. The paper also found that abuse of parental power affects every member of the household irrespective of their biological sex.*

**Keywords:** gender labelling, patriarchy, abuse of power, womanism

## **Introduction**

Female struggle against patriarchy has given rise to gender disharmony, gender-based movements and the emergence of a body of literature often referred to as feminist literature or gynocentric works. African feminists like their counterparts in other climes challenge the systemic subjugation of women under the guise of marriage

and motherhood. They also attack religious institutions and other social institutions for adopting and further entrenching some patriarchal doctrines that encourage gender inequality in the society.

Safiya Yero gives us the major focus of the African feminist writers in these words:

All these (women's) works focus on the concerns of the African woman: her fears, her problems, her dilemmas, her wants, her needs, her desire, sorrow and disappointment and most importantly, the African women writers tell the stories of how a woman struggles daily, to deal with a patriarchal social and religious system, and at the same time, strives to carve a space for herself. (*Brackect mine*. Yero,120).

The feminist literature identifies patriarchy as the main stumbling block to the realization of the aim and objectives of the feminist movement. The author's main aim is to end sexist exploitation and patriarchal oppression and to ensure that all form of discriminations against women which inhibit the full development of their potentials are totally eradicated. This goal cannot be achieved unless the patriarchal structures in the society are dismantled. Consequently, patriarchy has received much critical attention than matriarchy. Matriarchy is used here to mean women domination of men. In fact, it has been argued that:

It is impossible to discuss African literature without talking about Patriarchy. African women pay attention to the ways that Patriarchy – that is, the psychological and political system that values the male higher than the female – use laws, traditions,

force, ritual, customs, education, language, labour (etc.) to keep women governed by men in both public and private life. African women have been silenced for too long about the crimes of traditional Patriarchy such as the abusive and dehumanizing institution of patriarchal polygamy, widow abuse, genital cutting, witch-hunting and women's lack of access to property and power in traditional society. (Yero 122)

In challenging male domination of the society, some of the African women writers follow the tradition of the mainstream feminists. Consequently, their works are replete with male characters – husbands and fathers – who exploit the women under their (men) influence. Olusola Oso observes that some “African female novelists, who can be categorized as the radical feminists have, as their category implies been radical in their response to the African male novelists' portrayal of women. These writers have demonized and bestialised male characters in their novels.” (Oso, 2018). He notes further that:

With the passage of time, and the growing popularity of feminism across the globe, the African feminist writers have increased considerably. Some of these writers, particularly the radical African feminist writers

evidently gave room for their feminist zeal to becloud their sense of objectivity. They see practically nothing enviable in men, and demonize the male characters in their novels

The effort here is not to downplay the contribution of feminist writers to the overall development of the African literature. For the avoidance of doubt, the feminist writers have contributed positively to the development of African literature by raising consciousness especially on the need to dismantle the patriarchal structures in the African society. As Omolola Odunowo puts it, "Women writers have taught women to stand up for themselves and what they believe in, through their works of prose fiction they have been able to show women a part of them that should voice out, not drown in the patriarchal abyss as society expects." (Odunowo, 2017). The concern here is that some of the writers, the radical feminists in particular, present simplistic and one-sided accounts that do not reflect the situation in real life. To them, all women are angels and all men are demons. Men are solely responsible for all patriarchal oppression. Yahaya Babakatun however refutes this claim:

Most critical works in writings by women both in Africa and African American societies are replete with questions of misuse and distortion of power and

privilege in a socio-cultural milieu in which the control of power and privilege seem to reside with the men, which they exercise at the expense of women. There seems to be divergent opinion from even women writers and critics, on the culpability of the men. Some critics believe that some women are accomplices and by implication are more culpable than the men. These women by conduct and assertion assist men to intimidate and subjugate women by endorsing the hypothesis of women inferiority. They thereby endorse the postulation of male psychoanalysts about women that denigrate other women." (BabaKatun)

With the passage of time, the public begin to associate feminist with male hating because of the negative portrayal of men in their works.

The female writers deliberately refrain from reporting the role of women in perpetuating some harmful patriarchal tradition. The male writers who are supposed to give their own side of the story, do not deem it necessary to respond to the radical feminists' claims. The reason for the silence of male writers on gender issues remains unclear. What is clear and indisputable is that their silence has created a huge gap in the area of gender studies, especially as it affects inter-gender intimate relationship and family life. This paper examined the

gap so created with the aim of finding a better way of reporting gender based issue, especially those affecting people at household level.

The paper is grounded in *Wonanism*, a deviant of Western or radical feminism. According to Mtan and Agyo,

Even though feminism was an emancipatory movement, it's approach was militant and sometimes violent and separatist. This approach made African women begin to birth other strands of feminism that are friendly with their cultural matrix. One of the strands is African feminism or womanism. (79).

Wonanism and feminism obviously have the same goal which is to end Patriarchy and all forms of patriarchal oppression. The major difference between the two gender based movements lies in their respective approaches. While Mainstream feminism emphasises confrontational and radical approach, Wonanism favours dialogue and diplomatic approach. Olusola Oso identifies different ways in which the female writers responded to the negative portrayal of women in African literature:

African female novelists have responded to this literary tendency which they found disturbing in two significant ways. Some, who can be described as womanists or liberal feminists, have

responded by empowering the women in their novels. They do this by either subverting the norm in the African society by assigning the role of the bread winner of the family to the women or by at least endowing them with psychological depth and economic independence. (Oso, 2018)

The womanists give balanced reports of gender issues unlike the radical feminists. They acknowledge that women are complicit in the subjugation of the female gender and the general exploitation of the vulnerable group in the society. Gregory Nwakunor reports the following comment attributed to one of the liberal feminists:

My work can be said to be anti-feminist, as I actually looked at women as the oppressors of other women, because the common thing we see is men oppressing women; if you read my works, you will see that some of those incidences in the text, I will stand to pontificate that women actually were the reason for all women suffering. For instance, in female circumcision, it is women who carry out this. If the women stop this act, will the men tell them they must continue? No. It is women who continue to do these bad things to other women. (*The Guardian* March 1, 2020).

The views expressed in the literature reviewed above show that the authors dwell more on dichotomous distinction of the genders. They lay too much emphasis on the male-female dichotomy in their attempts to explain the cause and consequences of patriarchal oppression. This paper however looked beyond gender labels on both the side of the agents of patriarchy (the persons that inflicts the pain) and that of their victims. By adopting a holistic approach, the paper sought to close the gap created as a result of the exaggeration of gender dichotomy in the reviewed literature.

#### **Papa Eugene as Patriarchal Figure**

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* exposes the damage that colonialism has done to Africa and Africans, albeit from womanist point of view. The monster, Papa Eugene is a colonial product. His inability to manage the conflict arising from the incompatibility of the African culture and the foreign way of life resulted in his untimely death among other misfortunes that befall the Achikes in the novel. Chinweike Iwuchukwu succinctly acknowledges that:

Just like the dictatorial regime is making the nation's heart bleed, Eugene Achike is also unwittingly allowing things to fall apart in his home, thanks to his fanatical brand of Catholicism. He expects perfection from his wife and children and deals with them ruthlessly, whenever they

prove to be less than perfect. Fear and uncertainty reign supreme here, with the poor woman and her two children living like prisoners, perpetually on edge. (Iwuchukwu, 94)

Ironically, his newspaper, The Standard Newspaper lampoons the dictatorial government of the day for being hypocritical, ruthless and intolerant. By juxtaposing his leadership style with that of the tyrannical military regime of the day, Iwuchukwu seems to be confirming that absolute power – irrespective of who is exercising it and where it is being exercised – is open to abuse.

As a patriarch, Papa Eugene rules his house with iron hand and would not give room for new ideas or contrary opinion. His only son Jaja attempts to oppose him by refusing to go for Holy Communion: "The wafer gives me bad breath... "And the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me..." (Adichie 3). But he replies firmly: "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that." (Adichie 3). When the boy (Jaja) maintains that he would rather die than take Holy Communion, Papa Eugene attacks him physically. We read that he:

(...) picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagerè, which Mama

polished often. It cracked the top shelf, swept the beige, finger-size ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures to the hard floor and then landed after them. Or rather it landed on their many pieces. (Adichie 3)

He is portrayed as a dreadful beast that silenced every other member of his family. No one dares to question much less refrain from carrying out his instruction, no matter how unreasonable it may be. Kambili recalls one of such incidents:

We always dropped in to visit Father Benedict after Mass. "Let me stay in the car and wait, *biko*," Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. "I feel vomit in my throat." Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. It seemed a long moment, but it might only have been seconds. "Are you sure you want to stay in the car?" Papa asked. Mama was looking down [...] "My body does not feel right," she mumbled. "I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car." Mama looked up. "I'll come with you. It's really not that bad." Papa's face did not change. (Adichie 29).

A rational human being would have granted the wish of the pregnant Mama Beatrice in the circumstance, but Papa Eugene insists that she follow him to see the priest. The helpless woman

obeys him yet he ruthlessly beat her up for daring to refuse to carry out his command in the first place.

The beating Mama Beatrice receives from her husband which symbolizes violence against women by their male counterparts produces unwanted fruits. Kambili, the narrator reports the incident in these words:

"There is blood on the floor," Jaja said. "I'll get the brush from the bathroom." We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water colour all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped" (Adichie 33). Their mother is admitted in the hospital after the beating and they are left behind to clean up the mess. They only get to know the source of the blood when the next day Mama Beatrice tells them that, "there was an accident, the baby is gone" (Adichie 34). Papa Eugene's show of masculinity in beating his wife results in the abortion of his own child among other losses.

Even though Papa Eugene is imbued with chauvinistic character such as seen in radical feminist literature, the author balances her story by presenting some male characters with desirable traits. The Catholic priest, Father Amadi is presented as a conscientious and independent minded male character in *Purple Hibiscus*. His

character contrast with that of Papa Eugene. Expectedly, Papa Eugene does not see Father Amadi as a good church leader: "That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him." (Adichie, 29). The narrator tells us that Father Amadi helped Aunty Ifeoma to bring the aged and ailing Papa-Nnukwu (Papa Eugene's father) to Nsukka for medical treatment. Eugene had abandoned the old Papa-Nnukwu in the village (Abba) because the latter refused to convert to Christianity. Father Amadi also identifies with the poor children in the neighbourhood. This act reveals his deep concern for the weak and the downtrodden. Womanism advocates all-inclusiveness by seeking to emancipate the deprived irrespective of their gender categorization. Aunty Ifeoma's concern for Jaja and Papa-Nnukwu (men) as well as the female victims of Papa-Eugene's cruelty demonstrates what womanism stands for.

Through Kambili's account in the novel, the reader is able to appreciate better the paradox of patriarchy, particularly as the "Mighty Man" (Papa Eugene) is destroyed by the "weak woman" (Mama Beatrice). His senseless show of masculinity profits him nothing but untimely and shameful death. His actions ultimately compel his wife to eliminate him with poison. Her word: "I started putting

the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor." (Adichie 290).

The silence that hovers over Eugene's house as a result of his senseless show of power and what precipitated the tsunami that ends the silence are conveyed in the following words:

I let my mind rake through the past, through the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than our lips. Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all; Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the veranda of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus; fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom.... a freedom to be, to do (Adichie 16).

Weaving imagery and figurative expressions together to give us a mental picture of how Eugene's dictatorship in the family came to be questioned, the narrator seems to be saying that people tend to revolt against their oppressor(s) as they become increasingly aware of the negative impact of the latter's actions on their lives. Aunty Ifeoma experimental purple hibiscus (page 91-92) symbolizes the different environment, idea, world view etc. that Kambili and Jaja are exposed to in

Nsukka. The ideas familiar to them – which the red hibiscus (page 10) growing in their house in Enugu symbolizes – are here juxtaposed with the ones they encounter for the first, just like they did the purple hibiscus, at Auntie Ifeoma's house. The author presents Auntie Ifeoma as an ideal womanist. Ikechukwu Orjinta writes that, "The womanist ideal woman is: The woman that knows who she is: the adult, mature, responsible, open-minded and child bearing mother. She is an honest and capable wife or partner." (Orjinta, 89)

### **Hamsatu: A Matriarch in a Patriarchal Society**

Hamsatu in the novel *Habiba* does not only hold on to the old set of beliefs and ideas; she ensures that every member of the household under her control accepts or at least upholds those beliefs which many considered outdated at the time.

Hamsatu takes advantage of the prevailing cultural cum religious practice that requires children to obey their parent, especially their mother, to silence Saleh. Sadia's comment on Saleh's predicament is telling:

She had asked him severally in the past why it was that he allowed his mother to control his life, he had answered that the Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him) wishes that every child remains in the good books of his parents,

especially the mother, to receive the blessing of Allah (SWT) and Al-Janna (paradise) it had made sense to her then but not anymore. She believed that a child could correct his parents if they were ignorant of the truth and were misleading their children. This woman had no right to decide for her son on matters like who to marry, divorce, what children were acceptable, and what children were not. (Mohammed 44)

Hamsatu's reasoning and decisions are largely influenced by the prevailing patriarchal practices in her environment. She compels her son Saleh to give Kande divorce "in three pronouncements." (Mohammed 13). The implication of giving divorce in three pronouncements is explained thus:

"A divorce that is given three times is irrevocable. This is known as talaq ba'in kubra. A talaq ba'in kubra means that the husband and wife cannot reconcile and be married again, not until after the wife has been married to and divorced from another man." (Refword 4).

Kande is thus sent out of her matrimonial home not because she



committed any crime known to any law of the land but simply because she bore three female children for Saleh. Yet we are told that:

Hamsatu herself had borne six girls, five of which died in infancy, leaving only Maimuna and an only son, Saleh. Her fears had been that her husband's name would terminate if he did not have sons in the lineage to carry on his family name. This had been her fears over the years that Saleh had been growing up. It had pushed her to get Kande to marry the young Saleh, then only seventeen. (Mohammed 7)

Obviously, Hamsatu exercises the power to choose wife for Saleh and the power to get Saleh to divorce his wife for whatever reason. Kande like Mama Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* suffers needless pain arising from the patriarchal practices in the society.

Hamsatu's actions which stem from the patriarchal doctrines around her contribute largely to the calamity that befalls Saleh and his family as narrated in the novel. We read that, "Sadiah had to protect her marriage. At that moment, she felt so sorry for the household; they were all victims of the old woman's hideous manipulations" (Mohammed 43).

Hamsatu is portrayed as a hypocrite. She is inconsiderate and

vengeful. She hates Habiba and Ummi and does not pretend about that. She reveals her wicked intention to get rid of the innocent girls in these words: "Ehenn? Anyway, it is that good-for-nothing daughter of Kande's that started it all. Don't worry, we shall solve you two as a problem sooner than you know" (31)

Yet she pretends to be a devout Muslim, often saying the daily prayers and making references to Islamic teachings when she attempts to justify her misdeed. While trying to give reason to support her plan to marry off the thirteen years old Habiba, she argues that Islam does not permit people to give birth outside wedlock. She tells Sadiya that, "Islam forbids it! Moreover, I will do anything within my powers to stop it from happening to my family. A child should be born the acceptable way, and he should not be cheated out of what belongs to his father." (Mohammed 43). The narrator reveals what Sadiah thinks of her mother-in-law:

Sadiah looked at the woman from the corners of her eyes, unable to discern in her mind between the devil and the creature she lived with...To her mind, the older woman's vessel was consumed by the double-faced devil with eyes in the back of his head, if ever there was a creature like that. She could not accept anyone saying that the Matron had any iota of good in her. (Mohammed 47).

**Abuse of Power in the Focused Text:  
A Comparative Analysis**

This section examined some shared traits of Eugene and Hamsatu as depicted in the focused novels in order to demonstrate that abuse of power is not gender-specific and to reveal the complicity of the female gender in the subjugation of women in African society

The analyses of the texts reveals that both characters are obstinate and close-minded. Eugene is unreasonably determined not only to erase every trace of African culture and uphold the European ways of life but also to compel other persons within his influence to do the same. In Anikwenwa's word, Eugene is "like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave." (p. 70). This remark which foreshadows the tragic end of Eugene in the novel, is based on the African (Igbo) proverb which says that only a stubborn fly follows the corpse to the grave. Indeed, Eugene's obstinacy resulted in his untimely death.

Similarly, Hamsatu stubbornly rejects any idea or opinion that runs contrary to the old tradition she knows. Girl-child education is alien to her and she is not prepared to listen to any argument in favour of it. Saleh tries to make her see things differently: "Please! The girl is, in fact, a pupil who is only in Primary five. I had no opportunity to go to school when I was young, so I would like my children to go to school until such a time when I can no longer afford it, or they are unable to pass their exams." (32). But

Hamsatu remains adamant. She argues that at Habiba's age (13 years) she was already a mother (Mohammed 43). She explains further her position on the subject thus:

"I don't want Saleh to make a mistake by allowing that daughter of Kande's to grow wild like Abubakar's daughter who brought shame to her family by getting pregnant out of wedlock; all in the name of going to school." (Mohammed 43).

It goes without saying that such abuse of power affects members of the households negatively. The victims here, as one would expect, are women: Mama Beatrice and Kambili (in *Purple Hibiscus*) as well as Kande, Habiba, Ummi and Sadia (in *Habiba*). The male members of the households are equally affected. We are told that Sadia, "felt so sorry for the household; they were all victims of the old woman's hideous manipulations" (Mohammed 43). All the members of the household including the supposed head of the family, Saleh, suffer needless pains as a result of Hamsatu's abuse of parental power. Hamsatu is obviously the agent of patriarchal oppression here. Like Papa Eugene who inflicts pains on the helpless Mama Beatrice as a result of which she had miscarriages, Hamsatu makes lives unbearable for members of her household.

Another important revelation from the analyses is that both characters dominate other members of the household they belong. Hamsatu decides who her son marries; the type

of children such woman should bear; whether or not Habiba is ripe for marriage; and whether it is proper to give her as a fourth wife to Alhaji Zubairu who is her grandfather's contemporary. When Saleh attempts to oppose her, she silenced him saying, "Schools? Are you mad? Do you want that daughter of Kande's to bring shame to this family?" (Mohammed 32).

Similarly, Papa Eugene decides the position his children must take in the class and which of the Catholic Priests hears the confession of the members of the household. He also draws the timetables that spell out what the children do at home and even at Auntie Ifeoma's house in Nsukka. He decides who comes into the house and who is not allowed to enter his compound; his own biological father, Papa-Nnuku is one of such people that are not allowed into his compound. He does not respect people he termed worshippers of idol, irrespective of their age and social status. And so he orders his father's age mate, Anikwenwa out of his house saying, "What is Anikwenwa doing in my house? What is a worshipper of idols doing in my house? Leave my house!" (69).

Clearly, Papa Eugene is a symbol of masculinity and misogyny. His domination of members of his household symbolises the patriarchal domination that womanists are determined to eliminate in both domestic and public spheres. Like Papa Eugene, Hamsatu controls other

members of her family. Her preference of male children over female children lies at the centre of the collapse of Saleh's marriage to Kande. The preference of male children to female children is one of the practices that womanism condemns. Womanists advocates equal opportunity for all, irrespective of gender labels. Habiba, the title character becomes a school dropout not because she is unable to pass her examinations, but because Hamsatu single-handedly gives her in marriage to Mallam Zubairu. Habiba reflects on the impact of Hamsatu's abuse of power on the family: "in her mind's eyes, she saw herself in some years to come: a half-illiterate, old woman with numerous children, because she knew there was no escaping for her, at least, not with Sadia's new moves because as it were they had to survive." (Mohammed 169).

Papa Eugene's family are victims of male domination while the members of Hamsatu's family are victims of female domination.

As agent of patriarchy, Hamsatu uses marriage as a tool of exploitation of women. The female children from Kande are like a burden to her. The presence of Habiba and Ummi in the house reminds her of "Kande's failure" to give her the grandson(s) she wanted at all cost. The only way to get rid of them without attracting public condemnation is to give Habiba out in marriage at the age of thirteen. Earlier, she had asked Saleh to divorce Kande, knowing fully that the latter will

naturally leave with Habiba and Ummi as they were too young then to be separated from their mother. The sudden reappearance of the two girls comes to her as a surprise because she had warned Saleh never to seek after Kande and her children. Saleh had to explain how the girls came back: "I did not go to Kande's place, Mother; I made you a promise never to go to her. The children came of their free will" (24). Here, Hamsatu manipulates divorce/marriage to settle scores with Kande and to punish the female children she gave birth to.

In *Purple Hibiscus* we see how some women contribute to the perpetuation of male domination of women. This is evident in the conversation of some women in Papa Eugene's house in Abba: "*Nekene*, see the boy that will inherit his father's riches!" one woman said, hooting even more loudly, her mouth shaped like a narrow tunnel. "If we did not have the same blood in our veins, I would sell you my daughter," another said to Jaja." (Adichie 65).

These women play minor roles in the novel yet their comments reveal that they endorse some harmful patriarchal traditions. By referring to Jaja as "the boy that will inherit his father riches," the woman is suggesting that Kambili who is with him at that moment has no share in their father's property. She is obviously endorsing the custom that exclude female children from inheritance of landed property. The author through her work denounces the

discrimination against women on the matter of inheritance in some parts of Igbo land. Another issue of concern from the women's comment is the issue of high bride price. The woman will "sell her daughter" to a rich man or a rich man's son like Jaja. The rich suitor will pay high bride price to have her daughter. Here, the girl child is objectified, treated as a mere property that can be bought and sold just like the way slaves were treated in the olden days.

Also, Mama Beatrice is determined to remain in Eugene's house in spite of his cruelty because of the attitude of such women that would do anything to get a rich man as a son-in-law. She expresses her worries in these words:

"Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go?" She did not wait for Aunty Ifeoma to respond. "Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them, even, and not to bother paying a bride price?" (Adichie 175).

The materialistic mothers do not only "sell" their daughter to the highest bidder but also create fear in the mind of women who would have otherwise quit an abusive marriage. The avaricious mothers here represent women who oppress other women. Adichie presents Aunty Ifeoma as a symbol of womanism. She says to

Mama Beatrice, “*Nwunye m*, sometimes life begins when marriage ends.” (Adichie 53)

And when her nonagenarian father, Papa-Nnukwu says that, ““My spirit will intercede for you, so that Chukwu will send a good man to take care of you and the children.”” Her reply is, “Let your spirit ask Chukwu to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask,” (Adichie 60). To her, marriage and motherhood is optional, not compulsory.

It is evident that Hamsatu and Papa Eugene dominates their respective households but their method of control differs. Papa Eugene uses his wealth to secure obedience. He is a philanthropist. We read that:

Papa wrote a cheque and handed it to the usher, telling her he did not want to make a speech. When the M.C announced the amount, the priest got up and started to dance, jerking his behind this way and that, and the crowd rose and cheered so loudly it was like the rumbling of thunder at the end of the rainy season. (Adichie 90)

Papa Eugene weaponized his wealth whenever his power is challenged by anyone around him. He uses his wealth to secure obedience from others. His biological father is abandoned and neglected because he refuses to convert to Christianity. No one dares to challenge Papa Eugene on the subject, not even the priest in Abba.

His widowed sister whom he refused to help because she does not share his fanatical idea tells us the reason why people are afraid to confront him: “everybody in Abba, will tell Eugene only what he wants to hear. Do our people not have sense? Will you pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you?” (96). But there is this man who would not join the bandwagon and that is Anikwenwa. He come to Papa Eugene’s house in Abba and tell him to his face that he (Eugene) is, “like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave.” (p. 70). Eugene refuses to heed Anikwenwa’s advice. Instead he ordered the old man out of his house.

Hamsatu on the other hand controls Saleh and other members of the family by playing the victim. She uses her old age to gain sympathetic response from Saleh. She would cry and ask her late husband (Saleh's father) to come and witness how his son is mocking her openly. Out of pity and fear that the old woman could die of grief, Saleh accepts to do her wish. But a day came when Saleh tells her that, "That blackmail will not work on me in this case." (Mohammed 51). She had cried in her usual manner:

A woman is nothing without a husband *wooo*

An old widow is wretched like a barren woman *wooo*

Death is better than disgrace at the hands of your own child *wooo*

A child that suckled these breasts on my chest *wooo*

Mustapha, do you see what you have left me in? *wooo*

I have become a mere spectacle of insults for your son? *Wooo*

But Saleh would not budge. We are told that, "That night the old woman went on hunger strike. She will not eat the food of people who have no respect for the wisdom of the elder." (Mohammed 54).

### Conclusion

This paper has found that the simplistic reporting of the complex phenomenon as sexist exploitation in feminist literature robs the works of verisimilitude which is a vital ingredient in fictional accounts. The feminist writers' style of demonizing the male gender while exonerating the female gender from liability in the matter of patriarchal oppression has created stereotypes and avoidable gender disharmony. The womanists' style of giving balanced reports of abuse of power by men and women at both public spheres and domestic levels reflects the situation in real life unlike that of the radical feminists. The paper juxtaposes the abuse of parental power in the focused texts which follow the womanists' style and concludes that women are complicit in the denigration of the female gender, particularly in the African society. It is therefore imperative to report gender-based violence and all forms of patriarchal exploitation with deep sense of responsibility and with the

aim of finding a solution to the intractable problem.

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