



A Stiwaniist analysis of female figures of academia in Emecheta and Adichie's selected novels

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According to the Stiwaniist theory, colonialism, oppressive traditional structures, and African men (sometimes women too) can all impede social reform and contribute to gender inequality in Africa. Various studies highlight the importance of formal education in contributing to the emancipation of women in contemporary societies, despite challenges brought by the aforementioned obstacles. The choice to discuss two highly esteemed African female novelists who are from different generations of writers is imperative in tracking the evolution of formal female education in lightening the patriarchal weight in black societies. Through a close reading and thematic analysis of Emecheta's *Double Yoke* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, this study shows that despite being confronted with sexist resistance in Nigeria between the 1970s and 1980s, black female university lecturers such as Miss Bulewao and Ifeoma serve as agents of socio-economic transformation cultivated by egalitarianism. In addition, the discussion on Obinze's mother in Adichie's *Americanah* highlights that while there are systems which are counter women's liberation stemming from society's sexist ideologies, the 21st century is showing an adjustment to the implications of the newly-educated African woman, especially as a professional and mother.

Contribution: Through the adoption of Stiwaniism as a theoretical lens, this study contributes to the existing literary scholarship of African feminisms that advocate for a collective activism to combat gender disparity, with women as active participants. This is with particular attention to how sexism, as underpinned by neocolonialism and traditional ideologies, continues to oppress girls and women despite the influence of formalised education, which can also be attributed to women's economic dependence. Through the analysis of academic female characters in selected classical novels by Emecheta and Adichie as primary sources of data, the current article reveals the novelists' prophetic fictional narratives regarding the challenges and successes faced by higher education in addressing female marginalisation. This study is important for the present milieu because it emphasises the challenge of the continued exponential increase in gender bias against black female lecturers and scholars in and outside the academy, highlighting that women's access to and improved enrolment numbers in higher education institutions does not necessarily abolish gender inequality in education.

Keywords: academia; feminism; gender; gender disparity; higher education; transformation; Stiwaniism.

Introduction

For many years feminist literature has highlighted factors that perpetuate gender inequality and hinder a total transformation that is comprised of empowered and totally liberated women. In *Re-creating ourselves: African women and critical transformations*, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) emphasises the urgency of a critical development that is fostered by sociological, economic and historical transformation to ensure female emancipation in Africa. In the foreword to *Re-creating ourselves: African women and critical transformations's* the theorist mentions that black women consider social recognition and dignity as well as a space to freely act and live with joy and responsibility as significant aspects of their liberation (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). Formalised higher education, as a domain that has been previously denied to African girls and women for the longest time, has been identified as one of the tools that can equip women to gain some equality, and this has been portrayed in feminist and womanist literatures such as the writings of Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. According to Chirimuuta (2006) and Baten et al. (2021), education is one way in which women can emancipate themselves from the grip of patriarchal culture underpinned by male domination.

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This study applied a purposive sample of Adichies's *Double Yoke* (1983), *Purple Hibiscus* (2012) and *Americanah* (2013) to thematically analyse female lecturers (who act as transformative figures in their patriarchal societies) as symbols of education. Although the aforementioned authors were born in different generations, their selected literary works include the settings of institutions of higher learning to proffer progressive societies through female academics. These settings include the University of Calabar in *Double Yoke*, the University of Nigeria in *Purple Hibiscus* and Nsukka University in *Americanah*. The novelists' privilege of having acquired tertiary education or being exposed to universities has aided in their creation of female characters who prove that education encourages progressive and egalitarian ways of thinking about life in general, and most importantly as noted by Adu-Gyamfi and Osei-Egyir (2023), boosts an assertive attitude in women. However, this is not to suggest that all university- or college-educated women cease to be victims of gender prejudice, because there are other factors that are responsible for the marginalisation of women. Rydström and Gill Michael (2008) explain that despite the improvement in female school enrolment and work, there are still some disparities that are propagated by customs and old traditions that marginalise women. Thus, one of the main concerns of the current analysis is the challenges that educated African women are confronted with in societies that insist on viewing women as second-class citizens, despite sociopolitical and economic changes that are expected to improve the position of women. These changes were mainly brought about by the collapse of formalised colonialism, which led to the inclusion of women in various political and social spheres, as well as the increase in the numbers of women studying in universities and being employed outside of the home. Even though *Double Yoke* and *Purple Hibiscus* are set around the mid to late 20th century and *Americanah* is set between the late 20th century and early 21st century, the authors depict education as a liberatory tool for women throughout history.

Thus, this article is grounded in Ogundipe-Leslie's social transformation including women in Africa (STIWA or Stiwanism) as a theoretical lens to support the main argument. The main argument emphasises the urgency of a comprehensive transformation in Africa to uplift the position of women in the continent. The structure of this article begins with a synopsis of the theory employed, followed by an overview of the past and current state of the relation between gender and education in Africa, with particular focus on Nigeria. Thereafter, the article provides summaries and thematic analyses of the selected novels and ends with a conclusion of the findings.

Theoretical framework

In their quest to achieve gender parity in the continent, African feminisms (such as Stiwanism) realise that alongside economic and political developments, the plight of women needs to be addressed in line with these improvements. This means that changes in government and institutional policies

must reflect in practice wherein equality denotes equity. By adopting Stiwanism as a theoretical perspective, this article supports Banu and Kanimozhi's (2020:2206) view that 'Stiwanism is a unique way to study African feminism as it relates to history, politics, race, gender, economics and socio-dynamics'. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:229) emphasises the recognition that the biggest adversary of women are the systems that oppress and subordinate them, as well as individuals who encourage inequality. To support this view, the theorist outlines the following as obstacles hindering gender parity: colonial and neocolonial systems; repressive traditional structures; the African man and woman themselves by sometimes accepting oppression (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). With regard to female education, patriarchal systems during colonialism, which were also racial, excluded black women from accessing education, thus depriving them of better economic opportunities and independence. According to Baten and colleagues (2021:2), the introduction of Western formalised education was administered disproportionately, giving more opportunities to male students. While institutionalised colonialism may have ended, the neocolonial dispensation presents new challenges despite women's access to university education and employment as academic practitioners. In addition, traditional belief systems that continue to emphasise female domesticity contribute to the limited enrolment of women in higher institutions of learning, making it difficult for those who are enrolled to successfully complete their qualifications and present contradictory dualities for female academics (Bueskens & Toffoletti 2018). Therefore, Stiwanism advocates that such structural patterns that preserve sexist ideologies and practices between men and women should be changed. Most importantly, as an Afrocentric paradigm, Stiwanism is rooted in a call for collaborative and collective efforts of the whole society, with women as active participants, in ensuring the transformation of gender, politics and society in general. In line with Rydström and Gill Michael's (2008) view that many policies of development are said to be implemented by the very institutions that have blocked women's freedom, Stiwanism's call for the active participation of women recognises the aforementioned ineffective practice of the marginalised being spoken for while they remain oppressed. Therefore, the analysis of characters such as Bulewao, Ifeoma and Obinze's mother, who are actively instilling and advocating for egalitarianism, represents this theory's support for women as vital in the promotion of a social transformation that includes the liberation of women.

Education in Nigeria

The colonial (British) incursion in Nigeria that occurred in 1884 saw the introduction of formal education in Nigeria and most, if not all, Anglophone African countries in the continent. This educational system was somewhat gender biased, because in order for the colonial government to simplify communication with the native peoples and train them to serve the colonists, black men were given preference over black women in attending these schools (mostly through missionaries), which equipped them with skills to be cooks

and clerks, among others (Jaiyeola 2020:10). Although the positions that black men occupied at the time were often menial, they placed those men in a better economic position than black women. Consequently, African native women were relegated to the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, because they had little to no economic independence as a result of being restricted to unpaid labour in the home and rural farming. As a result of this history, black women are still catching up to the present day, and Omolewa (2006) explains that such a disparity is rooted in the colonial system of education, which alienated women from economic and educational opportunities.

The admission of a majority of black men in Western education training contributed to the high disparity of literate men and illiterate women in early colonial African societies. According to Oyebolu (2019:441), the advent of Western education created a gap between the black man and woman. Despite the fact that the British colonial rule ended over half a century ago, their sociocultural and political practices have been subconsciously passed on throughout different generations, and legacies have continued to thrive even up to this day in postcolonial Nigeria. The neocolonial political and socio-economic systems are the main drive that facilitate Western sexist ideals. Makama (2013:121) explains that before mid-20th century, patriarchal attitudes in Africa about gender roles resulted in some parents only seeing the relevance of education for boy children over girls, especially when there were limited resources to enrol all the children in school. Thus, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) is correct to cite colonialism and neocolonialism as the first mountain on the African woman's back, because the colonial settler introduced Western education and, from the onset, gatekept it from the native woman, and the current postcolonial African community still suffers the remnants of this sexist practice despite initiatives by democratic governance.

As a way to combat gender inequality in the educational sector and improve society's development, various African states implemented free education for different levels of learning, with Nigeria being one of the first. During the 1950s in certain parts of the country and in the 1970s, primary education was introduced for the whole nation (Onojete n.d.). In addition, different Nigerian government administrations established over five policy initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s. These include the Blueprint on Women's Education in 1986, the Nomadic Education Programme in 1986 and the National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-Formal Education in 1991. Despite these initiatives and other changes in the political and economic spheres, the 2012 Gender in Nigeria Report suggests that out of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index, Nigeria is ranked 118th, which is still a worrisome position. The aforementioned is often the result of stubborn systems in societies that refuse to support female education. Aja-Okorie (2013:273) reports that out of 77 million children not in school, 56% are girls, while women make up two-thirds of illiterate adults. Although globalisation is gradually improving the statistics of women's literacy in Nigeria and

most parts of the African continent, wherein the percentage of female scholars is also increasing, other obstacles (which include oppressive cultural structures and patriarchal men) continue to prevent or discourage some women from studying as far as they desire. For those women who succeed in going far in acquiring qualifications and end up working in the academic space, they are met with hostility which makes their lives difficult, wherein the unfortunate and those who are not resilient remain oppressed.

Based on this discussion, it cannot be denied that when the British left Nigeria, it proved to be a struggle to abolish the patriarchal ideologies which were a combination of indigenous and colonial patriarchy (Ellsworth 1991; Gobo 2020). The main contention was that if women and girls are encouraged to go to school and work outside the home, there would be a gap in the running of the household and women would cease to respect their husbands. Evidently, these are excuses to cover up the pushback for women's freedom, especially because education and employment contribute to solving the oppression of women as they guarantee economic freedom, which in turn may result in social and spiritual independence (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993:115). Thus, the existing educational policies and those that are still to come can only achieve so much and require sociopolitical will to enforce gender equality and equity for female students, as well as lecturers in both private and public domains.

Synopses of novels and contextualisation

Double Yoke

Set in postcolonial Nigeria (mostly at the University of Calabar) in the 1980s, this novel is a first-person narration of a Creative Writing class assignment that is given by Miss Bulewao, through the telling of events by a student called Ete Kamba, who writes about his love journey with Nko. Miss Bulewao can be regarded as the voice of Emecheta, as she also worked in the Creative Writing Department at the University of Calabar at some point in her teaching career. This claim is supported by Ogunyemi (1996:267), who avers that *Double Yoke* was prompted by the novelist's one-year return to Nigeria (University of Calabar) as a Creative Writing professor after being in England for almost 20 years. Upon the realisation that her home country was lagging behind in some aspects of social transformation, which include gender disparity, Emecheta's biggest concern at the time was to address the retrogression of Nigerian systems which have remained since she left (Ogunyemi 1996). It is through Ete's narration of his conflict with his girlfriend Nko regarding the question of her sexual chastity that Miss Bulewao's Stiwanist voice emerges. During a conversation wherein she is giving Ete feedback on the writing assignment, she points out to him that as a soon-to-be graduate, he has failed to critically assess his perspectives on men and women's sexuality; that is, most of his justifications are based on biased religious and cultural ideologies.

The novel also depicts the dual burden of tradition and modernity, which is carried by many postcolonial African women who seek to fit in and negotiate belonging in hybridised societies that are characterised by indigenous and modern cultures. Bedana and colleagues (2019:101) explain this conflict as part of 'a result of the African's hurt psyche due to colonialism, which incapacitated the native to meaningfully exist in both the traditional and modern world'. According to Booker (1998:100), *Double Yoke* greatly details the challenges encountered by the ambitious Nko, who seeks university education while battling with the expectations of feminine behaviour in her village. In addition, Nko and other female students observe the difficulties that educated African women have to deal with, particularly in the academic space, and that gives them an idea of what their own futures may look like. It is the realities of lecturers like Dr Edet that depict that while women may have access to education and work as academics, there still exist challenges that are brought about by the contradictory nature of their existence as African and female.

Purple Hibiscus

Originally published in 2003, written during her senior year at Eastern Connecticut State University, *Purple Hibiscus* is Adichie's first popular novel and has been well received all over the world. Although Adichie does not explicitly mention what years the novel is set in, it can be assumed to be around the 1970s in independent Nigeria, judging by the political climate. This was immediately after the Nigerian Civil War, when the country was settling economically and politically. Throughout the novel, Adichie mainly explores patriarchy through the family of a staunch Catholic man (Eugene Achike) who is referred to as Papa, and who conveniently uses religion and culture to oppress and dominate his wife, children and servants. The novel also includes the family of Ifeoma, who is Eugene's sister and a lecturer in Nsukka. According to Okpeicha-Gnanvi (2016:45), although Eugene and Ifeoma's households hold Catholic beliefs, they are paired to suggest an alternative upbringing for their children as well as family values. Their varying interpretations of religion and culture are the main cause for these different socialisations.

Ifeoma's career as a lecturer and scholar is pertinent for this paper's discussion because of its influence on her parenting and general social values. For one, she is juxtaposed with her sister-in-law Beatrice, who is depicted with a repressed personality, partly because of a lack of a university degree and financial independence. Kambili is able to differentiate between how her mother and aunt carry themselves differently and draws inspiration from her fearless aunt, who also brings up her children in a desirable way which portrays fairness.

Americanah

Americanah is Adichie's third novel, and among other accolades, it was selected by the *New York Times* as one of the

10 Best Books in 2013 (Koziet 2015:98). The novel mainly explores the intersections of race and gender by narrating politics of representation for an African woman (Ifemelu) navigating a Eurocentric and patriarchal society. *Americanah* has flashback narrations of Ifemelu's time in Nigeria which include her love story with Obinze and her admiration of Obinze's mother. One of the things that strikes and fascinates Ifemelu is the rumour that her high school boyfriend and his mother's move was a result of Obinze's mother having fought with another professor at her previous university. Moreover, the assertiveness and confidence with which Obinze's mother speaks assures Ifemelu that it is possible for a woman to not conform to some of the debasing standards that are set by the patriarchal status quo.

It can be deduced that some of the qualities that Ifemelu adores about Obinze's mother may be attributed to the influence of her education and employment at a higher institution of learning, which is perceived as a platform representing progression and critical thinking. For instance, as compared to Ifemelu's mother and some women, Obinze's mother raises her child in a genderless manner for most of the time by moving beyond the boundaries of patriarchy, and as such, Obinze grows up to support female freedom. The aforementioned claim is seen in how he is attracted to Ifemelu's confidence and rebellion while detesting his wife Kosi's desire to always be likeable and adhere to patriarchal standards.

Analysis and discussion of novels

Academia and the new woman

As mentioned in the novel synopses, some of the characters in *Double Yoke*, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* are women who have acquired postgraduate qualifications and work in institutions of higher learning as academics. In *Double Yoke*, Miss Bulewao and Dr Edet are central to the current analysis of higher education as both a transformative tool and a threat to patriarchy. Hunter (2006:181) reveals that 'most of Emecheta's writing illuminates the significant need for education as well as self-determination among young women in their quest for individuality and independence'. Miss Bulewao is introduced in the opening of the novel as a new lecturer who is 'eloquent in her talk of reform, what she would like to see done and undone in the university as well as Nigeria' (p. 1). Her focused outlook and sociopolitical soundness can be attributed to her educational training (Divala 2014). Emecheta (1983:1) writes that in the early 1980s, a black woman such as Miss Bulewao who displayed traits which are traditionally perceived as masculine, such as being outspoken, assertive, self-confident and sure of herself, was still unusual in Nigeria. The fact that this lecturer had written over six books was a marvel to the fourth-year students at the University of Calabar, and Ete Kamba even wishes that Miss Bulewao was a man (p. 2). Ete Kamba's wishful thinking is a result of the colonial and patriarchal conditioning which associates femininity with meekness and maintains that only men should be assertive and confident. According to hooks (2001:59),

this socialisation is problematic because it teaches both men and women that self-assertiveness is a threat to femininity, particularly because firmness does not complement hegemonic masculinity when embodied by women. Instead, female non-subordination intimidates male dominance (Folberg et al. 2022; Schippers 2007). Thus, the students' immediate perception of their new lecturer as an uncommon woman buttresses Stiwanism's perspective that neocolonial patriarchy and oppressive traditional structures persistently inform sexist thinking.

Ete Kamba's initial thoughts about their Creative Writing lecturer being a strange African woman are cemented when he hears her views on the double standards to which men and women are held in traditional societies, particularly in relation to sexual behaviour. As a result of being exposed to diverse environments and studying, especially abroad, Miss Bulewao attempts to highlight that it is wrong of Ete to chastise his girlfriend Nko for possibly not having been a virgin before their sexual encounter, while he does not consider his virginity (p. 161). Although female sexual freedom may have still been paid minimally sufficient attention in Africa around the 1980s and in prior years, Miss Bulewao had been exposed to discourse on sex politics and strategies in the United Kingdom, which gained traction from the early 1960s (Brewitt-Taylor 2017; Epochi-Olise & Monye 2021). According to Ete, Miss Bulewao's gender-conscious mentality is Westernised and somewhat out of touch with the African reality, because male chastity is not of much concern. The perception of 'Westernised women' was popular in Nigeria at the time, wherein women like Miss Bulewao were regarded as African daughters who had been to the United Kingdom and become 'been-tos' who were perfect in hypocrisy (Ogunyemi 1996). This means that in the eyes of those who remained in Nigeria, women who had travelled abroad were viewed as pretending to be unfamiliar with African customs by arguing that their homelands were backward, especially when compared to the Western world. In contrast, Addison (2010:72) avers that the word 'Westernised' is a catch-all label used by non-Western conservatives to describe any member of a non-Western society who attempts to claim any personal freedom for herself or others. To a large extent, Ete's perspective on female sexual behaviour is informed by patriarchal Western religious ideology and cultural beliefs that promote female chastity, as seen through cultural customs such as virginity testing and religious scriptures. Bhana (2016:475) asserts that respectable femininities are usually constructed by associating them with nonsexual identities and thus depriving women of sexual freedom. For this reason, Stiwanism asserts that the welfare of women's bodies and selfhood should be one of the fundamental concerns of African feminisms (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). Thus, by dismissing Miss Bulewao as out of touch with the African reality, Ete's patriarchal standpoint makes him a stumbling block in the way of social transformation by maintaining a sexist ideological attitude concerning female sexual behaviour.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, a deviant femininity similar to that of Miss Bulewao is portrayed by Kambili's descriptions of her aunt, who is characterised by words that signify constant boldness, fearlessness, leadership and confidence, as compared to Kambili's meek and subservient mother. During Ifeoma's Christmas visit, Kambili cannot help but watch every movement that her aunt made, nor can she tear her ears away. 'It was the fearlessness about her, about the way she gestured as she spoke and the way she smiled to show that wide gap' (p. 76). Furthermore, Kambili notices how differently her aunt speaks to Eugene, and it makes her heart beat irregularly. The fact that Auntie Ifeoma 'uses a flippant tone and does not seem to recognise that it is Papa, that he was different and special, made Kambili want to reach out and press her aunt's lips shut and get some of that shiny bronze lipstick on her fingers' (p. 77). While higher education cannot solely be attributed to women's ability to be assertive, Beatrice and Ifeoma's distinct characters portray the effect that being a university graduate can have on a woman's worldview. To prove this, Fubara (2014:25) explains that education alienates docility, passivity and inferiority from women. Beatrice is proof of the aforementioned view by frequently citing university education as the cause for her sister-in-law's liberal and unconventional views. Instead of learning from and adopting Ifeoma's progressive mentality, Beatrice becomes the mountain of her own freedom by criticising Ifeoma's progressive views and accepting her oppressed position. According to Grau (1996:348) and Kwachou (2020), education can be a sharp-edged sword that leads to freedom of thought and offers a number of options for women; hence, Ifeoma is always ready to stand up for what she believes is right, such as when she sternly disagrees with Eugene's suggestion to arrange a Catholic funeral for their father even though he was not Catholic. Because her education has made it possible to attain employment, Ifeoma is willing to devise means to singlehandedly finance the funeral if Eugene does not want to help. Through the contrasting characterisations of Ifeoma and Beatrice, the novelist succeeds in highlighting the impact of education and economic independence in offering oppressed women some voice.

Similar to Kambili's admiration of Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus*, *Americanah* shows Ifemelu being fascinated and inspired by Obinze's mother even before their meeting. Initially, Ifemelu is captivated by the rumour that her boyfriend's mother had left Nsukka University because she was involved in a fight with another professor; in a traditional setting, it is unusual for a woman to physically fight a man. However, Obinze clarifies that a committee that his mother was part of had found out that a professor had misused funds, so she confronted him publicly. The suspected professor became angry and slapped Obinze's mother, who reacted by holding everyone hostage and putting the key in her bra. She demanded a public apology from the professor as a condition to hand over the key (p. 59). Thus, it is this assertiveness and refusal to back down that captivates Ifemelu. When Ifemelu is invited for a meal at Obinze's house, Soltani and Salami (2023:7150) opine that 'Ifemelu is

intrigued by Obinze's mother's grandeur and bravery', she feels compelled to say intelligent things whenever she is in the presence of Obinze's mother and although she tries to be herself throughout the evening, she was no longer sure who 'herself was'. Ifemelu feels undeserving and unable to sink with her hosts into their atmosphere because their fluid and bantering rapport makes Ifemelu uncomfortable but also makes her wish that she could remain in their rapture forever. It is free of restraint, free of the fear of consequences; it does not take the familiar shape of a relationship with a parent (p. 69). Ifemelu is used to her conservative and indecisive mother who, among other things, changes churches at a whim depending on whatever she hears, without any critical examination (Okafor et al. 2023). Moreover, she is a typical traditional woman who considers Ifemelu's expressiveness as trouble-making and imitating masculine behaviour (p. 52). In this way, Ifemelu's mother is depicted as part of the women who continue to uphold sexist ideologies in raising girl children and is thus a hurdle hindering the freedom of young girls.

It can be concluded that in contrast to the nongraduate, passive and gender-unconscious women such as Beatrice and Ifemelu's mother, who adhere to patriarchal dictates, Miss Bulewao, Obinze's mother and Auntie Ifeoma's education and profession as pedagogical practitioners propel them to inspire social transformation through their assertive and confident personalities.

The Double Yoke of educated African women

Although education has the power to liberate women, the reluctance of some societies in accepting this change poses a challenge. In *Double Yoke*, along with Miss Bulewao, some of the students at the University of Calabar are aware of the challenges that are faced by the emerging new women in Nigeria in forging new identities, especially when they also desire to not be alienated from their traditional roles. Reem and Haifa (2020) explain that cultural perspectives and ideology contribute to how professional women form identities. By using Dr Edet as an example, Nko and her friends realise that this burden is one that women often put on themselves, thereby becoming their own mountains. According to Mrs Nwaizu, 'the young women should not forget that women like Dr Edet are their pioneers. They worked hard to achieve their academic positions, and they still would like to be seen as the pillars of tradition' (p. 102). While Mrs Nwaizu reminds the young women that women like Dr Edet serve as examples of the possibility of African woman functioning in multiple roles – roles that often struggle to co-exist – she also concedes that it comes at a cost. Bueskens (2018) explains this complicated duality as the cause for pervasive contradictions in women's lives in the present society. The challenges of being a highly educated woman who also embraces wifehood and motherhood are brought about by society's insistence on maintaining patriarchal ideologies in a socioculturally, economically and politically transitioning society.

Even the male students at the University of Calabar are aware of the burdens faced by educated African women. Ete and his friends wonder if Dr Edet's decision to use multiple titles is intended to achieve a fulfilment in her personality and to reflect all her roles in the church, as an academic and wife. Whatever her reason, the young men see it as taxing to do. Dr Edet is similar to another lecturer whose titles are Chief, Mrs and Dr and uses both her father's and husband's surnames. This particular lecturer is seen as strange because, according to Fakuade and colleagues (2015), the use of compounded surnames was not common even among educated Yoruba women in Nigeria, until recently. This adoption of double-barrelled surnames is predominantly popular among the famous, the highly educated and women in certain professions who wish to retain their maiden surnames while also adopting their husbands'. Such women often decide on two surnames as a form of patriarchal resistance, to oppose the notion of married women losing their birth names and thus their identity to embrace their wifely identity (Matladi 2022). Thus, Dr Edet who uses multiple titles and the unnamed lecturer who uses two surnames show that even in a supposedly progressive setting such as a university, educated women are still subconsciously required to constantly prove themselves in various ways (Grau 1996). These two lecturers prove that no matter how progressive some women may appear, it is still difficult for them to lead a totally liberated life that is free of traditional gender roles. Instead, these women settle for finding ways to manoeuvre through the world by publicly making it known that they embrace multiple identities and roles that are stereotypically regarded as feminine. It is thus a shame that women have to perpetually convince on-lookers in such a manner, especially because adopting one title or maiden surname would not strip them of any of the other roles. Akpan adds that the use of multiple titles is typical in Nigeria because, according to him:

[T]here are comparatively few Nigerian females who have achieved the position of being a Doctor in their education. So, the American trained ones in particular, would like people to know that they are Doctors, and despite that, they are still presentable and beautiful enough to hook an unfortunate man. So you see how these new females overburden themselves. (cf. *Double Yoke* p. 71)

The young men perceive this as a tendency of women from 'Third World' countries because many women from highly industrialised countries do not care so much for titles. While it may sound true, Akpan and his friends' view is inaccurate, because the issue of women being confronted with the decision of how to be addressed has always been universal. According to American author Tannen (1997), while men generally only have one title, which is 'Mr', women are allocated more than two and whichever they choose, there are always stories told by a woman's choice of title. Women who decide to simultaneously be addressed by more than one title may be trying to show whoever is interested that they can be educated, wives and mothers. This speaks to the idea of confirming being educated to the white patriarchal gaze while also reassuring the African traditional gaze that, despite being educated, the women also embrace their

socially defined roles as wives. The aforementioned can be attributed to the fact that in Africa, as in many traditional contexts, it is largely believed that being married bestows a sense of dignity on a woman's femininity, that a woman with a married title is respected more than a single woman. For instance, Adichie (2017:3) observes that Nigerian society gives the 'Mrs' title exaggerated value, as it is made to appear as though those who are not Mrs have failed somehow. Thus, some women have been socialised to regard being Mrs Somebody as a remarkable achievement and never miss an opportunity to make it known that they are married. Even Nko's friend Esther observes that Dr Edet is prouder of her 'Mrs' title than her 'Dr' title. Although Adichie (2017) concedes that she does not have a problem with the Mrs title, she cautions against affording it too much value. Thus, Dr Edet and the other female lecturer discussed above exemplify the challenges of highly educated or academic women who seek to form multiple identities that reflect all the roles that they espouse, and this can be linked to the patriarchal burden of the modern African woman. Stiwanism holds that if sexist traditional structures that regard womanhood as primarily defined by domesticity are to be abolished, women like Dr Edet would have their social weights lifted.

The educated mother

Adichie presents Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus* and Obinze's mother in *Americanah* as single mothers who head their households as a result of losing their husbands, providing a good angle to examine the sexist hypothesis of women being incapable of leading homes. According to Saad and colleagues (2022), transformations in the global society have normalised households being headed by women, either because of widowhood or just personal choice, which is something that would have been unthinkable in earlier societies. The anomaly would be because heads of households were for the longest time stereotyped as male (Hedman, Peruci & Sundstrom 1996; Varley 1996). Moreover, the economic independence that most educated women possess in the modern day makes it easy for them to single-handedly head their households. Despite the general belief that children who are raised by both parents grow up in healthier environments and become better human beings (Anderson 2014; Jacobs & Daniels 2020), Ifeoma's children (in *Purple Hibiscus*) and Obinze (in *Americanah*) seem to have been raised fairly well. In addition to having access to standard education and having their economic needs met, Amaka, Obiora, Chima and Obinze display egalitarian values, assertiveness and moral virtue. For instance, Amaka is confident to stand up for what she believes in, such as her refusal to take on an English name for confirmation at church. Furthermore, Obinze's admiration for women such as Ifemelu who are not docile (*AM:60*) distinguishes him from many men who believe in female subjugation.

While *Purple Hibiscus* is centred on the patriarch Eugene Achike's oppression of his family, Adichie juxtaposes this with Ifeoma's family to highlight opposite socialisations.

Ifeoma becomes the head of her household after the passing of her husband, Ifediora, and she never remarries despite her financial challenges, which her father believes would be resolved if she gets married again. According to Dube (2018:232), Ifeoma's depatriarchalising nature is depicted by her liberated and egalitarian parenting style, which is also reflected through her daughter Amaka, who acts as her cousin Kambili's foil. One significant indicator of this is how Amaka is confident, has freedom of expression and is able to stand up for herself, whereas Kambili is accustomed to silence to the extent that she barely converses even with her peers. Moreover, Kambili leaves the decision of which university she would attend to her father, since he decides for his household (p. 130). Contradictorily, while still in high school, Amaka already knows which university she plans to go to, which student residence she will be staying in and which extracurricular activities she will be involved in. Not only does this reflect the importance of autonomy and freedom to choose, but it also signals independence on Amaka's part and the lack thereof on Kambili's part.

During their visits to Nsukka, Kambili and Jaja can see how differently their aunt heads her family. One time when Kambili and her cousins are playing a jumping game with Father Amadi, Kambili thinks:

It was what Aunty Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realised then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't. (cf. *Purple Hibiscus* p.226)

Day in and out in Nsukka, Kambili recognises that most of their responses at their home are clouded by fear of failure, because there is no room to fail under their father's headship. In the case that one does fail, there are dire consequences. For instance, whenever Kambili or Jaja come second in school, their father always severely reprimands them and tells them that there is no reason they should not come first. Any conduct that Eugene does not approve of is followed by harsh consequences, accompanied by scriptural references to justify his actions. In contrast, Okpeicha-Gnanvi (2016:45) observes that the way in which Ifeoma runs her household shows that she is a well-educated and enlightened woman who teaches her children with fairness and freedom.

In addition, households headed by Obinze's mother and Ifeoma display nonsexist dynamics such as the normalisation of designating chores to all children despite their gender, thus creating free and healthy environments. By so doing, these two women actively confront the problems of gender in their ethnic cultures, as suggested by Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:208). Apart from her aura, Obinze's mother's perspective on life and her views are liberal; hence, Ifemelu is not ashamed to tell her that she does not love cooking, even though it is predominantly thought of as a woman's arena. Had Obinze's mother been a traditional woman, Ifemelu's hate for cooking would have been judged. To show that

Obinze's mother is also a depatriarchalising figure, she and Obinze cook together, and Ifemelu finds this arrangement unusual because in many African homes, cooking is reserved for women. The belief of cooking being a female role is popular despite research which stipulates that most qualified chefs are actually male (House of Commons. The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee 2013). This goes against Ejim's (2017:82) submission that there are some things, such as cooking, that women are simply better at and more productive if they engage in it, and so with men.

Obinze, Chima, and Obiora's outcomes show that women do not always require male companionship to raise children, particularly sons. This is especially true when women become sole parents due to uncontrollable circumstances. Musagasa (2022:78) notes that in Adichie's novels, 'progressive masculinity is not illustrated through the creation of a utopian gender-free society but rather as a single mother's personal project'. This mother aims to mould her son into a progressive man in a patriarchal society. The setups of Obinze's home and that of Ifeoma reflect progressiveness because they embrace unpopular gender relations, as encouraged by Ogundipe-Leslie (1994):

Many African scholars engaged in the liberation of black societies, have failed to confront the question of gender within the family unit which is one of the leading sites for social transformation... There is a need for new reordering of the society at the level of family because of the changes within the indigenous family patterns which arise from new socio-political and economic developments. (*Purple Hibiscus* p. 210)

Adichie uses *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* to show that education is a transformative agent which carves the individual's perspectives on social relations and thinking in the home, which is an arena often regarded as sacred and never interrogated. The discussion above suggests that the open-minded perspective fostered by education results in mothers rearing their children in a nonsexist manner.

Marriage and the educated new woman

Similar to other issues, *Purple Hibiscus* shows that Beatrice and Ifeoma have varying views regarding the significance of a marriage in a woman's life. Whenever Ifeoma speaks out against the unfairness meted out against women by patriarchy or advises Beatrice to leave her abusive marriage, Beatrice always cites university education as responsible for her sister-in-law's reasoning. To Beatrice, a woman's crown is her husband, and she could not think of a woman's life being complete without children and a husband; thus, she initially does not comprehend how Ifeoma could suggest that sometimes life begins when a marriage ends (p. 75). Beatrice's response suggests that most African women who are exposed to institutions of learning or education have liberatory perspectives on life and marriage.

Stiwanism views economic transformation as fundamental for the advocacy of gender parity in Africa, and Adichie uses

Ifeoma's insistence (in *Purple Hibiscus*) on financial independence to support this theoretical view (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:1). When Ifeoma's father Papa Nnukwu tells her that his spirit intercedes for her so that Chukwu will send a good man to take care of her and the children to lessen the financial strain, Aunty Ifeoma asks that he pray for the hastening of her promotion to senior lecturer instead (p. 83). Papa Nnukwu represents early generations which strongly believe that a man should take care of a woman and children, as well as the patriarchal assumptions that undermine women's potential to head their families (Rubaya 2022). Ifeoma is aware that a promotion at work would come with a better salary which would ease their financial strains and therefore prefers to financially secure her family herself than to get a man who would support her. In this way, Ifeoma represents those African women who choose to not remarry or marry but rather focus on advancing their careers (Wienclaw 2011:116). This is contrary to her female students, who either marry too early or drop out of school in order to be graduate wives who are owned by their husbands (p. 54). Therefore, Ifeoma's decision to be economically independent represents Stiwaniist advocacy for African women to do away with patriarchal ideals which may benefit them, such as financial irresponsibility (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current article has highlighted that gender movements have the mandate to transform societies and individuals for the betterment of women and girls; therefore, there is no way but for the African woman to form new ways of being. This is supported by Aidoo (2007:162) who, over 20 years ago, acknowledged that the new generation of women is different from earlier generations because when pushed, they rise up to the occasion with courage, strength and clarity. This has been portrayed by Miss Bulewao, Ifeoma and Obinze's mother who, in the midst of traditional resistance, resolve to embody egalitarian beliefs and values in and outside their homes. In addition, through the characters of Ifemelu's mother and Beatrice, the selected novels by Adichie and Emecheta successfully portray the relationship of education and women's freedom (or lack thereof) by juxtaposing them with highly educated women. Although Dr Edet and the other lecturer who use multiple titles and double-barrelled names are academics who depict the inclusion of women into higher institutions as scholars, their characters show that there are still some hurdles to overcome along the way, primarily those that are rooted in neocolonial and traditional patriarchal structures and thus prohibit gendered transformation. Thus, it is evident that tertiary education has the potential to contribute to the realisation of gender equality and equity in Africa by improving financial independence, giving women a voice and fostering egalitarian parenting in women-headed houses.

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