

## Fighting Patriarchy in Nigerian Cultures Through Children's Literature

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### Abstract

This study tried to investigate the prevalent patriarchal practices in Nigerian cultures and how they could be curbed via children's literature. Patriarchy is generally accepted and widely practiced in Nigeria. Its tenets have remained unprinted but have been actively governing people's lives and transactions in Nigeria over decades. These tenets which have overtly and covertly impacted negatively on the women folk and indirectly on men, also on the socio-economic and political advancement of Nigerian society in general have been effectively sustained and transferred, informally and formally to posterity, as part of Nigerian culture. Children's literature has always provided opportunity for nurturing, in response, appreciation and internalization of one's and group's cultural heritage. It equally impacts on the growth and development of the children's self perception, which results to the internal urge of transferring same to posterity. This study, therefore, postulates that given the evident roles literature plays in character molding, that children's literature is therefore a veritable tool for expunging the negative patriarchal practices in Nigerian culture.

**Key words:** Patriarchy; Children's literature; Culture

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### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is multi-linguistic in nature which also makes it multicultural. Among many other features these diverse

cultures have in common is Patriarchy. Patriarchy is a system that extols males' authority, domination and supremacy over the females in all spheres of human endeavour. Admittedly, some aspects of patriarchy have, however, brought order and progress in Nigerian society. Using the Igbo, one of the major cultural groups as an example; the headship of the father directs the affairs of the family, the 'okpala' or 'diokpa' (depending on the dialect): The eldest man in a kindred also directs and moderates the affairs of a kindred and the traditional ruler, a position which has remained male preserve in Nigerian various cultures, equally play the same role in villages and towns. But most of the patriarchal practices are obviously demeaning and clearly oppressive to the female gender. Those aspects could be perceived in forms of; subjugation, abuse, exploitation, sexism, chauvinism, political injustice, girl-child marriage, domestic violence, women trafficking and kidnapping (a case in hand is that of the Chiboc girls saga), marital rape, deprivation of various rights and many more. These are some of the dehumanizing and demeaning practices that are often seen in Nigerian society and which are most of the time cloaked in the 'holy' garment of tradition. Most often these practices are perpetuated and reinforced in Traditional, Christianity and Islamic practices in the guise of morality. To buttress this point Oguejiofor cited the Pauline teaching in 1cor. 11, pp.7-9; "...for the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the woman created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (p.30). He further noted this teaching to be:

Misconstrued to mean that in line with the practices of most societies, unfaithfulness is a worse sin in a wife than in a husband. Even though Christianity holds that adultery is equally sinful for both husbands and wives, the Christian society has not always translated this into practice. That is why adultery with a married woman was considered grievous, not because of the woman but primarily because it was an offence against the husband. (pp.30-31)

The male gender is both the primary and secondary beneficiary of these practices in the society system

while the female gender has remained the victim of this deliberately instituted interests and privileges that have been appropriated by a group over the other.

In Nigeria, patriarchy has remained a way of life. Children are nurtured and socialized in their various homes (nuclear and extended) with regard to their sexes, not based on the fact that they are humans that deserve equal treatment and opportunities. The different ways of socializing the two genders are in accordance with Nigerian culture which prepares them quite in time for the various roles they are expected to play as adults. Part of the result has been that the male child is equipped with the skills that enable him grapple with and be properly equipped for the socio-economic, political and religious matters which will put him in a stronger footing for challenges ahead. On the contrary, the girl-child is kitted with house-keeping skills which prepare her to cope with rearing of children and taking care of her future husband. She is trained to understand that her "glory" lies in marriage, without which she will become a societal misfit hence the Igbo adage "*Ugwu/mma nwanyi bu di*" (The woman's prestige, glory and beauty are dependent upon her husband/marriage). It is pertinent to note that there is no direct equivalent adage for the male gender. In fact the adage that comes close to this is "*nwoke adi njo*" (Being a man can never be a disadvantage). As aptly illustrated by Chukukere, using Flora Nwapa's heroine, Amaka, Chukukere showed the ultimate ambition of every Igbo girl thus:

Amaka had always wanted to be married... and when at last Obiora decided to marry her, she was on top of the world. She was going to show everybody that a woman's ambition was marriage, a home that she could call her own, a man she would love and cherish and children to crown the marriage (p.146)

While allocating family estates, the girl-child/woman is never a beneficiary. In some sub-cultures in Nigeria, it is considered a waste of money and time to send girls to school since she will eventually be married off. She is not part of the inheritance; in fact, she is an inheritable "estate" herself because she can be inherited by her brother-in-law or the nearest relation of her husband's, age disparity notwithstanding, whenever her husband dies. On the contrary, a boy-child, who is traditionally preferred to the girl-child, has a right over the family inheritance. He can also marry as many women as he wants at a time as well as inherit his brother's or half brother's wife in case of death. In addition to inheriting whatever the wife has managed to acquire in life, the husband has every right to inherent his wife's property. He also has the right to choose any woman of his choice. These cultural situations have, over decades, made Nigerian women grossly disadvantaged emotionally, psychologically, socio-economically, politically and religiously and they have remained second fiddle in all human endeavours as a result. In fact the Nigerian patriarchal structure was systematically structured to

oppress and subjugate women and render them both helpless and weak.

However, some social critics in Nigeria have insisted that women are not naturally made weak rather that man-made socio-cultural structures have. Adimora-Ezeigbo in one of her novels rejects the generally accepted description of women as the "weaker sex". She rather describes them as the "weakened sex" (p.57) given the arduous man-made cultural system they grapple with throughout their existence. They are weakened, not by God who, to the admiration of His creations, "... saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was good and He approved it" (Genesis, 1:31). They are rather weakened by the patriarchal system in which the males have put themselves in charge of and also instituted cultural structures that demean and disvalue their female counterpart.

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## 1. EFFORTS MADE SO FAR TO AMELIORATE THE SITUATION

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A lot has been done by some women, men and some concerned organizations to either reduce the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy or to eradicate it completely from the system. The ultimate aim has been to dismantle the patriarchy system and install equity through

transformation of the economical, political, social, psychological and legal circumstances of the powerless ... which disvalue, disempower and disposes women with its central objectives tied to the needs of women to opportunities, facilities, skill acquisition and position of authority, especially within the political sphere. This recent development accords women the opportunity to develop their individual talent and contribute more meaningfully to social development, helping subvert cultural as well as the societal norms which have been of disadvantage to the women folk. (Makama, 2013, p.135)

One of such organizations was "Better Life for Rural Women" which was founded by former Nigerian first lady, Late Mrs. Miriam Babangida. As long as the organization lasted, it empowered the rural women by providing them with soft loan which helped them start off small businesses. Some were equipped with some skills for making soap, detergent and so on. Unfortunately, this programme did not pay attention to the nagging issue of women liberation from the shackles of patriarchy which was the bane of the condition of the rural women in the first place. It was also bedeviled by the phenomenon commonly referred to in Nigeria as "Nigerian factor". Corruption crept in and some of what were meant for the rural women were often highjacked mid way, and coupled with the endemic problem of lack of sustainability and maintenance in Nigeria, the programme died as soon as the initiator left the presidency. Another organization, 'Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics (FONWIP) which was an improvement of the former organization was initiated.

It targeted women empowerment and eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination against women. This group organizes seminars, enlightening women on their legal rights. Its most populous agenda became its request on government to reserve 30% female representation in government appointments. This request was implemented in accordance with Beijing conference recommendations. The group also conducted several workshops for women who intent to run for public offices as well as creating awareness on gender relations in public policies.

The United Nations Organization (UNO) has also contributed immensely towards putting an end to gender inequality in Nigerian society. They have made some Declarations and Conventions that are targeted towards ending all forms of political unfairness. As recorded by Makama, they include:

- i The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- ii The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- iii The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). (2013, pp.135-136)

A critical examination of the efforts made by these organizations will reveal that their target has been enthronement of gender equality. Eradication of patriarchy which has become a sort of cancer eating deep into the lives of the female gender and the society at large has never been in their agenda.

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## 2. FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

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There are other groups/movements whose sole aim is to achieve complete dethronement of patriarchy in human existence. These include feminist movements which operate at both national and international levels. These groups may differ in their ideologies but they share a common point of convergence in the models they project: cultural rebirth as it concerns patriarchal practices. These groups include: The Radical Feminism, Womanism, Black Feminism, Africana Womanism, Social Transformation in Africa Including Women (STIWANISM), Motherism, Nego-Feminism, Femalism and Snail-Sense Feminism.

### 2.1 Radical Feminist Model

This movement originated from the Western countries. It is a perspective within feminism that focuses on the hypothesis of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion that male supremacy oppresses women. It aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression of women. This group

argues that women's subordination is not rooted in relation of production but in specific relations of reproduction and sexuality...that the use of word and language affect our

psyche on the definition of men and women. They point to the effectiveness of the capacity of language to shape our thoughts and desires.... ( Makama, 2013, p.119)

This movement therefore calls for radical reordering of society.

### 2.2 Womanist Model

At its broadest definition is a universalist ideology for all women, regardless of colour. A womanist is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male or female.

### 2.3 Black Feminist Model

Black feminism as a model was formed in response to the needs of the women who felt racially oppressed by the women's movement and also discriminated against by the black liberation movement. Black feminism asserts that Africa-American women are doubly disadvantaged in the social, economic and political spheres because they face discrimination on the basis of both gender and race.

### 2.4 Africana Womanist Model

This movement rejects feminism because it is set up in a way as to promote the issues of white women over the issues of black women. On this, Weems argues that feminism will never be okay for black woman due to implications of slavery and prejudice. She further asserts that the relationship between a black man and a black woman is significantly different from the relationship between a white man and a white woman, and because the white woman battles the white man for subjugating her, but the black woman battles all oppressive forces that subjugate her, her children and the black man. ... Unlike womanism, Africana Womanism is an ideology designed specifically with women of African descent in mind. It is grounded in African culture and focuses on the unique struggles, need and desires of African woman. (En. wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa\_womanism)

### 2.5 Femalist Model

This was developed by Chioma Opara. Ezeigbo records that Femalism is:

A hue of African feminism, is a softer tone than liberal feminism and highly polarized from radical feminism. Unlike womanism which was made popular by Alice Walker and Africanized by Ogunnyemi, femalism is essentially African and accentuates the body. (2002, p.23)

### 2.6 Stiwaniist (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) Model

Stiwaniism was propounded by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie. This model argues that African women are more oppressed in their status and roles as wives in view of their multiple identities.... Ogundipe-Leslie criticizes the plight of African women as due to the impact of imposed colonial and neo-colonial structure that often place

African males at the height of social stratification. Their plight is also due to the internalization of patriarchy by African women themselves ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molara\\_Ogundipe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molara_Ogundipe)).

### 2.7 Nego-Feminist Model

This model sees Western feminism as confrontational and combative while the African feminism is prone to negotiation (Nego-feminism). It is “no ego” feminism. While creating this theory Obioma Nnaemeka “builds on the idea of “African woman’s willingness and readiness to negotiate with and around men even in difficult circumstances” (Nego-feminism, 2004, p.380).

### 2.8 Motherist Model

This is another variant of African feminism and was advanced by Catherine Acholonu. This model argues for “African-based and conceived theory to define the woman’s role and situation in Africa”. The main thrust of Acholonu’s work is to “empower African women as mothers”. “Acholonu’s thesis counters the ideas of feminism and works within the popular gender roles and expectations that circulate in Nigeria’s patriarchal society”(Ezeigbo, 2002, p.22). In quoting Stephanie Newell, Ezeigbo further records that “Acholonu remythologizes the maternal body, loading it with organic symbols and offering it as an expression of the African essence”. (Ibid., pp.22-23) Ezeigbo therefore likens Acholonu’s woman as mother to “Mother Africa”. Acholonu also states that “the rural woman is our link with mother earth and with her rests our last hope for reunification with the indispensable mother essence” (Ezeigbo, 2012, p.23).

### 2.9 Snail-Sense Feminist Model

This theory as propounded by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is of the view that the Nigerian woman should adopt the slow but courteous snail mode of movement in her dealings with men in the tough and very difficult patriarchal society they live. They should

often adopt conciliatory or cooperative attitude towards men. This is akin to what the snail does with the environment in which it moves and exists. The snail crawls over boulders, rocks, thorns, crags and rough terrains smoothly and efficiently with a well lubricated tongue which is not damaged or destroyed by these harsh objects.... (2012, p.27)

While drawing from the snail-like movement, Ezeigbo advocates that in a society as Nigeria where women are denigrated with expressions that portray them as untrustworthy, gossip and weak and are treated as such, that the woman “must learn survival strategies to be able to overcome the impediments placed before her and live a good life. She has to be the proactive and strong” (Ibid., p.28). Snail-Sense feminism is:

Akin to what the snail does with the environment in which it moves and exists. The snail crawls over boulders, rocks,

thorns, crags and rough terrains smoothly and efficiently with a well lubricated tongue which is not damaged or destroyed by these harsh objects. The Igbo people say, Ire oma ka ejule ji aga n’ogwu”-meaning, ‘the snail crawls over thorns with a fine and lubricated tongue’. Moreover, the snail carries its house on its back without feeling the strain. It goes wherever it wishes in this manner and arrives at its destination intact. If danger looms, it withdraws into its shell and is safe. This is what women often do in our society to survive in Nigeria harsh patriarchal culture. (Ezeigbo, 2004, p.27)

In spite of the obvious ideological divergences, these models and some of the other organizations earlier mentioned still maintain one objective of struggling to pull down the age-long patriarchal structure ingrained in Nigerian culture which has continued to affect Nigerian women negatively. Admittedly, they have made some remarkable and commendable achievements which can be perceived in a handful of really rational and enlightened families who have seen the benefits of considering the female members of their families in the distribution of family assets. I use the word ‘consider’ because even in these families that have chosen to overlook the dictates of tradition, the distribution is not equitably done yet. The males still have better share of it even in situations where the female is the elder or the bread winner of the families. (Some cultural groups like the Yoruba and Efik, Ugwuta; a town in Igbo cultural zone) have been noted for involving their daughters in the inheritance of their father’s land but not the wives). In some parts of these areas too, widows’ plights have been reduced. They no longer experience the very old trend of subjection to a sort of cleansing ritual, and dispossession of the husband’s estate in the culture. To Nigerian women, these are encouraging signs. In the political arena, the Nigerian government has shown signs of living up to their words as documented and approved even though the political terrain has remained both financially tough and security wise very rough for the women folk.

The 1991 Nigerian Constitution clearly stated in Section 40 that:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular **he** may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of **his** interest provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord registration.

Section 42(1) of the same constitution states that “a citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that **he** is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination”.

At a first look at these aspects of the said constitution, one may say that they are all inclusive; male and female, but a closer scrutiny of them will disclose elements of

discrimination on gender bases. The pronouns “**he**” and “**his**” as highlighted in the quoted constitution are pointers that Nigeria is far from seeing women as partners in progress. Language and the pragmatic import of it often impact so heavily on the users’ psyches which directly inform their actions. While citing Chukwukere, Ezenwa-Ohaeto observes that “language can be an instrument of freedom and liberation as well as oppression and dominance. The male gender shapes language to portray them as powerful and independent and warrants them to form and direct their stance and reality of life against the female gender. (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2013, p.22). She further states that “this linguistic aspect of the constitution appears to be the explanation of the extensive discrimination against women when it comes to actual practice and implementation of the constitution”. Admittedly, “legislative representation has witnessed the presence of women yet they remain under-represented when compared to their male counterparts” (Makama, 2013, p.123). On the part of the girl-child, she is still facing a lot of threat which includes trafficking, early marriage (some government officials still marry girls of 13-14 age bracket. The case of Ahmed Sani Yerima, a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who married a minor of 13 years old is a case in hand and one out of many) rape, deprivation of education “which tend to further impoverish the women folk, and subject them to statutory discrimination”( Ojo in Makama, 2013, p.120), and kidnapping as can be seen in the more than 200 school-girls kidnapping saga currently making news headline globally and to which Nigerian government has not been able to do anything meaningful.

Penal Code is effectively used to subjugate women in Northern Nigeria where it is graded as a corrective measure. In case of adultery or fornication, the woman is liable to stoning while the man has a lesser kind of punishment. There are also some discriminatory Laws and policies meant for women alone. For example:

Women employees pay higher tax rates than men. A woman is not given tax relief on account of her children, even when she is a single mother. This is because men are traditionally expected to be breadwinners and heads. The Police Act discriminates against police women on the basis of their sex. If a policewoman wants to marry, she must apply in writing to the commissioner of Police for the state command, giving the address and occupation of the person she intends to marry. Permission will only be granted if the man is of good character and if the woman has been in the police force for a minimum of three years. And an unmarried female police officer who becomes pregnant is discharged from the force and shall not be re-enlisted except with the approval of the Inspector-General. (Ezeigbo, 2012, p.7)

These practices are perpetuated by a body that is supposed to uphold law and order as stipulated in Nigerian Constitution, Section 42(1). It is equally important to state that in many Nigerian families, women still undergo all kinds of demeaning and traumatic treatments just for the

mere reason that they are women. That translates into a great worry at national level. That also means that there is something which these organizations for women liberation and the feminist have missed. There is a very huge lacuna that needs urgent filling up if, in spite of all the resources already invested into this struggle, the Nigerian women are still facing subjugation, dispossession and demeaning experiences in their various homes, at political and religious matters of the Nigerian society. The problem therefore requires re-strategizing, an approach that will help in nipping the problem from the bud.

### 3. CHILDREN’S LITERATURE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND ELIMINATION OF PATRIARCHY (CHLIGEEPISM)

With regard to the persistence of women oppression and subordination in Nigeria in spite of the pervasive struggles targeted at the elimination of the negative patriarchal practices in Nigeria, this study postulates a strategy that is more fundamental in outlook. A strategy that is based on the philosophy of early child education which is premised on the fact that in-prints made in the life of a child through the materials made available to them and the nature of the language they acquire in addition to the happenings around them; how their families handle matters relating to the father, mother, aunts, nieces and nephews. How the siblings are socialized in the homes throughout their formative stages and beyond will be the main influence in the child’s experiences and education. The nature of the child’s experiences and education will be both the foundation and the building blocks for his/her life time which will in turn build his/her personality and how s/he will perceive his/her environment and the world in general. The theory of “*CHLIGEEPISM*” therefore is premised on the efficacy of children’s literature in the struggle against the negative aspects of patriarchy in Nigeria. This eclectic approach (involving the ideologies of all the feminist movements with exception of radical feminism and some aspects of Snail-Sense feminism) postulates that by the creation of formidable female characters by writers of children’s literature, female characters who have achieved greatness in spite of the tough patriarchal environment they grow up in. Female characters who are not only specialists in home chores, home making, care givers of their husbands and rearing of babies but who also are great nation builders, specialists in their chosen professions and who have made great discoveries and contributions that brought positive changes in their societies. Children’s literature that portrays the eventual outcome of children who grew up in patriarchal families and ones that grew up in families with gender stereotypical tendencies. Dynamic and career female characters who, through the characters they meet in novels, poetry, drama books and

personal experiences, have decided to have the number of children they can cater for while they are still strong enough to do so and move ahead with their careers.

This theory also advances children's literature that upholds refinement of the mind through imbibing the tenets of good relationship, shared responsibility (ability to critically respond to both personal and societal issues), progressive values and norms, tolerance and the negative effects of gender stereotyping, gender preference and dispossession/deprivation of people's rights in our society. The presumption is that if writers of children's literature adopt gender relations that depict the above values as themes in their works, as they tell stories about life, about gender equality and eradication of patriarchy, our children will imbibe and internalize these virtues and appreciate them as values and perceive them as way of life and as part of their developmental experiences. While the female children will aspire to be like those female characters that have achieved greatness in their chosen fields and the males understand that house chores are not meant for girls alone and that they are all shareholders in the family asset(s) whether the girls choose to get married or not, the society will be a better place to live in.

Before now, many Nigerian children story writers have used their writings to propagate patriarchy. They often project male characters as heroes and female characters as housewives and mothers or just observers who cheer the males of their heroic achievements. Umeh describes the woman's situation while she criticizes Ifeoma Okoye's stories about Eze which is popularly known as "Eze Series". "...her one-dimensional portrayal of the 'mother' is anachronistic and unrealistic, especially in twentieth century Africa. The dominant picture of the Mother in *No School for Eze*, ... is that of an enslaved, uneducated housewife who sits in the compound experiencing 'life' by proxy (1997, p.195). Even in this twenty-first century where some women have achieved envious positions in government and private establishments, some writers still portray women as in the traditional folktale era. In as much as women appreciate marriage and children, just as men equally do, they also want self development and actualization. They are capable of acquiring skills that will give them opportunities to contribute in nation building. Aside the moral lessons found in this kind of children's novels, the novels are simply anachronistic in nature and are not true to life because presently most Nigerian women are striving to acquire education and they have started occupying political positions (though the percentage of representation is still very low). They are corporate business women, Engineers, Academics and Medical doctors, and into Private business etc (It should be noted that the terrain to these achievements for Nigerian women are littered with hurdles based on gender relations). Some children's literature writers draw

the themes of their works from their experiences of the cultural conditionings and knowledge; it is therefore difficult for some of them to create characters outside their personal experiences. Regrettably, some of these writers are women. While expressing disgust towards women and women writers' attitude and their mode of handling most issues pertaining to tradition, especially as it concerns women oppression, Marrie Umeh cited Morala Ogundipe-Leslie's brilliant description of the situation thus:

That African women writers suffer from a sort of schizophrenic cultural syndrome. Women are their own worst enemies. Shackled by an ingrained negative, self-image calcified by gender hierarchies from both the African and colonial worlds, their reactions to pragmatic problems are often unprogressive and self-defeating. Often when pure objectivity is demanded of a situation, women react with sentiment and emotion rather than with reason and logic. Then again, notions of distinct female roles are so entrenched in the female psych that women who deviate from the norm fear alienation from the group. Ostracism from one's kith and kin is stressful and women writers are not courageous enough to take on this burden. (1997, pp.202-203)

The above clearly depicts most women's attitude to most patriarchal practices which they often explain away with 'that is the way it is done' and this stance has been ingrained in their psychs that they have become afraid to question the status quo, rather they put up structures of punishment for offenders. And so it is a common place to hear women use these derogatory expressions against themselves and sometimes against their children too, who, incidentally pick up these expressions very early in their lives from their immediate environs and the trend becomes part of the tradition. This situation could be perceived in Buchi Emecheta's *The Wrestling March*, and *The Moonlight Bride* as observed by Umeh. The images of women in the later are uncomplimentary and are filled with derogatory sexist expressions. For instance in page 58 of the novel, expressions as "men mature, women age", "We tore past our gossiping mothers in our eagerness to be at *udala* tree" are found. In the same novel a girl called Echi is married off, against her will, to a man, Chiyei, who is generally described as "never-do-well" in the village. What matters is not what becomes of the girl and the children in such a marriage, rather what is most important to them is that the girl 'answers a name' as it is often said. Whether the name is worth bearing by any sense of it is the least of their concerns.

The above two novels cited were written in 1980, more than two decades ago, yet these sexist and derogatory expressions still abound in the present linguistic repertoire of Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and other Nigerian linguistic groups and by implication among the growing children who internalize these expressions too early in their lives and worse still, in some of the recommended children's literature!

The present generation of children's literature authors is charged with the responsibility of recreating characters

and telling stories that are capable of using decent and polite language towards everyone, language that is gender sensitive, which can engender tolerance and peaceful coexistence of all. Language that is capable of activating creativity, imagination and which can lead to refinement of the mind. Language that is all inclusive and not exclusive. This situation prompts one to join Umeh in asking “why are our contemporary feminist writers inhibited in describing their female characters in their children’s books as strong individualistic and bright human beings, acting out roles compatible with courageous women in Nigerian society today? (1997, p.204)

In relation to this trend, one also joins Wilson-Tagoe to ask these thought provoking questions:

Do we want to give our children just any reading material... or do we want to give them literature that would please them, stimulate their imagination, build up their sensibility ..., develop their perceptive power and help them to grow up in a cultural environment that is not just static but responsive to a growing Africa and international world? (1992, p.20).

In this twenty-first century, a century noted for its tremendous technological advancement which has turned once distanced worlds into a village, the themes often portrayed in some of the children’s novels could only pose problem of national backwardness if the struggle against patriarchy is worth the efforts and exclude the nation from the global trend.

At school, a child begins to encounter various kinds of written materials including literary ones, stories told in form of books; fictional and non-fictional, drama, and poetry. In addition to serving as medium of entertainment and relaxation, and development of cognitive skill, literature is a veritable tool for the expression and exposition of cultural values. It serves as a window to both the immediate and the outside world environments and expands the reader’s knowledge as well as paves ways of the reader’s development of mental imaginations. It equally activates growth in humanity and general understanding. For children, literature plays a vital role in character molding and in perception self in relation to one’s environment. It gives them the opportunity of appreciating their cultural heritage as well as inculcating the habit of respect for others’ cultures. Smith observes that “... good children’s literature arouses a child imagination and extends one’s horizon giving one a knowledge of the past in relation to the present and imbuing in him ideals and values necessary for national development” (Web).

Children’s literature is useful for some other reasons. While citing Norton, Crippen states that “developing positive attitudes towards our own culture and the culture of others is necessary for both social and personal development” (Web).

In responding to an interview question on what he thinks about teaching of literature, Chinua Achebe stated:

... I think the teaching of literature should go on and even increase because I think it is very important. When we talk about the confusion in our culture, about no morals and so on, where do we get these things in the modern world if not from literature? I mean, we don’t have the social institutions that we had in the past in which the values of the community were transmitted. How do we transmit a national culture to Nigerians if not through works of imagination? This is something that our people have not paid attention to. We are talking about modernization, industrialization, and so on, but we do not realize that we cannot even industrialize unless we have tackled the mind, the imagination, and thus the attitude of people to themselves, their society, to work, and so on. How do you do these things if you cannot get to the minds, to their imagination? So literature is not a luxury to us. It is a life and death affair because we are fashioning a new man. The Nigerian is a new man. How do we get to his mind? Is it by preaching to him once in a while by the leaders? No, I think it is something solid and permanent that we must put into his consciousness. That is what he reads, what he believes, and what he loves. We must dramatize his predicament so that he can see the choices and choose right (p.24).

Finally, this paper has the burden of presenting children’s literature as the best alternative means of eradicating the ugly devastating effects of patriarchy in Nigerian culture. Through children’s literature, the seed of the effects of domestic violence, rape, and derogatory expressions that are replete in Nigerian society cannot only be controlled but eradicated. When the seed is nurtured to maturity, it will bear good fruits of compatibility, tolerance, equity, shared responsibility, self actualization and national development. It will be a gradual process though, but the good result will be sure. According to Odejide “the universal theme of female liberation needs to be explored in the Nigerian setting” (Umeh, 1997, p.204), and to lay an indelible and lasting foundation for its success, writers of children’s literature must wake up to this urgent but needed solution to patriarchy. Stories, in this case, children’s stories, are really very important in mending the already impaired future of the Nigerian female gender. In emphasizing the importance of stories, Chimamanda Adichie explicates that “...stories matter, many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispose and to malign but stories can also be used to empower and to dehumanize. Stories can be used to break the dignity of the people but stories can also be used to repair that broken dignity...”

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