

# Challenging Patriarchal Misogyny: A Feminist Analysis of the Selected Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Jamaica Kincaid

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## Abstract

*The research paper conducts a comparative feminist literary analysis which studies selected works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Jamaica Kincaid to show how both authors use their cultural and postcolonial backgrounds to fight against patriarchal misogyny. The paper shows how both writers use displacement and voice and resistance as literary techniques to make female subjectivity the main focus of their stories from its previous position as a secondary element. The paper analyzes domestic violence and colonial legacy and sexual politics and maternal ambivalence and self-determination through postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality and gender studies. The analysis shows that Adichie and Kincaid belong to separate geographic and cultural backgrounds because they come from Nigeria and Antigua but their fictional and essay works both work to decolonize gender norms while they show new ways for women to exercise power that goes beyond patriarchal restrictions.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchal Misogyny, female agency, African literature, feminist theory.

## 1. Introduction

Women writers from postcolonial Global South countries have faced dual oppression which stems from both colonialism and patriarchal systems. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Jamaica Kincaid serve as essential literary figures within this tradition because their work shows how women experience power structures that operate through racial and colonial and gendered oppression. Their writings reveal a common feminist political perspective which emerges from the real-life daily experiences of women who have been ignored and oppressed and denied their basic human rights.

Adichie established her writing career within the postcolonial African tradition by creating female characters who face challenges from three elements: Igbo patriarchal society, religious fundamentalism, and the lasting effects of British colonial rule and the Biafran War. Kincaid, who was born Elaine Potter Richardson on 1949 in St. John's Antigua, writes from her Caribbean postcolonial perspective which shows how British colonialism and plantation slavery violence conflicts with the domestic hierarchies that restrict her female characters. The two authors show a common interest in how women develop their identity and autonomy because both of them want to achieve their goals in environments that work against their success.

The title of this paper — From Margin to Center — borrows from bell hooks's influential 1984 work *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* which argued that feminist theory must begin from the lived experiences of those most oppressed by interlocking systems of domination. The phrase demonstrates how Adichie and Kincaid use their work to achieve political goals through their depiction of female characters whose perspectives society considers unworthy of notice in their fictional and essayistic writing. The paper investigates through their work how they achieved this central focus through their

examination of voice and bodily autonomy and educational systems and sexual matters and the destruction of patriarchal belief systems.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Feminism and Intersectionality**

The postcolonial feminist theory and intersectionality which Kimberlé Crenshaw defined and scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, and Patricia Hill Collins expanded upon. Postcolonial feminism asserts that Western second-wave feminism universalism fails to explain gender oppression because it must consider the effects of colonialism and racial and social and cultural particularities. Mohanty's critique of the homogenizing construction of the 'Third World woman' in Western feminist discourse is particularly relevant here, as both Adichie and Kincaid resist precisely this flattening of female experience by insisting upon the particularity of their characters' cultural locations.

The female protagonists of both writers can be understood through Spivak's subaltern concept which describes the colonized subject whose voice has been systematically occluded by the structures of colonial discourse. The authors create their most compelling characters through the subaltern woman archetype who exists between colonial history and patriarchal culture while trying to find her identity which official discourse denies. The women in Adichie's and Kincaid's fiction use their voices to tell their stories through narration and opposing and fighting back and staying alive which separates them from the subaltern who Spivak defines. The texts enable their literary execution of the subaltern woman which allows her to speak while others listen.

Theoretical tool intersectionality enables this analysis to examine all the different methods through which these fictional women face multiple systems of oppression. Adichie's Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, for instance, is simultaneously a child, a girl, an Igbo Catholic, and the daughter of a wealthy but violently abusive patriarch — each of these identities shapes her experience of oppression in specific and irreducible ways. Kincaid's Lucy and Xuela exist as Black women who also identify as Caribbean subjects and former colonial subjects and daughters who experience the psychological effects of both maternal and colonial power. The analysis requires multiple oppression dimensions which include gender and race to understand their situations accurately.

## **3. Patriarchal Authority and Domestic Violence: The Body as Battleground**

The female body serves as a battleground where patriarchal power establishes its dominion which stands as the main thematic element in both Adichie's and Kincaid's literary works. The Achike household in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* serves as a space where religious fundamentalism and patriarchal violence combine to create their most destructive effects which stem from Eugene's role as its devout yet dictatorial leader. The domestic violence that Eugene commits against Beatrice and their children functions as the expected outcome of his religious beliefs which teach that men should exercise authority over their family members. The body of Beatrice—who ultimately poisons Eugene to save her own life—serves as a record that displays the harmful effects of patriarchal household rules through its visible injuries and fatal consequences.

The domestic violence depiction in *Purple Hibiscus* from Adichie shows its strength through its avoidance of emotional excess. Beatrice exists as more than a passive victim because she has internalized her subjugation so deeply that she cannot see any way to fight back against her situation. Her poisoning of Eugene stands as her final option to defend herself which becomes her ultimate feminist statement yet results in her defeat because gender violence has taken away her ability to fight back through proper methods. Adichie demonstrates that women who face oppression create their own pathways through tyrannical systems which challenge basic views on female victimhood.

Jamaica Kincaid approaches the topic of bodily subjection through a method that differs from other approaches yet possesses equal strength. The *Autobiography of My Mother Xuela* Claudette Richardson establishes her body as her personal territory which allows her to exercise radical self-control against a world that has tried to take everything from her. Xuela chooses to remain childless since she rejects the reproductive duty which patriarchal and colonial systems force upon all women. Her body represents the one territory which she describes as her sole area of control. Kincaid connects this decision to reject authority to the history of Caribbean slavery and colonialism which treated Black women's bodies as property that faced sexual abuse and forced reproductive labor. Xuela's refusal of maternity is thus not merely a personal choice but a historical and political act.

The main character Lucy experiences body image issues which stem from both colonial pasts and societal demands of her time. Lucy demonstrates her sexual exploration through her actions which defy the domestic limitations imposed by Mariah, her employer, to establish her right to control her own body, which creates disruption in both the American feminist society she belongs to and the Antiguan colonial society she escaped. Adichie and Kincaid declare through their physical demonstrations of defiance that women possess bodies which serve as active sites for them to define their identity instead of becoming mere instruments through which men establish their control.

#### **4. Voice, Silence, and the Politics of Female Narration**

The feminist project of both authors needs to examine how women express themselves through vocal expression. Voice in literature serves as a political statement which declares people deserve to express their thoughts through spoken language while women have faced historical efforts to be silenced. Adichie and Kincaid base their written work on the theme of speaker identity which includes their origin and their power to speak. Kincaid's first works display their strong personal character through its confessional first-person narration which defies the patriarchal system that demands women to express themselves in indirect terms. The young protagonist of *Annie John* uses direct language to express her thoughts which creates discomfiting moments because she needs to express her complex feelings about her mother. Annie's voice creates a claim to her environment through its evaluation of colonial Antigua and its patriarchal family systems because it judges everything from the values of his world. The 'I' in Kincaid's fiction operates as a feminist demonstration because Kincaid uses a young Black Caribbean girl's personal experiences to challenge both the racial hierarchy of colonial narratives and the gender hierarchy of patriarchal systems.

The way Adichie uses voice in her work shows both structural and political complexity. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* she tells the story through multiple points of view which show the characters Ugwu and Olanna and Richard but the female characters Olanna and her sister Kainene create the book's moral and emotional core. Adichie uses her female characters to create complete character development through their mind and story control which she uses to show how women's experiences face historical erasure in Biafran War official accounts. The private and domestic experiences of Olanna and Kainene are presented not as peripheral to the grand historical drama but as its deepest and truest register.

Adichie's non-fiction writing particularly *We Should All Be Feminists* which she adapted from her 2012 TEDx talk functions as a strong declaration of women's public speaking power. The essay presents a manifesto through its straightforward conversational language which has established Adichie as one of the most popular feminist writers of her time. Through her direct and unreserved discussion of the common ways that people practice sexism and misogyny which she has experienced both in Nigeria and around the world Adichie establishes herself as a public feminist intellectual who patriarchal systems have tried to deny. The work gains political importance through its worldwide distribution and its use as educational material in various countries which forces recognition of women's right to express themselves while controlling their own narrative.

#### **5. Education, Independence, and the Escape from Patriarchal Domesticity**

Adichie and Kincaid both view education as an essential but conflicted method through which women can attempt to break free from the limitations imposed by patriarchal home life. Yet both also recognize that formal education, particularly education administered by colonial and postcolonial institutions, is not straightforwardly emancipatory. Education functions as a tool which both maintains and confronts the societal beliefs that restrict women's freedom.

The elite Catholic school which Kambili and her brother Jaja attend in *Purple Hibiscus* teaches religious principles which their home environment follows through its strict authoritarian regime. Kambili discovers educational possibilities which extend beyond her father's authority through her connection with her aunt Ifeoma who shows her a different way of family life through their university-based household which operates as an open and lively space without social restrictions. The educational achievements of Ifeoma establish her as an independent woman who shows Igbo families that intelligence and authority belong to both genders rather than being male attributes. Adichie presents Ifeoma as a character who demonstrates that women can attain limited independence through education and their ability to think independently while they reside in societies which enforce strict patriarchal systems.

Education for Kincaid's characters serves as a connection to the violent legacy of colonialism. The colonial curriculum exists as a method of psychic control which the school system teaches Annie to respect English history and culture while showing contempt for her own heritage. Annie's reading ability and intelligence enable her to understand the colonial system which the education system teaches her. She leaves Antigua to study nursing in England because she wants to escape colonial home life while realizing that British cities provide women with more freedom than her native island. Lucy moves to North America to work as an au pair because she wants to escape the restrictive domestic duties which Antiguan society places on women. Kincaid's essay-novella *A Small Place* shows her view of education as a colonial tool which she uses to demonstrate how colonial power continues to exist in the Caribbean after colonization ends. In her work the schoolroom serves as a learning space which battles for control of her characters' cultural and mental independence.

## **6. Maternal Ambivalence and the mother-Daughter Dynamic**

The mother-daughter relationship serves as the most important psychological element and theoretical dimension of both writers' work. Adichie and Kincaid both present motherhood as an institution which contains strong conflicting elements because their relationship with Western literary traditions presents them with actual maternal love to display.

The psychological conflict which drives Annie John develops through the process which separates Annie from her mother because their bond breaks apart. The mother character who remains unnamed throughout the story serves as a crucial storytelling element because she demonstrates to readers both her loving protective nature and her ability to force her daughter into social demands which require feminine behavior. The mother of Annie expects her daughter to become a proper young woman by learning cooking skills and dressing modestly and following proper behavior standards, but Annie experiences this expectation as her mother breaks trust by withdrawing love until she meets the standards of patriarchal societal norms. Kincaid describes the mother as an oppressive figure who suffers from colonialism and patriarchal systems in her society which she must follow, but her tragic existence prevents her from establishing a different path for her daughter to follow through the power of female independence.

Kincaid develops a complete exploration of ambivalence through *The Autobiography of My Mother*, which starts with the statement that the main character's mother passed away at her birth. Xuela's existence becomes a representation of how colonialism and slavery have destroyed the historical and psychological identity of Caribbean people by taking away their ancestral ties and cultural heritage and their maternal care. Xuela uses her empty space to create a complete philosophy which depends on her need for independence, showing that her complete personal control comes from her motherless state.

Adichie presents a mother-daughter relationship which lacks centrality to her story yet still maintains its importance. The damaged bond between Olanna and her mother in *Half of a Yellow Sun* together with Kambili's complicated love for her abusive mother who ends up killing Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* show how patriarchal oppression harms women through its transmission between mothers and their daughters. Both writers suggest that the feminist project must necessarily involve a reckoning with the maternal inheritance of oppression — not a wholesale rejection of motherhood, but a critical interrogation of the conditions under which maternal love is constrained and corrupted by patriarchal and colonial structures.

## **7. Naming, Identity, and the Reclamation of Selfhood**

The act of naming which leads to transition through renaming creates a battle for people to establish their identity through their personal name. The Imperial practice of imposing European names on colonized populations serves as a primary method through which their cultural identity gets destroyed in postcolonial territories.

Jamaica Kincaid started using a pseudonym for her writing career when she chose the name Jamaica Kincaid to replace her birth name Elaine Potter Richardson in order to protect her family from potential scandal that her writing might cause. The act of self-naming creates a feminist and postcolonial statement because it enables people to use Caribbean identity through the name 'Jamaica' while they avoid simple racial identification. Lucy's name creates a connection to Lucifer who fell from heaven so the character exudes both rebelliousness and rule-breaking power. The patriarchal and colonial tradition of naming women based on their adherence to male standards gets flipped through Lucy's identification with her fallen namesake.

Adichie presents her most straightforward examination of naming through her TEDx presentation and her 2017 essay *Dear Ijeawele* which she uses to teach her friend feminist methods for raising a daughter. Adichie advises parents to teach their

daughter that her personal name and her identity belong exclusively to her without ties to any man or institutional authority. Kambili from *Purple Hibiscus* begins to develop her personal identity through her growing ability to announce her name and use space and express her viewpoints which her family home has been designed to prevent her from demonstrating. Adichie presents her most straightforward examination of naming through her TEDx presentation and her 2017 essay *Dear Ijeawele* which she uses to teach her friend feminist methods for raising a daughter. Adichie advises parents to teach their daughter that her personal name and her identity belong exclusively to her without ties to any man or institutional authority. Kambili from *Purple Hibiscus* begins to develop her personal identity through her growing ability to announce her name and use space and express her viewpoints which her family home has been designed to prevent her from demonstrating.

## **8. Feminist Consciousness and Political Agency**

The writers Adichie and Kincaid investigate how women develop political awareness through their personal experiences to create a feminist understanding of their oppression. The two bodies of work show that people find their way through life only by enduring suffering that comes from their gender-based experiences. Adichie presents her feminist political beliefs most clearly through her book *We Should All Be Feminists* but the book needs to be understood together with her fictional works which show feminist understanding through character experiences that they cannot identify as sexism or misogyny. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Olanna develops her feminist awareness through her wartime experience which brings down patriarchal home structures while opening up new ways for women to build solidarity. The war destroys the social structures that define Olanna's existence and pushes her to fight for her life through self-initiated actions instead of traditional femininity.

Kincaid's protagonists develop feminist awareness through their experiences which show political impact through their actions. The three main characters of the story show their feminist beliefs through Xuela's idea of extreme self-control which Lucy uses to challenge all social and romantic norms that society forces upon her and through Annie's decision to leave Antigua. Kincaid presents her feminist beliefs through her argument that colonialism and patriarchal control operate as interconnected systems which create oppressive conditions for women. The female characters in both stories achieve their political power through the establishment of feminist connections which enable them to work together with other women. Kambili's relationship with her cousin Amaka develops into a major feminist awareness center in *Purple Hibiscus* because Amaka demonstrates strong self-confidence which Kambili needs to fight for. The friendship ties between Annie and her peers in *Annie John* create essential networks of female support which help women to stay connected while they face the restrictions of colonial girlhood.

## **Conclusion**

The research shows that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Jamaica Kincaid write about their Nigerian and Antiguan postcolonial experiences to create literary works that focus on female identity while fighting against patriarchal oppression. The authors use their narrative techniques which include female voice assertion and bodily autonomy exploration and maternal ambivalence investigation and feminist consciousness dramatization to transform their female characters from the narrative margins that patriarchal and colonial systems have established into central positions of narrative and moral and political power.

Their research shows how gender and race and class and colonial history combine to create and sustain misogyny while feminist analysis and feminist literary practice need to study these connections because they need to understand all aspects of women's oppression. Adichie and Kincaid create female protagonists who exist as particular women from specific historical periods because their battles against patriarchal systems become their battles against specific cultural and historical conditions of postcolonial Nigeria and the Caribbean. The exact details of their battles make their fights against authority systems become relatable to all people.

the forbidden topics of domestic violence and bodily subjection and enforced silence and colonial destruction through their work. The authors assert through their writing that all aspects of women's lives deserve to be recognized through serious examination by both literary and political spheres. The authors work to dismantle patriarchal structures of misogyny through their cultural work which extends to global discussions about gender rights and human dignity.

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