

Storying the Self in Nigerian Gender Discourse: A Critical Evaluation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014)

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ABSTRACT: *This article offers a critical review of the Nigerian female writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's autobiographical essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014). Beyond the binarism of self and other and male and female inherent to any work on gender, we study the concept of Happy Feminism and its related issues introduced by Adichie in Nigerian gender discourse. By contrast with classic feminism, happy feminism is defined as a kind of feminism adapted to the African cultural context which empowers African women, improves their self-esteem and excludes any form of sexism, misogyny, misandry or emasculation. Based on a Personality Psychological approach to personal narratives and using a narratological and socio-literary framework, this article explores and puts into question the relevance of the term Happy Feminism by confronting it to current studies on Nigerian gender discourse. While not neglecting Adichie's contribution to the elaboration of Nigerian gender discourse, the article highlights the fact that the concept of Happy Feminism is problematically undertheorised.*

Keywords: *Autobiography, autobiographical memory, cultural translation, feminism, gender, Happy Feminism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most promising writers of the third generation of African novelists. She has written three novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *Americanah* (2013) and a short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) [1]. *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) [2], her only non-fiction writing, is a personal and eloquently argued essay in which she offers readers a unique definition of feminism for the twenty-first century, one rooted in inclusion and awareness. In contrast to her novels in which she uses current narrative techniques to depict contemporary African issues, we notice, as noted by Dan P. McAdams in his article "Personal Narratives and the Life Story" that the "the self is storied" [3] in *We Should All Be Feminists*. Indeed, as indicated on the cover of the essay, drawing extensively from her own experiences and her deep understanding of the often masked realities of sexual politics, Adichie's essay can be essentially seen as an exploration of what it means to be a woman today in the world and especially in Nigeria. In this essay as in her novels, her feminist consciousness is apparent insofar as most of her female characters and the women she describes are questioning patriarchal rules in Nigerian society.

In this study, gender is used, as defined by Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan in *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, as "an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours and competencies, which are then assigned as either 'masculine' or 'feminine' [4]. We aim at studying how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie uses lifetime periods, that is to say general memories of specific periods of her life, to depict gender expectations in Nigeria and the way she succeeds in associating her personal experience of male-female relationships with current gender discourse. In this critical evaluation of her essay, we intend to review Adichie's innovative philosophy and concept of "Happy Feminism" by underscoring its contribution and its limits in the process of resisting the ongoing patriarchalization of Nigerian postcolonial society, its history and traditions. As we define *We Should All Be Feminists* as an autobiographical essay, we find relevant to use a conceptual approach to Personality Psychology based on Dan P. McAdams' study on personal narratives.

Some of the key questions that have been raised in this article include: how does Adichie define "Happy Feminism" and what is its relationship with African masculinity? What is the relevance of the concept of "Happy Feminism" in Nigerian gender discourse? How far is the concept of "Happy Feminism" related to the problematics of cultural translation as experienced by African writers based in Western countries? Most of these questions will be answered by using an approach based on careful analytical evaluation.

II. UNMASKING GENDER REALITIES: FICTION WRITING VS. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

Whether in her novels or in her non-fiction writing, the main objective of Adichie happens to be a strong will to describe gender realities in Nigerian society. However, the difference between her fiction writing

and her autobiographical essay lays on the narrative strategies she uses. In *We Should All Be Feminists*, the autobiographical “I” is emphasised on the self and actual aspects of her life.

2.1 Showing vs. Telling African Gender Realities

Most of the main female characters in African women’s novels are engaged in a struggle to be visible and respected in societies where they have a marginal status. They challenge gender expectations and socio-political status quo in which women feel oppressed and silenced. This is essentially due to the fact that African female novelists use writing as “a weapon” [5] as the Senegalese novelist MariamaBâ clearly put it in an interview with Barbara Harrell-Bond in 1980. From the pioneers of African female writers (MariamaBâ, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa etc.) to the new generation (Dangarembga, Sefi Atta, Adichie etc.), female writers are determined to unmask gender realities that silence women in postcolonial African societies. In their novels, short stories and plays, they unveil women’s social realities and tend to give them opportunities denied them in the sexist and gendered societies in which they live. For instance, ChimamandaNgoziAdichie’s first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), relates the story of a family in which a tyrannical man named Eugene, among other things, constantly beats his wife, Beatrice. Finally, she had to poison him to save her life and protect her family. Like in TsitsiDangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* where the female protagonist shows her callousness after the death of her brother, it appears as if it is only through the disappearance of men that women acquire freedom in modern African societies. Symbolically, in women’s writings and in modern African societies, men appear as obstacles in women’s self-fulfilling process.

However, as important and powerful as it might appear, fiction writing, that is to say the composition of non-factual prose texts, is not enough to empower women and make them more visible since fictional texts are usually published without any comment from the author. Indeed, as indicated by the American critic Wayne Booth in his authoritative book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the modern writer must efface himself and renounce the privilege of direct intervention and retreat to the wings and leave his characters to work out their own fates upon the stage [6]. In the same perspective, Richard L. W. Clarke noted in the preface to the first edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: “Since Flaubert, Booth contends, many authors and critics have been convinced that ‘objective’ or ‘impersonal’ or ‘dramatic’ modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. Sometimes... the complex issues involved in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between ‘showing,’ which is artistic, and ‘telling,’ which is inartistic.” [7]

Taking these modes of narration into account and, more importantly, paying close attention to the distinction between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’, we can state that Adichie’s *We Should All Be Feminists* is an autobiographical essay through which she “tells” and describes postcolonial African women’s realities. Contrary to fiction writing, here the reader is helped by the author’s “guidance of explicit evaluation”[8] that fiction writing does not allow as Adichie speaks without a spokesman or a narrator. Consequently, we can assert that from her novels to her autobiographical essay, we have shifted from the “poetic faith” in which there must be a “willing suspension of disbelief” (S.T. Coleridge)[9] to the “autobiographical contract” or “autobiographical pact” as theorised by Philippe Lejeune in *Le PacteAutobiographique*. [10]

2.2 Storying the Self in *We Should All Be Feminists*

In *We Should All Be Feminists*, though the author inscribes her analysis in a collective discourse, the tone is specifically personal. Without any doubt, this essay is best read as a collection of autobiographical memories, which in a psychological perspective, are said to be focused on the self. Indeed, in “Memory, Autobiography, History”, John F. Kihlstrom states that “to create an episodic memory, and autobiographical memory (with the emphasis on auto), the event node must be linked to a mental representation of the self as the agent or patient of some action or the stimulus or experiencer of some state”[11]. As for Dan P. McAdams, he insists on the “selective and strategic” aspect of autobiographical memories when he writes:

From an early age, children tell stories about life, casting their personal experiences into the structure of setting, character, scene, and plot. As they move into adolescence and adulthood, they collect together remembered episodes from the past into an autobiographical storehouse that may be organized in terms of lifetime periods (e.g., “when I was in grade school,” “before my father left my mother”), general events (“high school football games I enjoyed,” “job interviews”), and event-specific knowledge (“my 7th birthday,” “senior prom”) [...]. Rather than representing a veridical recording of life as lived, autobiographical memories are highly selective and strategic.[12]

When reading Adichie’s essay, one easily notices that time markers and places related to her life and especially to her childhood are recurrent: “Okoloma was one of my greatest childhood friends” (p.7), “now here’s a story from my childhood” (p.11), “when I was in primary school in Nsukka” (p. 11). Moreover, her family members and close friend are involved in her narrative: her close friend Okoloma (p.7), her dear friend Louis (p.14), her grandmother (p.35). Even people she mentions and that she does not name will certainly

recognize themselves or can be renowned in her essay: her primary school teacher who favoured boys in class management (p.11), the American woman whose managerial status bothers men (p.23), the Nigerian woman “who decided to sell her house because she didn’t want to intimidate a man who might want to intimidate her” (p.29) or the great-grandmother from whom she inherited feminist ideas (p.47).

People mentioned in *We Should All Be Feminists* are real and thus different from fictional characters such as Eugene and Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*, Ugwu, Olanna and Richard in *Half of a Yellow Sun* or Ifemelu and Obinze in *Americanah*. And, most importantly, the connection between all the events narrated in this essay, through which an emphasis is put on “I”, is that the self is storied in selected life periods memories related to gender issues in Nigeria. This enables to notice that finally, if *We Should All Be Feminists* can be seen as a cultural text inasmuch as it mirrors Nigerian (and by extension American) culture, we can assert that it is best read as a narrative identity, a concept that, in Personality Psychology, refers to “an individual’s internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self”[13]. This theoretical approach enables us to fully understand the innovative aspect of the concept of “Happy Feminism” developed by Adichie in her autobiographical essay.

III. THE CONCEPT OF HAPPY FEMINISM AND ITS RELATED ISSUES

In the fields of Gender Studies, Women’s Studies or Feminist Studies, the term “feminism” has been constantly referred to as having an epistemological richness. However, it has ramifications and cultural connotations that can only be clearly understood in the context in which they are used. Adichie’s concept of “Happy Feminism” broadens the theoretical scope of African gender studies focused on women’s selves.

3.1 Redefining Feminism: From Classical Feminism to Happy Feminism

As noted by Scott Appelrouth and Laura DesforEdles in *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era: Text and Readings*, “feminism has never been a unified body of thought, and there are various ways that feminisms and feminist theorists can be contemplated”[14]. However, the most widely accepted definition of this term is certainly that related to classical feminism which is focused on the personhood of women, and their status as morally equal to men. Here, biological based and socially constructed differences between men and women are highlighted. Generally speaking, as stated by Adichie in *We Should All Be Feminists*, a feminist would be “a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes” (p.47) and feminism would be described as a reaction to a proposed injustice against women by men.

In *We Should All Be Feminists*, ChimamandaNgozi Adichie attempts to redefine the feminist thought in national and global perspectives. She uses the word “feminism” on the first lines of her essay. According to her, it was first applied to her by her late childhood friend Okoloma when she was fourteen: “Okoloma was a person I could argue with, laugh with and truly talk to. He was also the first person to call me a feminist” (p.7). Though she did not know what it meant, she could tell from her friend’s tone that it was not a compliment. Indeed, she guessed that her friend’s words “You know, you are a feminist” were not so different from “You are a supporter of terrorism” (p.8). Adichie explicitly implies that her male friend’s point of view on feminism symbolises contemporary African thinking on gender, mainly that of African men. In fact, through the opening words of her essay, she tries to show the perception of feminism in the African context.

Contrary to many African female writers such as TsitsiDangarembga and MariamaBâ, Adichie is not against the fact of being seen as a feminist, a term which is said to convey western white women’s conception of male-female relationships. She even overtly claims it. However, as the term “feminism” is seen as “un-African”, she has coined the concept of “Happy Feminism”. Indeed, she writes:

In 2003, I wrote a novel called *Purple Hibiscus*, about a man, who among other things, beats his wife, and whose story doesn’t end too well. While I was promoting the novel in Nigeria, a journalist, a nice, well-meaning man, told me he wanted to advise me. (Nigerians, as you might know, are very quick to give unsolicited advice.)

He told me that people were saying my novel was feminist, and his advice to me—he was shaking his head sadly as he spoke—was that I should never call myself a feminist since feminists are women who are unhappy because they cannot find husbands.

So I decided to call myself a Happy Feminist.

Then an academic, a Nigerian woman, told me that feminism was not our culture, that feminism was un-African, and I was only calling myself a feminist because I had been influenced by Western books. [...] Anyway, since feminism was un-African, I decided I would now call myself a Happy African Feminist. Then a dear friend told me that calling myself a feminist meant I hated men. So I decided I would now be a Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men and Who Likes to Wear Lip Gloss and High Heels for Herself and Not for Men. (Adichie, 2012:10)

As clearly stated in this passage, Adichie attempts to clarify her conception of feminism by using various terms: “Feminist”, “Happy Feminist”, “Happy African Feminist”, “Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men and Who Likes to Wear Lip Gloss and High Heels for Herself and Not for Men”. Swimming

against the tide of public opinion (a journalist, an academic, a Nigerian woman), she tries to convince the reader that feminism, a word “so heavy with baggage, negative baggage” (p.11) can be used to describe the realities and the claims of African women. Finally, after introducing the concept of “Happy Feminism”, she offers her own definition of feminism at the end of her essay: “My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it, we must do better.’ ” (p. 48)

Beside her personal approach to feminism, another issue highlighted by Adichie in her essay is the marginalisation and the process of silencing the African woman in public spaces, a concern previously widely dealt with in African literature by pioneers of African gender studies. This is illustrated in many examples related to different steps of her life (childhood, adulthood, professional life) and from testimonies coming from female Nigerian and American friends or women she knows. For instance, in one of the stories she relates, she remembers that her primary school teacher organized a test that would enable her to give the status of class monitor to the student who would get the highest score. While she obtained the highest score on the test, a boy who had only the second-highest score was chosen by the school master. She added: “What was even more interesting is that this boy was a sweet, gentle soul who had no interest in patrolling the class with a stick. While I was full of ambition to do so. But I was female and he was male and he became class monitor (p.12).

In this story from her childhood, she shows how gender order prevails in Nigerian society. Indeed, as observed by Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan in *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, “the gender order is a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful. It is through the gender order of a society that forms or codes of masculinities and femininities are created and recreated, and relations between them are organised” [15]. Adichie implies through this lifetime period that since childhood, masculinity and femininity are prescribed in Nigerian society. More importantly, she suggests that leading roles and positions are associated with men’s image while women are reduced to silence, an injustice which is not explainable by biological determinism: “A man is as likely as a woman to be intelligent, innovative, creative. We have evolved. But our ideas of gender have not evolved very much” (p.18). This reminds us of Simone de Beauvoir’s motto in *The Second Sex* that in any society one is not born woman, but becomes one, that is to say that gender roles are not inborn but are socially constructed. As surprising as it might be, as revealed in Adichie’s testimony exemplified by the case of her primary school teacher, women actively participate in the perpetuation of this discriminatory social order even on aspects that do not favour them. We can wonder whether this attitude stems from women’s lack of a feminist consciousness or if it is only tantamount to a will to preserve a traditional social order.

Other stories confirm that this unvoiced status of women is doubled with a form of invisibility and Lagos, the largest city in Nigeria, is presented as the place that symbolises this contemptuous attitude stemming mostly from men. For instance, when Adichie gives a tip to a young man who looked after their car, it is her male friend who is thanked and not her (p.15) and each time she walks into a Nigerian restaurant with a man, the waiters would greet the man and ignore her (p.20). And for a woman who is proud of her femaleness and who has a strong feminist consciousness, this sexist behaviour is not only upsetting but also revolting. As a consequence, Adichie writes: “Each time they ignore me, I feel invisible. I feel upset. I want to tell them that I am just as human as the man, just as worthy of acknowledgement. (p. 20). Moving from her personal situation to the general and universal status of women, the Nigerian essayist patently shows that gender matters not only in Nigeria but everywhere in the world.

3.2 Gender and Otherness: An Argument About African Masculinity

In *We Should All Be Feminists*, ChimamandaNgozi Adichie does not appear as utopian as believing that women’s determination to gender equity can revolutionise male-female relationships in Africa. This is why she appreciates men who are engaged in women’s struggle for liberation. For instance, one of her friends is said to be “progressist” because he understands women. However, *We Should All Be Feminists* is not to be read as an essay defending only African women’s rights. Like Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream”, it is an advocacy and a hope for more equal relations between men and women: “I would like today to ask that we should begin to dream about and plan for a different world. A fairer world. A world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves. And this is how to start: we must raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently” (p. 25).

For Adichie, one of the first steps of this redefinition of African sexual politics would be to avoid men’s emasculation that is to say to avoid making them feel less masculine by encouraging them to keep their male strength and their role in society. At this level, unlike the dominant impression of the text, the essay seems to be more prescriptive than illustrative as personal testimonies do not support her main ideas and the autobiographical “I” is constantly replaced by a collective “we”. Indeed, Adichie expresses her disagreement on some commonly accepted ideas on Nigerian masculinity that presuppose that a woman’s success is a threat to man. For instance, while Nigerian women are recommended to cover themselves to show their femininity, a

Nigerian man is expected to be a *hard man*, in other words, he has to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability (p.26).

Another assumption on Nigerian men is the idea that masculinity is necessary linked with money. As an illustration, Adichie gives the example of two secondary school students of opposed sex who go out, both of them teenagers with meagre pocket money. To prove his masculinity, the boy is expected to pay the bill (p.26). More importantly, in their process of socialization, women have to adapt to these cultural realities to help men to show their manhood. For instance, if a Nigerian woman is the breadwinner in her relationship with a man, she must pretend she is not, especially in public, otherwise, she emasculates him. (p.28)

For Adichie, by validating these preconceived ideas on manhood, society teaches men to “mask their true selves” (p.26) and as a consequence induces them to have very fragile egos for “*the harder* a man feels compelled to be, the weaker his ego is” (p.27). Clearly, *We Should All Be Feminists* expresses an argument about the prescribing nature of gender expectations in the Nigerian context. Adichie vehemently states that “The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we *should* be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn’t have the weight of gender expectations” (p.34)

IV. ADICHIE AND THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

Nigerian major theorists in gender studies include MolaraOgundipe-Leslie (Stiwanism), Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (African Womanism), and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí who developed the concept of the non-gendered Yoruba family. Over the last three decades, they have strived to develop theoretical tools tightly closed to African realities in general and specifically Nigerian cultural context. By coining the term “Happy Feminism”, Adichie tries to respond to the need to renew gender concepts in Nigerian gender discourse. However, with regard to previous works, we may wonder how relevant this concept happens to be in African gender discourse. Does her contribution really bring something new in the landscape of gender studies or is she simply lost in cultural translation?

4.1 Africanising Feminism: Happy Feminism vs. Womanism and Stiwanism

If Adichie’s writing highlights her belonging to an African literary tradition, namely that marked by male writers such as Chinua Achebe, *We Should All Be Feminists* shows her appropriation of protest feminism inherited from pioneer female African writers. Though many African female writers are reluctant to use the term “feminism”, the Nigerian writer is not the first one to claim it in African gender discourse. Indeed, more than two decades ago, precisely in 1992, the Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo did the same when she stated:

When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I should go on to insist that every man and every woman should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence of African development without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element of feminism. [16]

We must highlight at various levels not only Nigerian female scholars’ reluctance to use the term “feminism” but also, more importantly, their attempt to coin terms that are able to translate African cultural realities. For instance, in her article entitled “Womanism: The Dynamics of The Contemporary Black Female Novel In English” (1985) [17], Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has given a preference to *womanism*, a term coined by the African American writer Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*[18]. While Walker’s womanism, a neologism usually interchangeable with black feminism, is focused on the experience of African American women, its reappropriation by Ogunyemi is characterised by the desire to take into account African women’s experience in women’s fight for respect and self-determination. As for Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, she has coined the acronym STIWA (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) from which is derived the concept of STIWANISM. She proposes a feminism of cooperation and collaboration which does not bash or antagonize men. The distinguishing feature of this feminism is that it recognizes the complementarity of the two genders while not papering over the real issues affecting women in Africa. On the whole, the African experience is the core value of the types of feminism which are proposed by African female scholars.

4.2 Gender and Cultural Translation: Why Should We All Be Feminists?

If we can state that most of the major figures in African gender studies denounce the Eurocentric foundation of feminist concepts currently used in academic discourse, we must recognize the fact that the US-based Nigerian scholar Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí is certainly the theorist who proposed the most relevant sustained argument against the concept of gender in Africa. In her article “Conceptualising Gender: Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies” (2004), Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí highlights European and American cultural hegemony that resulted in the universalization of gender. Indeed,

synthetizing works by western scholars, she writes: “I wish to suggest that feminist concepts are rooted in the nuclear family. This social institution constitutes the very basis of feminist theory and represents the vehicle for the articulation of feminist values. This is in spite of the widespread belief among feminists that their goal is to subvert this male-dominant institution and the belief amongst feminism’s detractors that feminism is anti-family.”[19]

Contrary to European and American societies where the nuclear family plays a major role, the extended family is at the heart of social life in most African societies. This is certainly the reason why in one of her previous works, *The Invention of Women. Making an African Sense of Western Discourses* (1997) [20], Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí advocated a reconception of gender discourse in Africa by making a cultural and context-dependant interpretation of African social realities. In his review of this authoritative study, through which Oyèwùmí makes a meticulous historical and epistemological account of Oyo-Yoruba culture in western Nigeria, BibiBakare-Yusuf writes:

The central thesis of Oyewumi’s provocative book *The Invention of Women*, is to deny that gender is a fundamental social category in *all* cultures. Drawing her examples from the Oyo-Yoruba in western Nigeria, Oyewumi argues that gender has not historically been an important organising principle or a first order issue. Contra European discourse, amongst the Yoruba, biology was not used to explain or establish social relations, subjectivity, positioning and hierarchy. She suggests that in European culture and intellectual history, participation in the *polis* and cultural significance is determined by the meaning ascribed to the body. Here, her argument resonates with other critiques of the European schism between ‘mind’ and ‘body’. The body is regarded as the site of irrationality, passion and moral corruption. The mind, in contrast, functions as the seat of reason and restraint. This dualism enabled the association of certain groups with the body and bodily functions, and others with reason and spirit. Those conceived as irrefutably embodied were visibly marked out for enslavement, oppression and cultural manipulation. [21]

As highlighted by BibiBakare-Yusuf in this quotation, Oyèwùmí sustained that gender is not viewed as a first order issue in Yoruba culture. As a consequence, Yoruba families and relationships between members of the same community are not gendered. Furthermore, she mentions in her book a second major principle in social interactions by underscoring the fact that seniority (age chronological difference) is the most important organising principle in Yoruba society[22]. As noted by BibiBakare-Yusuf, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s claim for the absence of gender in Yoruba culture and the centrality of seniority as an organising principle is based on two factors: “a) there is no mark of gender in the Yoruba language (whereas seniority *is* linguistically marked and is therefore an essential component of Yoruba identity); and b) Yoruba social institutions and practices do not make social distinctions in terms of anatomical difference” [23].

The contrast between Adichie’s *We Should All Be Feminists* and the ideas developed by Oyèwùmí in her research work is striking. In fact, we can state that the works of the two authors reveal ethnic plurality in Nigeria, as Adichie is Igbo and Oyèwùmí Yoruba, the most relevant observation might be on the fact that Adichie’s way of dealing with gender issues in Nigeria reveals the influence of western feminism whereas, as written by Mara ViverosVigoya in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, “Oyèwùmí made a powerful case for the necessity of generating concepts appropriate to particular African contexts, rather than relying on distorting European concepts such as the nuclear family to interpret African experience” [24]. However, we can wonder whether Oyèwùmí’s assumption that Yoruba women and men have the same power and opportunities is realistic. By stating that Yoruba language does not make hierarchical gender distinctions but only recognizes anatomical difference, isn’t she confusing language and social reality?

Notwithstanding, if we stick to Oyèwùmí’s point of view, we can state that there is no need for men or women to be feminists in African societies. This would mean that women’s oppressed and marginalized status in Nigeria and by extension in patriarchal societies in general is not solely due to their gender. Certainly, other factors are to be scrutinized to understand their unfavourable status in Nigeria.

Finally, we must recognize that Oyèwùmí’s contribution to the development of theoretical paradigms anchored to African local realities is one of the most valuable in Nigerian gender discourse. With regard to the depth of her analyses, Adichie might be seen as someone who is confronted with the problem of cultural translation. Indeed, the idea of cultural translation is introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in his book entitled *The Location of Culture* in which he successively used it in statements such as “a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation” (p.10), “the borderline condition of cultural translation” (p.11), the “process of cultural translation, showing up the hybridity of any genealogical or systematic filiation” (p.83) or “cultural translation, hybrid sites of meaning” (p.234) [25]. For Anthony Pym, Homi K. Bhabha is concerned with “what this kind of mixed discourse, representative of those who have migrated from the Indian sub-continent to “the West,” might mean for Western culture. He sets the stage with two possible options: either the migrants remain the same throughout the process, or they integrate into the new culture” [26].

Adichie spent so many years outside Nigeria (in the United States) so that she sometimes seems to be disconnected from Nigerian culture. *We Should All Be Feminists* does not appear as a text written for an African

audience. Indeed, before being published, it was first presented as a talk in London in 2012. For this reason, we may assume that she tries to explain Nigerian realities to a western audience. In this perspective, she endeavours to translate Nigerian gender relationships in such a way that it can be understood to non-Nigerians. In this process of translation, she seems sometimes to be lost. As a consequence, we notice a kind of mixed discourse that is characteristic of the migrant belonging to two cultures and thus translating between cultures. In fact, we must question some of the assumptions developed by Adichie on Nigerian women, for instance a statement such as “We teach girls shame. Close your legs. Cover yourself” (p.33). We can wonder if Nigerian women are actually advised to be ashamed of their bodies as she would like us to believe, or is it just an appropriation of the antagonism between the mind and the body as developed in Western philosophical thought? And is it only in Nigeria that women are seen as sex workers when they are alone in hostels (p. 19) or is it a stereotype just applied to Nigerian realities? And can Nigeria be seen as the only country where gender “prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are” (p.34) or does Adichie just want to make it clear that gender expectations are heavier in Nigeria than elsewhere? An in-depth analysis of these questions might reveal that compared with current gender conceptual tools used by Nigerian scholars, the theoretical background of *We Should All Be Feminists* is weakly theorised.

V. CONCLUSION

In this article, we have critically evaluated ChimamandaNgoziAdichie’s autobiographical essay *We Should All Be Feminists* with a focus on the concept of “Happy Feminism”. We have tried to understand as to what extent this concept is relevant and challenging in Nigerian and, by extension, African gender discourse. We have attempted to provide evidence taken from a wide range of sources which both agree with and contradict Adichie’s actual contribution to the theoretical elaboration of gender epistemology in Africa. By coining the term “Happy Feminism”, Adichie made a valuable contribution to the feminisms of the global South and contemporary gender studies. However, her essay leaves the impression that like European and American feminists, she is taking part in the process of universalising gender discourse and the discursive coloniality of hegemonic feminisms developed by western feminists. This is intriguing insofar as multiple contemporary groups in diverse developed nations are being created to protect the rights of men against the excesses of feminism. For instance in the United States, Kathleen Parker has written *Save the Males: Why Men Matter Why Women Should Care*[27], a book in which she describes the trivialization of the father as feminism’s collateral damage and where she denounces the dramatic change in American society. She wonders when Americans stopped thinking of men as strong providers and decide they were stupid and unnecessary. Reading *We Should All Be Feminists* reveals that the fight for gender equality remains the goal in Africa but questions such as those raised by Kathleen Parker will also seem to be relevant to Africans who are rooted in their culture. In this light, we can state that an exacerbate feminism will be a cultural suicide in modern Africa.

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