

5

A feminist reading of Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*

Oladeji, Felix Oluwabukola & Oyewole, Tabitha

Abstract

*Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue shaped by patriarchal ideologies that perpetuate oppression and sexual violence against women. This paper explores feminist perspectives, particularly radical feminism, as articulated in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* (2017). These works challenge the entrenched norms of patriarchy by advocating gender equality and critiquing societal structures that perpetuate women's marginalization in education and leadership. Through feminist literary criticism, the study examines how these authors depict the complexities of gender politics, the impact of patriarchy on women's lives, and efforts to redefine gender roles and sexual freedom. By highlighting themes of sexual objectification, violence against women, and the liberation from unjust societal norms, this paper accentuates feminism's ongoing relevance in addressing contemporary social, political, and psychological aspects of women's lives.*

Keywords: Feminism, *My Sister, the serial killer*, *Dear Ijeawele*.

Introduction

Over the years, the fight for gender equality has been a persistent issue worldwide. Numerous writers and scholars have examined feminism, drawing various conclusions about gender inequality in society. Although feminism's popularity has surged recently, its roots trace back to the nineteenth century. Charles Fourier, a French philosopher, coined the term "féminisme" in 1837 (Goldstein, 1982). The term "feminism" is often associated with efforts to elevate women's social status to that of men, advocating women's rights and gender equality. Today, feminist theory and the movement advocate specific lifestyles, activities, and ways of living. Feminism focuses on women's experiences and highlights the various forms of oppression

they face in society. Feminists argue that male domination is pervasive in nearly all significant aspects of life and is the root cause of social inequalities and injustices affecting women (Fidelis, 2018).

Feminism is not limited to the West. African writers, particularly women, have also explored feminist themes in their works, addressing issues of female subjectivity and exposing the cultural impediments faced by women. Early African writers such as Flora Nwapa (*Efuru*), Ama Ata Aidoo (*Our Sister Killjoy*), Mariama Bâ (*So Long a Letter*), and Buchi Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood*) depict women's struggles within marriage, focusing on childbirth, child-rearing, patriarchy, and male chauvinism. A later generation of writers, including Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Purple Hibiscus*), Lola Shoneyin (*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*), and Yejide Kilanko (*Daughters Who Walk this Path*), have also made significant contributions to African feminist literature.

Unlike the earlier generations of feminist writers in Africa, particularly Nigeria, who are well-known for their focus on the treatment of women in society, there are authors who, while not as prominent, effectively promote feminism in their works. These writers are often referred to as "silent" feminist authors. In addition to addressing women's issues, they also tackle broader societal problems. Aliyu (2016) notes that contemporary Nigerian female writers continue to address patriarchal issues, but they also critique flawed social, economic, and political structures exacerbated by poor leadership, which affect everyone in society. These writers present women more realistically, in contrast to previous generations who often idealized women in their works. Authors such as Abi Dare, Joseph Morountodun, Ayobami Adebayo, Ukamaka Olisakwe, Namina Forna, Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia, and Damilare Kuku fall into this category. Aliyu (2013) asserts that feminism addresses women's roles and considerations in social, political, psychological, and economic aspects of life. Feminist literary criticism, emerging alongside sociopolitical feminism, critiques patriarchal language and literature by revealing how they reflect masculine ideology. It examines gender politics in literature, analyzing the subtle construction of masculinity and femininity and their relative status, positioning, and career marginalization.

Hence, this paper examines Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* (2017) through the lens of radical feminist criticism.

Emergence and Development of Nigerian Women's Literature

The trajectory of Nigerian women's literature reflects a dynamic interplay

between historical, cultural, and political influences. Early pioneers such as Flora Nwapa (*Efuru*, 1966) and Buchi Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood*, 1979) foregrounded the challenges of patriarchy, domestic roles, and cultural expectations placed upon women. Their works opened up literary spaces that interrogated female identity in postcolonial Nigeria.

As new generations of female writers emerged, there was a marked shift toward more varied and experimental narratives. Authors like Zaynab Alkali, Ifeoma Okoye, and Sefi Atta expanded the thematic focus to include urban life, education, and mental health. The third generation of Nigerian women writers, represented by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Oyinkan Braithwaite, further pushes the boundaries by embracing global feminist discourses, transnational identities, and genre hybridity. Adichie's work spans historical fiction, short stories, and feminist essays, while Braithwaite adopts crime fiction and satire to examine familial and societal dysfunction.

Thus, Nigeria women's literature has transitioned from realist narratives rooted in tradition to bold, form-challenging texts that interrogated not only patriarchy but also genre itself. This evolution sets the stage for understanding how the feminist aesthetics shape the form and content of *My Sister, the serial killer and Dear Ijeawele*, reinforcing their critique of patriarchal structures.

An Overview of Feminism

Feminism is a global ideological and political movement aimed at transforming the power dynamics between men and women. Rooted in individual and collective experiences, feminism claims that society is based on patriarchal principles that privilege men over women, resulting in discrimination against women (Vukoicic, 2018). Feminist literary theory seeks to liberate women from gender repression.

Feminism is the belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Since most societies privilege men, social movements are necessary to achieve gender equality, acknowledging that gender intersects with other social hierarchies (Freedman, 2007). Fourier's utopian socialism emphasized the importance of social progress and equality, including the emancipation of women. His ideas were revolutionary for the time, challenging the patriarchal structures and advocating for a society where women could participate equally alongside men. Feminism, fundamentally, is the belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. This principle underpins the various waves of feminist movements, each addressing different aspects of gender inequality.

However, Adewoye (1980), in his article *The Role of Women in Traditional Literature*, states that women are not given their due recognition.

He notes that pre-literate women suffered from a lack of acknowledgment from both literate men and women. Women have contributed significantly to their societies, especially in oral literature, where African women have played a revolutionary role. Adewoye's assertion that women have not been given due recognition in traditional literature is supported by several scholarly observations and examples, particularly in the context of oral traditions and African societies. In many cultures, traditional literature, especially before the advent of widespread literacy, was dominated by oral traditions. These traditions often did not document or adequately credit the contributions of women. In patriarchal societies, historical narratives, myths, and folklore were predominantly recorded by men, for men, and about men, sidelining the roles and voices of women.

In oral literature, a vital component of cultural heritage, has been shaped by women. In many African societies, women have been the primary custodians of oral traditions. They have been storytellers, singers, poets, and keepers of communal knowledge. Their roles have been revolutionary in preserving and transmitting cultural values, histories, and social norms across generations. African women, in particular, have played an indispensable role in oral literature. They have used storytelling and song to convey moral lessons, historical events, and communal wisdom. For instance, the griots or jeliw in West African cultures, though often associated with men, have female counterparts who are equally important in maintaining oral traditions. These women have been instrumental in passing down genealogies, cultural histories, and social customs.

Furthermore, Finnegan (1970), emphasizes the significant role women played in the oral literary traditions of various African societies. She notes that women are often the main performers of lullabies, work songs, and other forms of oral poetry, which are essential to the cultural fabric of these communities. There has been a growing recognition of the need to re-evaluate historical narratives and give due credit to the contributions of women in traditional literature. The growing body of scholarly work that highlights these contributions showcases the importance of acknowledging and valuing the role of women in traditional literature.

Lewis (2003), describes feminism as a culture that treats women differently and places them at a disadvantage. He asserts that such treatment is cultural and changeable, not an immutable aspect of the world. Feminism aims for personal and social change towards a more equitable culture. Lewis postulation explores the historical, sociological, and cultural perspectives that demonstrates how gender roles and inequalities are socially constructed and subject to change. Throughout history, the roles and status of women have

varied significantly across different cultures and eras, illustrating the cultural and changeable nature of gender inequality. For example, in ancient Greece, women had limited rights and were often confined to domestic roles. However, in ancient Egypt, women enjoyed more rights, such as owning property and participating in legal matters. During the medieval period in Europe, women's roles were largely confined to the household. In contrast, in some African and Native American societies, women held significant political and social power. These examples depict that the treatment of women has been culturally specific rather than universally fixed, supporting Lewis's view that such treatment is cultural and subject to change.

Sociological theories provide frameworks for understanding how gender roles and inequalities are socially constructed and perpetuated through cultural norms and institutions. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender is not an inherent quality but a set of behaviors and roles performed based on societal expectations. This perspective supports the idea that gender roles are culturally constructed and, therefore, changeable. Additionally, sociologists like Sylvia Walby have analyzed how patriarchy is embedded in societal institutions such as the family, education, and the workplace. These institutions socialize the individuals into accepting and perpetuating gender inequalities. Changes in these institutions, driven by feminist movements, can lead to shifts in cultural norms and reduce gender disparities.

The cultural perspective emphasizes the role of cultural narratives, media and education in shaping perceptions of gender and driving social change. Feminist critiques of media representation have shown how women are often portrayed in stereotypical roles that reinforce gender inequalities. Campaigns for more diverse and empowering representations of women in media have led to gradual cultural shifts. Educational initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality have been instructed in changing cultural attitudes. However, the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw, further grounds the Lewis's view that gender inequality is culturally constructed and changeable. Intersectionality which examines how various forms of discrimination (based on race, class, and sexuality) intersect and create unique experience of oppression. By addressing these intersections, feminism aims to create a more inclusive and equitable culture for all individuals, demonstrating that inequalities are not immutable but can be transformed through a holistic approach.

Furthermore, Aliyu-Ibrahim (2016), states that feminism addresses women's roles and considerations in social, political, psychological, and economic life. Feminist literary criticism, in conjunction with sociopolitical

feminism, critiques patriarchal language and literature, exposing masculine ideology. It examines gender politics in literature and the construction of masculinity and femininity, along with their status, positioning, and career marginalization. Aliyu-Ibrahim's perspective emphasizes how feminism intersects with multiple dimensions of life and how feminist literary criticism plays a crucial role in challenging and deconstructing patriarchal ideologies. Feminism, as both a movement and academic discipline, comprehensively addresses various aspects of women's lives. In the social sphere feminism critiques traditional roles assigned to women, advocating for equal opportunities and rights in all areas of life. Feminists challenge norms that confine women to domestic roles and push for their equal participation in public and social life. Historically, movements such as the women's suffrage movement and the women's rights movement aimed to dismantle these restrictive roles and expand women's social participation.

Feminist literary criticism exposes and critiques masculine ideologies present in literature. By revealing how texts reflects and perpetuate male dominated perspectives, feminist critics aim to challenge these biases and foster a more inclusive literary canon. This analysis of gender politics in literature explores how texts portray gender roles, relationships, and power dynamics, shedding light on how literature both mirrors and influences societal attitudes toward gender.

Aliyu-Ibrahim (2016), further grounds the construction of masculinity and femininity in literature by asserting how critics analyze literary constructs and represents these concepts, investigating how texts contribute to the social construction of gender identities. This includes examining how literature reinforces stereotypes about gender roles and how it can either challenge or perpetuate these stereotypes. This perspective addresses issues of status, positioning, and career marginalization in literature. It examines how females' characters are positioned within narratives and how these portrayals reflects broader societal marginalization of women. By analyzing the representation of women's professional and person lives in literature, Aliyu-Ibrahim perspective highlights and critiques the ways in which these portrayals contribute to or challenge existing gender hierarchies.

A common misconception is that feminism promotes hatred against men; instead, it advocates for equal rights for both genders. Ruether (2011) argues that feminism critiques patriarchy, which distorts the humanity of both women and men. Feminism seeks cultural, political, economic, and social equality, believing in equal opportunities and treatment for all genders. Fidelis (2018) explains that gender equality in feminist criticism denotes women's efforts to achieve equal treatment with men at work, home, and in society.

Feminism is fundamentally concerned with women's roles and considerations in society. Fidelis's perspective examines how feminism addresses gender inequality in different domains and how it fundamentally concerns itself with women's experiences and roles.

In the workplace, feminism has long focused on addressing gender disparities that affect women's professional opportunities and treatment. Historically, women have faced significant barriers, including occupational segregation and wage gaps, which have marginalized their contributions and restricted their advancement. Feminist efforts to achieve equal pay have led to important legislative changes, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 in the United States, aimed at addressing these disparities. Despite these advancements, feminist criticism continues to highlight ongoing issues such as the persistence of the gender pay gap and discriminatory workplace practices. Fidelis's perspective emphasizes the advocacy of fair treatment, inclusive work environments and policies that support work-life balance, which are essential for promoting gender equality at work within the feminist literary criticism.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that advocates for a fundamental restructuring of society to eliminate male supremacy in all social and economic spheres. It recognizes that women's experiences are also shaped by other intersecting factors such as race, class, and sexual orientation. According to McLaren (2012), radical feminists call for the transformation of all established institutions, including political, legal, economic, social, cultural, and medical systems. He argues that striving for equality based on sameness can ultimately disadvantage women, as the sex/gender system itself is seen as the foundational cause of women's oppression.

Radical feminism is known for the declaration that "the personal is political," emphasizing the structural and systemic nature of women's oppression. Radical feminists were instrumental in initiating health movements and in educating women about their bodies (McLaren, 2012). Their focus is on the subordination of women and the ways in which male power is maintained and reinforced through practices such as sexual harassment, rape, prostitution, childbearing, domestic labor, romantic relationships, and marriage. Radical feminists have made significant contributions to addressing violence against women.

In response to the widespread devaluation of women in society, radical feminism celebrates womanhood, highlighting the creative and reproductive power inherent in female biology. It seeks the abolition of patriarchy to liberate all members of society from systemic injustice by challenging

entrenched social norms and institutions. This includes opposing the sexual objectification of women, raising public consciousness about rape and violence, and dismantling traditional gender roles (Vukoicic, 2018).

Features of Radical Feminism

Vukoicic (2018) outlines the defining characteristics of radical feminism, which are grounded in the belief that the eradication of patriarchy is essential to ending women's oppression. These features include:

- i. The incitement to and rejection of traditional gender roles, as well as the critique of how women are portrayed in language, the media, and personal interactions.
- ii. The development of anti-patriarchal constructions of female sexuality and the rejection of conventional models of heterosexual relationships.
- iii. The pursuit of sexual freedom and bodily autonomy for women.

Critical Perspectives on Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the serial killer* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*

This section critiques existing scholarly works on Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the serial killer* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*, with the aim of identifying key gaps that the present research addresses through a radical feminist lens.

Ihueze and Blessing's work(2024) explores the evolving symbolic meaning of the knife through a Psychoanalytic lens. The paper reveals how the knife embodies unconscious desires, repressed memories, and the moral decay of the protagonists, Ayoola and Korede. However, the focus of the present research diverges entirely from this psychoanalytic perspective.

Similarly, Ihueze and Nneka's (2023) examines the symbolic representation of moral corruption. The knife, passed from an abusive father to his daughters, becomes a foreboding symbol of humanity's inner darkness. Again, while insightful, this symbolic reading does not align with the radical feminist approach in the present study.

Ogbazi and Emelumadu's article (2022) employs a trauma framework to investigate the psychological and sociological effects of repressed pain in the female characters. However, the paper does not engage with the themes of sexual objectification nor violence against women, which are central to this study's focus. Thus, its orientation remains distinct from the concerns of this research.

Furthermore, Akeju-Ahmad and Shobowale's(2024) explores how

Adichie's linguistic choices articulate socio-cultural issues relating to gender roles in Nigerian society. Using Systemic Functional Linguistics, the authors demonstrate the connection between language and literature in the text. While relevant, their stylistic approach differs significantly from the radical feminist lens adopted in this study.

Sebola (2022) discusses how Adichie seeks to reposition postcolonial hermeneutics on Black women's identity, shedding light on the challenge faced by African women. However, it does not delve into the complexities of gender politics, patriarchy, or the definition of gender roles and sexual autonomy as this research does.

Shama (2024) interprets the text within the framework of class struggle, portraying men as the dominant class and women as the subordinated proletariat. While insightful, this Marxist reading does not align with the present study's focus on feminist critique, particularly radical feminism.

Research Methodology

This study employs Radical Feminist Theory to critically examine patriarchal structures and their representation in literature. Radical feminism calls for the fundamental transformation of societal norms in order to eliminate male dominance and the oppression of women. The framework guides the feminist reading of Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the serial killer* (2018) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* (2017). A qualitative research design is utilized to explore the feminist themes presented in these works. Qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth examination of textual nuances and themes that challenge or reinforce gender roles and expectations. This involves close reading and interpretation of the texts to uncover how each author presents feminist ideas and critiques patriarchal norms. Key passages, themes, and character dynamics reflecting radical feminist perspectives are identified and analyzed. By integrating Radical Feminist Theory with qualitative analysis, this research aims to illuminate how the selected texts critique patriarchal norms and contribute to feminist discourse.

Analysis

Elimination of Gender Inequality in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*

Women, have historically endured oppression, domination, and humiliation by men, primarily due to the dominant ideology of patriarchy, which perpetuates gender inequalities. Radical feminists advocate the

abolition of patriarchy to liberate society from injustice by challenging established social norms and institutions.

We sit in our customary places at our rectangular table my mother and I are seated on the left, Ayoola on the right There used to be a chair at the head of the table, but I burnt it down to a crisp in a borne fire just outside our compound. We don't talk about that. We don't talk about him. (p.53)

The narrative excerpt from *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018) by Oyinkan symbolically illustrates a feminist aesthetic: the complete elimination of gender inequalities. The scene depicts a lunch setting where Ayoola, her mother, and Korede sit around a table, notably missing a chair symbolizing male dominance and patriarchy. Korede's act of burning the chair signifies the rejection of oppressive systems that have long dominated society. Traditionally, the head of the table represents the seat of authority, often occupied by the male figure in a patriarchal family structure. By burning this chair, Korede rejects and eliminates this symbol of patriarchal dominance. This act can be seen as a radical feminist statement against the traditional male authority and the gender hierarchy it perpetuates. Korede mentions, "We don't talk about that. We don't talk about him." This silence is seen as a form of suppression, where the family refuses to acknowledge or discuss the past authority figure. From a radical feminist perspective, this silence depicts the erasure of oppressive influences, refusing to give voice or power to the figure that once held sway over the family. It signifies a deliberate move to create a new narrative free from patriarchal control.

The new seating arrangement, with the mother and Korede on one side and Ayoola on the other, depicts a reconfiguration of family dynamics. Without the head of the table, the family is depicted as more egalitarian, without a single dominant figure. This shift aligns with radical feminist ideals of dismantling hierarchical structures within the family to promote equality and shared power. Korede's act of burning down the chair demonstrates a significant assertion of female agency. Taking decisive action to eliminate a symbol of patriarchal authority and autonomy. By removing the chair and not discussing the patriarchal figure, the family challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. This action undermines the notion that authority and leadership within the family must be male dominated.

Encourage her participation in sports.

Teach her to be physically active. Take walks with her. Swim. Run. Play tennis. Football. Table tennis. All kinds of sports. Any Kind of sports. (p.28)

In *Dear Ijeawele* (2017), Adichie offers fifteen suggestions to empower a mother's daughter, emphasizing the importance of encouraging girls to participate in sports and challenging societal norms that limit women's activities. This aligns with radical feminism's goal of restructuring society to eliminate male supremacy in all contexts, including social and economic contexts. This excerpt suggests that certain sporting activities are traditionally not designed for females and that society often only permits the male gender, contributing to the strong determinant of male dominance over females. Encouraging girls to participate in a variety of sports challenges traditional gender stereotypes that often depict physical activity and sports as predominantly male domains. Sports participation can significantly empower girls, fostering a sense of confidence, independence, and agency. Radical feminism emphasizes the need for women and girls to reclaim their power and autonomy. By engaging in physical activities, girls develop strength, resilience, and self-assurance, which are crucial for challenging and overcoming patriarchal constraints.

Adichie's emphasis on participation in "all kinds of sports" promotes equality of opportunity. It suggests that girls should have access to the same range of sports and physical activities as boys. By promoting girls' participation in sports, Adichie implicitly challenges institutional barriers that often limit their access to sports facilities, resources, and training. Radical feminism aims to address and dismantle these systemic barriers to ensure that girls can freely participate in and benefit from sports. This includes advocating policies and practices that support equal access and opportunities in sports. The directive to "take walks with her" and participate in sports together underscores the importance of role modeling and mentorship. Radical feminism recognizes the value of women supporting and empowering each other. By actively engaging in sports with girls, parents and mentors can provide positive role models, fostering a culture of physical activity and strength that transcends traditional gender roles.

I prefer Mrs. because it is similar to Mr.
A man is Mr. whether married or not, a
woman is Mrs. whether married or not So
please teach Chizalum that in a truly just
society, women should not be expected to

make marriage-based changes that men
are not expected to make. (p.35)

Adichie further addresses societal norms in *Dear Ijeawele* (2017), championing equality in marital titles and rejecting expectations that women should change their names upon marriage. This challenges the entrenched sexism that underpins beliefs about gender superiority and advocates for equal rights in a just society. The preference for "Mrs." over "Ms." reflects a desire to challenge traditional norms that require women to change their titles based on marital status, while men retain a consistent title regardless of marital status. Radical feminism critiques these norms as reinforcing patriarchal values, where women are defined in relation to their marital status, perpetuating inequality and erasing individual identity. By advocating the use of "Mrs." regardless of marital status, the excerpt asserts a symbolic equality with "Mr." which remains unchanged for men. This challenges the societal expectation that women must indicate their marital status through titles, whereas men are not similarly obligated. Radical feminism aims to eliminate such double standards and promote equal treatment and respect for women's identities and choices.

The statement, "women should not be expected to make marriage-based changes that men are not expected to make," critiques the unequal burdens placed on women within marital relationships. This highlights how traditional marriage norms often enforce roles and expectations that disadvantage women, such as name changes, domestic responsibilities, and economic dependence. The call for teaching Chizalum about a "truly just society" depicts a radical feminist vision of equality and justice. In a truly just society, individuals should have the freedom to define their identities and make choices without being constrained by gender norms or expectations. This includes challenging practices that perpetuate inequality and advocating for policies and cultural shifts that promote gender equity. Teaching Chizalum about these issues from a young age empowers her to critically engage with societal norms and expectations. This approach, peculiar to radical feminism, emphasizes the importance of education and awareness-raising to empower individuals to challenge and change oppressive structures and norms.

Tell her to stand up for what is hers, if
another child takes her toy without her
permission, ask her to take it back, because
her context is important... (p.33)

Adichie's instruction to "stand up for what is hers" encourages the girl to assert herself and take action when her boundaries or possessions

are violated. This feminist aesthetic challenges traditional gender norms that often discourage assertiveness in girls and women, promoting instead the empowerment to defend for themselves and assert their rights. By emphasizing that "her context is important," the excerpt validates the girl's ownership and autonomy over her belongings and personal space.

Sexism is an ideology rooted in the belief that one sex is inherently superior to another. It manifests as discrimination, prejudice, or stereotyping based on gender, primarily targeting girls and women. Adichie's suggestion highlights the pervasive societal prejudice against women, urging mothers to teach their daughters about equality in a truly just society where women have equal rights with men. This perspective aligns with radical feminism, which aims to dismantle the belief in gender superiority by challenging existing social norms that dictate expectations based on gender.

Also, gender equality is an expression used in feminist criticism to denote the striving of women to have equal treatment with men at work, home and in the society." This is to further justify the fact that feminism is basically concerned with the female gender; that is, their place and consideration in societies. The passage vividly portrays the challenge against existing social norms dictating how society expects females to behave and respond to issues. Male domination remains pervasive, often resulting in unfair treatment of women who are sometimes seen as lesser beings, physically vulnerable, and emotionally dependent, lacking autonomy. Conversely, men are often viewed as naturally dominant. This societal perception has been exploited by sexual predators, and many girls remain silent about abuse to conform to societal expectations of being agreeable.

Radical feminists oppose this patriarchal tradition, aiming to liberate everyone from such oppressive systems by advocating for gender equality and challenging societal norms that perpetuate discrimination and subjugation based on gender.

Eradication of Exploitation and Oppression of Women in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*

Radical feminists perceive society fundamentally as a patriarchy where men hold dominant power and oppress women. They aim to dismantle this patriarchy to free everyone from an unjust system by challenging established social norms and institutions. This includes combating the sexual objectification of women, increasing awareness about issues like rape and violence against women, and questioning traditional gender roles (McLaren, 2012). As a result, women are often victims of domestic violence, oppression,

and exploitation within this patriarchal framework. They endure various forms of mistreatment, including neglect, discrimination, and rejection, perpetuated by male counterparts. Radical feminists highlight the harms and dangers arising from unchecked male domination and the systemic subjugation of women in society.

And speaking of shame - never, ever link sexuality and shame. Or nakedness and shame. Do not ever make 'virginity' a focus. Every conversation about virginity becomes a conversation about shame. Teach her to reject the linking of shame and female biology. Why were we raised to speak in low tones about periods? To be filled with shame if our menstrual blood happened to stain our skirt? (p.59)

The passage above illustrates the extent of intimidation and oppression experienced by women in patriarchal societies. Nigerian society, deeply rooted in patriarchy, exemplifies this traditional structure where male dominance is a defining feature, shaping social relations and norms. However, the narrative presents a radical stance against male dominance by advocating against the sexual objectification of women, raising awareness about issues like rape and violence against women, and questioning traditional gender roles. This radical aesthetic challenges the entrenched norms that perpetuate gender inequality and harm women's rights.

Adichie emphasizes the importance of never linking sexuality and shame. Radical feminism critiques how patriarchal societies often use shame to control and oppress women's sexuality. By rejecting the association of shame with female sexuality, the excerpt advocates for women's right to embrace and express their sexuality on their own terms, free from societal judgment and condemnation. By challenging the linking of nakedness and shame, Adichie confronts societal norms that dictate women should feel ashamed of their bodies and sexual experiences. This feminist aesthetic argues against the objectification and sexualization of women's bodies, promoting instead the celebration of bodily autonomy and the rejection of societal expectations that demean women based on their physical appearance or sexual history.

Adichie critiques the focus on virginity, depicting how conversations about virginity often lead to discussions about shame. This feminist aesthetic approach challenges the concept of virginity as a social construct imposed on women to control their sexuality and value. Instead, it makes the case for

valuing women for their autonomy, choices, and individuality beyond societal expectations of purity or chastity.

We came out of my room because Mum was screaming, and there they were on the landing. “E gba mi o! O fe ba ale mi je O fe yi mi Lori ni? O ju si mi ! He looked at her with indifference. “if you don’t shut up now, I will deal with you. (p.95)

The passage illustrates the dangers of male domination and the subjugation of women in society. Korede and Ayoola came out of their rooms upon hearing their mother’s loud scream, dressed in her typical nightwear of a camisole and wrapper, despite never raising her voice to him before. The statement “I will deal with you” reflects an oppressive aesthetic prevalent in societies where men hold primary power, asserting dominance in governance, moral authority, social privileges, and control over affairs.

The woman’s pleas, “E gba mi o! O fe ba ale mi je. O fe yi mi Lori ni? O ju si mi!” and the man’s threatening response reflect a broader societal tendency to dismiss and silence women’s voices, especially in situations of abuse. This feminist perspective seeks to amplify women’s voices, ensuring their experiences and perspectives are heard and taken seriously in all spheres of life. The excerpt exemplifies how patriarchal structures facilitate and perpetuate the control and oppression of women. The man’s threat to “deal with” the woman if she does not comply is indicative of a broader societal norm where men often feel entitled to exert control over women, using violence or the threat of violence to enforce their will. The dialogue depicts cultural norms that place women in vulnerable positions, expecting them to endure and remain silent about abuse to preserve family honor or avoid social stigma.

Aliyu-Ibrahim (2016) asserts that “feminism focuses on addressing women’s roles and considerations in various aspects of human life: social, political, psychological, and economic” (p.2). Feminist literary criticism, aligned with socio-political feminism, critiques patriarchal language and literature by revealing how they perpetuate masculine ideologies. It analyzes gender dynamics in literature, examining how masculinity and femininity are constructed, their relative statuses, positions, and career marginalization.

Ending Sexual Violence and Promotion of Sexual Freedom in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele*

Sexual violence encompasses sexual exploitation and abuse, describing any act, attempt, or threat of a sexual nature that causes or is likely to cause physical, psychological, or emotional harm. It constitutes a form of gender-based violence. Women, as a specific gender, have historically faced oppression, violation, and humiliation perpetrated by men.

The knife was for her protection. You never knew with men, "they wanted what they wanted when they wanted it". She didn't mean to kill him; she wanted to warn him off, but he wasn't scared of her weapon.
(p.15)

The passage above highlights the principles of radical feminism aimed at addressing and ending sexual violence against women. Femi's lack of fear towards Korede's weapon, viewing her as diminutive compared to his height, underscores the narrative's call for an end to the pervasive issue of sexual violence fueled by male domination in society. Ayoola's possession of a knife "for her protection" illustrates the pervasive threat of sexual violence that women face. This feminist perspective acknowledges that patriarchal societies often fail to protect women, necessitating self-defense measures. This reality underscores broader systemic issues of gender-based violence and the need for societal and legal reforms to ensure women's safety without requiring them to resort to extreme measures. The statement, "they wanted what they wanted when they wanted it," reflects a deeply ingrained sense of male entitlement to women's bodies. Radical feminism critiques this entitlement as a fundamental aspect of patriarchy that perpetuates sexual violence. By challenging and dismantling this entitlement, this feminist perspective seeks to create a culture where sexual consent and autonomy are respected, and where men do not feel entitled to women's bodies. The excerpt implicitly touches on the lack of sexual freedom for women, who must constantly navigate the threat of sexual violence.

Tell her that her body belongs to her and her alone that she should never feel the need to say yes to something she does not want, or something she feels pressured to do. Teach her that saying no when no feels right is something to be proud of. (p.18)

The assertion that "her body belongs to her and her alone" is a fundamental principle of radical feminism. This statement emphasizes that women have the absolute right to control their own bodies, free from

external pressures or coercion. Teaching a girl to “never feel the need to say yes to something she does not want, or something she feels pressured to do” underscores the importance of consent. Radical feminism stresses that true sexual freedom is rooted in the ability to give or withhold consent without fear of repercussions. This perspective challenges patriarchal norms that often dismiss or undermine women’s autonomy and consent, promoting a culture where women’s choices are respected and valued. Adichie encourages women to resist coercion, emphasizing that saying no “when no feels right is something to be proud of.” This feminist perspective critiques the pervasive culture of coercion and manipulation that pressures women into unwanted sexual activities. By affirming the right to say no, radical feminism seeks to empower women to stand up against coercive practices and assert their autonomy.

Feminism aims to address women’s roles and considerations across social, political, psychological, and economic aspects of human life (Aliyu-Ibrahim, 2016). This conversation highlights feminism’s aesthetic by emphasizing the importance of women understanding that their bodies belong to them alone, which is crucial for combating rampant sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom. In many societies, male domination persists, often treating women as subordinate and leading to unfair treatment. According to Adebayo (1999), feminism involves asserting, describing, and documenting women’s experiences. This reinforces the idea that feminism centers on the female gender in society. Writers express their opinions and views on the injustices of gender inequality while also developing stylistic and figurative expressions in their writings.

We also use evolutionary biology to explain male promiscuity, but not to explain female promiscuity. So, teach Chizalum that biology is an interesting and fascinating subject, but she should never accept it as a justification for social norm. (p.18)

The excerpt critiques the selective application of evolutionary biology to justify male promiscuity while ignoring female promiscuity. Radical feminism identifies this as a patriarchal strategy to maintain control over women’s sexuality. By teaching Chizalum that biology should not be used to justify social norms, Adichie argues for critical thinking and the rejection of pseudo-scientific justifications for gender inequality. The idea that biology can be an “interesting and fascinating subject” but not a justification for social

norms aligns with the radical feminist perspective on biological determinism. This perspective argues that attributing social behaviors to biological imperatives often serves to neutralize and legitimize patriarchal structures. The patriarchal double standards around promiscuity contribute to a culture that tolerates and excuses sexual violence against women. By promoting critical thinking and the rejection of these double standards, the excerpt aligns with radical feminism's goal of ending sexual violence. Educating girls like Chizalum to question and reject these norms helps create a society where women's boundaries and autonomy are respected.

The passage highlights how women are oppressed due to the patriarchal ideology that underpins sexual violence. Patriarchal societies establish norms that structurally disadvantage women within families, reinforcing male dominance. Traditionally, culture, and religion have long dictated gender relations, embedding male supremacy into social and institutional structures, including leadership and education, thereby justifying women's marginalization. However, in Oyinkan's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* and Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* (2017), employing a radical feminist approach seeks to dismantle patriarchy to free everyone from an unjust society. This involves challenging prevailing social norms and institutions, such as combating the sexual objectification of women, increasing public awareness about issues like rape and violence against women, and questioning traditional gender roles.

Conclusion

Exploring feminist themes in literature, particularly through the lens of radical feminism in works like *My Sister, the Serial Killer* and *Dear Ijeawele*, reveals the persistent struggle against patriarchal norms and the ongoing quest for gender equality. These narratives expose how patriarchy systematically disadvantages women, perpetuating sexual violence and reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. By critiquing societal structures and advocating for women's autonomy and empowerment, the authors compel readers to reconsider traditional gender roles and imagine a more equitable society. This study has demonstrated that feminist literary criticism is a vital tool for raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and promoting social transformation. Moving forward, sustained engagement with feminist discourse remains essential to advancing the agenda of gender equality and dismantling oppressive systems that limit women's rights and potential.

REFERENCES

Adewoye, A. (1980). *The Role of Women in Traditional Literature*. University of Ilorin Press.

Adiche, C. (2017). *Dear Ijeawele*. Canongate Books.

Adiche, C. (2003). *Purple hibiscus*. Algonquin Books.

Aidoo, A. A. (1977). *Our Sister Killjoy: Or reflections from a Black-eyed squint*. Longman.

Aliyu-Ibrahim, F. (2013). *Examining the feminist perspective of selected emerging Nigerian women writers*. (unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Ilorin. Ilorin.

Aliyu-Ibrahim, F. (2016). *An approach to contextualising feminist writings in African culture*. Lambert Academic Publishing.

Aliyu-Ibrahim, F. (2018). Culture and Afro-centric Feminist Notions: A Critical Analysis of Stiwanism, Motherism, Womanism and Nego-Feminism. *Journal of the Literary Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1), 123-140.

Akeju-Ahmad, W., & Shobowale, S. (2024). Stylistics Analysis of Chimamanda Adiche's *Dear Ijeawele*. *Dutsin-Ma Journal of English and Literature*, 8 (2), 336-357.

Atta, S. (2005). *Everything Good Will Come*. Interlink Books.

Bà, M. (1981). *So Long A Letter*. Heinemann.

Braithwaite, O. (2017). *My Sister The Serial Killer*. Penguin Books.

Emecheba, B. (1979). *The Joys of Motherhood*. Heinemann.

Finnegan, R. (2012). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Open Book Publishers.

Freeman, J. (1972). The tyranny of structurelessness. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1), 151 - 165.

Freeman J. (1975). Political organization in the Feminist Movement. *Acta Sociologica*, 18 (3), 222-244.

Goldstein, L. F. (1982). Early Feminist Themes in French Utopian Socialism: The St.-Simonians and Fourier. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 43 (1), 91-108.

Hannam, J. (2007). *Feminism*. Pearson Longman Publishing.

Ihueze, A., & Ike, C. (2024). The Knife: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Toxic Inheritance in My Sister, the serial killer. *International Journal on Studies in English language and Literature*, 12 (7), 1-6.

Ihueze, A., & Ike, C. (2023). Deciphering Humanity's Shadow: Symbolic depiction of Decadence in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the serial killer*. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 11(12),

122-127.

Jackson, S. & Scott, S. (2002). *Gender: A Sociological reader*. New York: Routledge.

Kilanko, Y. (2012). *Daughters who walk this path*. Penguin Canada.

Kimberle, W. (2017). *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. The New Press.

Lewis, R., & Mills, S. (Eds.) (2003). *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader* (1st ed.). Routledge

McLaren, M. (2012). *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*. Suny Press.

Nwapa, F. (1966). *Efuru*. Heinemann.

Ogbazi, I., & Emelumadu, I. (2022). Beneath the Mask: Personality disorder in the female characters of Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the serial killer*. *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies*, 8 (1), 1-6.

Sarker, M. (2024). *Dear Ijeawele*: A Marxist Analysis. *Erothanatos*, 8 (1), 1-8.

Sebola, M. (2022). Some Reflections On Selected Themes in Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's Fiction and her *Feminist Manifesto*. *Literator - Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 43 (1), 17-23.

Shoneyin, L. (2010). *The secret lives of Baba Segi's wives*. Serpent's Tail.

Vukoicic, J. (2013). Radical feminism as a discourse in the theory of conflict. *Sociological Discourse*, 3 (5), 33-49.