

LITERARY ANALYSIS, STYLISTIC ANALYSIS, AND A PROPOSAL MODEL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment remains one of the most significant challenges in contemporary African societies, where sociocultural, religious, economic, and psychological barriers continue to limit women's agency and development. This study investigates the environmental challenges affecting women's empowerment in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Americanah* (2013), and *Notes on Grief* (2021). The research aims to identify the major obstacles confronting women, examine the strategies they employ to achieve empowerment, and propose a theoretical model that explains the empowerment process. Employing a qualitative research design, the study combines literary and stylistic analyses within the frameworks of New Criticism and African Reformist Feminism. Through close textual analysis of characters, narrative techniques, and stylistic devices, the findings reveal that women's empowerment is a dynamic process shaped by education, supportive social relationships, personal commitment, and resistance to patriarchal oppression. The study further demonstrates that empowerment is strengthened through positive interactions between women and their sociocultural environment. Consequently, it proposes the Positive Connection Model, founded on three interrelated pillars—Connection, Equipment, and Engagement as an innovative framework for understanding and promoting women's empowerment in African contexts. The study concludes that Adichie's works not only expose the structural barriers faced by women but also advocate practical pathways toward emancipation through education, solidarity, resilience, and social transformation.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; women's empowerment; African Reformist Feminism; New Criticism; literary analysis; stylistic analysis; environmental challenges; *Purple Hibiscus*; *Americanah*; *Notes on Grief*; Positive Connection Model.

INTRODUCTION

This study is situated within the framework of postcolonial committed literature, applying a qualitative method based on New Criticism and African Reformist Feminism. Our investigation focuses on the analysis of environmental challenges that hinder the process of women's empowerment in three major works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Americanah* (2013), and *Notes on Grief* (2021). This chapter constitutes the core of our doctoral research, aiming to demonstrate how Adichie's female characters confront sociocultural, economic, psychological, and religious obstacles in their quest for emancipation.

The primary objective of this study is threefold: first, to identify and analyze the different types of environmental challenges faced by women in the selected works; second, to examine the struggle strategies deployed by these women for their empowerment; third, to propose a

theoretical model of women's empowerment based on the lessons drawn from the textual analysis. This model, which we have entitled "Positive Connection," aims to illustrate how women's empowerment depends on the interactions between women and their sociocultural environment.

Our methodological approach relies on qualitative textual analysis, combining literary analysis (plot, characters, setting, point of view) and stylistic analysis (narrative techniques, figures of speech, African literary resources). We also mobilize African Reformist Feminism as a theoretical framework, allowing us to contextualize women's struggles within their specific African cultural specificity while recognizing the necessity of a progressive transformation of gender relations.

SECTION I: TYPOLOGY OF WOMEN AND FEMINIST EXPRESSION

1.1 In Purple Hibiscus

Purple Hibiscus, Adichie's first novel published in 2003, constitutes a foundational work in the expression of her feminist philosophy. The novel presents two contrasting female archetypes: Beatrice Achike (Mama), the incarnation of the submissive and obedient woman, and Auntie Ifeoma, the representation of the emancipated and assertive woman. This narrative duality allows Adichie to explore the different paths of empowerment available to women in postcolonial Nigerian society.

1.1.1 Beatrice Achike (Mama): The "Good" and Silent Woman

Beatrice Achike, nicknamed Mama, is presented as a pious, silent woman accustomed to obeying the rules dictated by her husband. Her character illustrates the condition of the traditional African woman, trapped in roles assigned by patriarchy and religion. As Udumuku points out in *Signature of Women* (2007), the "good woman" in postcolonial Africa is one who suffers in silence, maintaining a passivity and docility that make her acceptable in the eyes of patriarchal society.

The literary analysis of the character reveals a tragic evolution. At the beginning of the novel, Beatrice tolerates the brutality of her husband Eugene, a fervent Catholic who abuses his family in the name of religion. The narrative events show how Eugene's repeated beatings cause successive miscarriages in Beatrice. However, she refuses to leave the marital home, paralyzed by fear of social judgment and by her religious faith that condemns divorce.

The stylistic analysis of the passages devoted to Beatrice reveals Adichie's masterful use of physical and psychological description. Adichie employs short, simple sentences to translate Mama's state of anxiety and reduced speech: "Oh," I said. "Why did your father come this morning?" "I...I..." I stopped to take a breath. These ellipses and linguistic hesitations materialize the suffocation of the female voice in the patriarchal domestic space.

The narrative turning point occurs when Beatrice, after another miscarriage caused by Eugene's violence, decides to poison him progressively. This radicalization of her struggle illustrates the limits of liberal feminism in a context of extreme systemic violence. Adichie shows that when social and religious structures prevent any legitimate path of expression, some women may be

driven to desperate acts. As Mama herself affirms: "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor" (PH: 177).

1.1.2 Auntie Ifeoma: The Free and Courageous Woman

In striking contrast with Beatrice, Auntie Ifeoma embodies African feminism in its most assertive dimension. A widow, mother of three children, lecturer at the University of Nsukka, she lives in a modest house but radiates a freedom and dignity that Beatrice lacks. Her character is built through lively dialogues, sharp retorts that testify to her independence of mind.

The stylistic analysis of Ifeoma's dialogues reveals a strategic use of code-switching between English and Igbo. When she addresses her brother Eugene, she uses Igbo to mark her cultural anchoring and her resistance to his authoritarianism: "Eugene, let the children come out with us!" This linguistic alternation constitutes a major stylistic resource, signifying Ifeoma's refusal to submit to the linguistic and social norms imposed by her brother.

Ifeoma represents the woman who refuses to be defined by her marital status. When her sister-in-law Beatrice asks her: "Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house?", Ifeoma responds with proverbial wisdom: "Nwunye m, sometimes life begins when marriage ends" (PH: 44). This reply, borrowing from African oral tradition, illustrates how Adichie integrates cultural resources into her feminist writing.

1.2 In Americanah

Americanah (2013) extends Adichie's reflection to the challenges of racial identity and migration. The novel follows the journey of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who emigrates to the United States, and Auntie Uju, her aunt, a doctor forced to flee to America after the death of her protector, the General.

1.2.1 Ifemelu: The Identity Quest and Racial Consciousness

Ifemelu is the main character of the novel, an intelligent, determined young woman, but deeply marked by the feeling of dissatisfaction that her environment inspires in her. Her journey reveals the multiple layers of oppression faced by black women in the diaspora: sexism, racism, social class.

The literary analysis shows how Adichie structures the narrative around flashbacks that progressively reveal Ifemelu's traumas. The narrative technique of analepsis allows us to understand the origins of her malaise: her fanatically religious mother, economic difficulties, her relationship with Obinze, then the trials of American immigration.

On the stylistic level, Ifemelu's blog, entitled "Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America," constitutes a major narrative innovation. Adichie deploys a satirical and critical tone there, using humor as a political weapon. The blog excerpts, integrated into the narrative, create a textual polyphony that enriches the reflexive dimension of the work.

1.2.2 Auntie Uju: The Complexity of the Migrant Woman's Condition

Aunty Uju is a complex character who illustrates the compromises to which women are constrained in unequal power structures. A brilliant doctor, she becomes the General's mistress, a married and powerful man, to ensure her professional and material future. After the General's death, she flees to the United States with her son Dike, where she must work three jobs simultaneously to survive.

The analysis of Aunty Uju's dialogues reveals a significant linguistic evolution. In Nigeria, she speaks with assurance, using standard English and Igbo expressions. In the United States, her discourse modifies: she adopts simpler formulations, sometimes grammatically incorrect, reflecting her status as a precarious immigrant. This stylistic variation translates the loss of social status and the symbolic violence suffered by migrants.

1.3 In Notes on Grief

Notes on Grief (2021) is a memoir in which Adichie mourns her father, James Nwoye Adichie. Although the work does not directly address the challenges of women's empowerment, it reveals the family foundations that allowed the author to become an accomplished woman.

1.3.1 Chimamanda Adichie: The Grateful Daughter and Paternal Legacy

The character of Chimamanda herself, as narrator, offers a portrait of the autonomous, educated, and assertive woman. She attributes her success to the education and support of her father, who constantly encouraged her: "Yes, you're getting there. Don't doubt yourself. Don't stop" (NOG: 2021).

The stylistic analysis of this text reveals a poetic and meditative prose. Adichie uses short, fragmented sentences to translate the emotional shock of grief: "On 7 June, there was my father... On 8 June, Okey went to Abba... On 9 June, I kept our chat brief... On 10 June he was gone" (NOG: 5). This paratactic structure, devoid of subordination, mimics the brutal succession of events and the collapse of meaning.

1.3.2 Grace Achike: The Widow in Igbo Tradition

Grace, Chimamanda's mother, illustrates another facet of the African female experience. A widow, she chooses to assume the traditional Igbo mourning practices, including head shaving, despite her children's objections. Her attitude reveals the tension between individual affirmation and respect for cultural traditions.

SECTION II: WOMEN'S FIGHT FOR EMPOWERMENT

2.1 The Struggle in Purple Hibiscus

2.1.1 Beatrice's Silent Resistance

Beatrice's struggle for empowerment is first an internal, silent, and solitary struggle. She endures marital violence without ever publicly denouncing it, paralyzed by shame and fear. Her only comfort is the meticulous polishing of the figurines on the étagère, a ritual activity that symbolizes her need for control in a universe where she has none.

The analysis of symbols reveals the richness of Adichie's writing. The figurines broken by Eugene at the beginning of the novel prefigure the destruction of family innocence and the shift toward violence. The purple hibiscus, discovered in Ifeoma's garden, symbolizes the possibility of an alternative beauty and freedom, far from domestic tyranny.

2.1.2 Ifeoma's Radical Affirmation

Ifeoma, for her part, embodies open and organized struggle for empowerment. She fights on several fronts: against university authoritarianism, against family pressures, against poverty. Her final choice to leave Nigeria for the United States illustrates the strategy of exile as a means of empowerment.

On the stylistic level, Ifeoma's dialogues are marked by the use of proverbs and Igbo expressions. When she refuses Eugene's conditional help, she declares: "I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things" (PH: 57). This crude and provocative bodily metaphor translates the refusal of humiliation as the price of economic survival.

2.2 The Struggle in Americanah

2.2.1 Ifemelu and the Conquest of Voice

Ifemelu's struggle for empowerment passes through the conquest of her own voice. In the United States, she must learn to navigate a racial system that defines her before she defines herself. Her blog becomes the space where she can finally express herself freely, deconstructing racist and sexist stereotypes.

The analysis of narrative techniques shows how Adichie uses the blog as a distorting mirror of American society. The post titles ("Understanding America for the Non-American Black," "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor") create an ironic distance that allows Ifemelu to criticize the system while participating in it.

2.2.2 Auntie Uju and Survival Through Adaptation

Auntie Uju's struggle is more pragmatic, more down-to-earth. She must survive, raise her son, rebuild her medical career in a new country. Her marriage to Bartholomew, a Nigerian as contemptible as he is incompetent, illustrates the temptation to rely on a man as the only path to security. But Auntie Uju eventually leaves him, realizing that this dependence is a new form of enslavement.

2.3 The Struggle in Notes on Grief

In Notes on Grief, the struggle is not political but existential. Chimamanda must learn to live with her father's absence, to transform grief into writing. This therapeutic writing itself becomes an act of empowerment, allowing the author to make sense of her suffering.

SECTION III: DISCUSSION AND PROPOSED MODEL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

3.1 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of Adichie's three works allows us to draw several essential conclusions concerning environmental challenges and women's empowerment.

Firstly, the challenges faced by women are multiple and interconnected. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice simultaneously suffers physical, psychological, economic, and religious violence. Her husband Eugene uses Catholic religion as an instrument of control, interpreting marital submission as a Christian duty. This religious dimension of environmental challenges is crucial to understanding Beatrice's paralysis.

Secondly, empowerment is not a state but a process. Ifemelu, in *Americanah*, perfectly illustrates this processual dimension. Her empowerment is not reduced to obtaining a job or a visa. It passes through a progressive awareness of her own value, independent of others' gaze. Her return to Nigeria, after thirteen years in the United States, means that she has finally integrated this fundamental lesson.

Thirdly, women cannot empower themselves alone. The support of other women (sisterhood) and of certain men (allies) is indispensable. Auntie Ifeoma offers Kambili and Jaja a refuge that allows them to discover another way of life. Similarly, Chimamanda's father, James Nwoye Adichie, created a family environment conducive to his daughter's flourishing.

Fourthly, education appears as the main lever of empowerment. All the empowered women in Adichie's works are educated: Ifeoma is a university lecturer, Ifemelu is a communication graduate, Auntie Uju is a doctor, Chimamanda herself is the product of a family valuing education.

3.2 The "Positive Connection" Model of Women's Empowerment

3.2.1 First Pillar: Connection

Connection designates the link that the woman establishes with her sociocultural environment. This link can be positive or negative. A positive connection implies the presence of allies — men or women — who support the woman in her journey. A negative connection, conversely, implies the presence of antagonists who block her empowerment.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice is initially in negative connection with Eugene (antagonist), but finds a positive connection with Auntie Ifeoma (tritagonist). In *Americanah*, Ifemelu benefits from positive connections with Ginika, Kimberly, and Curt, who help her integrate into the United States. In *Notes on Grief*, Chimamanda benefited all her life from a positive connection with her father, who encouraged and valued her.

3.2.2 Second Pillar: Equipment

Equipment designates the set of resources — material, intellectual, psychological — that the woman acquires to face the challenges of her environment. Education is the main vector of equipment, but there are others: professional training, psychological support, access to information.

Ifeoma, in Purple Hibiscus, is equipped by her university degree which allows her to provide for her children's needs despite her widowhood. Ifemelu, in Americanah, equips herself by developing her blog and building a professional network. Auntie Uju equips herself by obtaining her medical recognition in the United States.

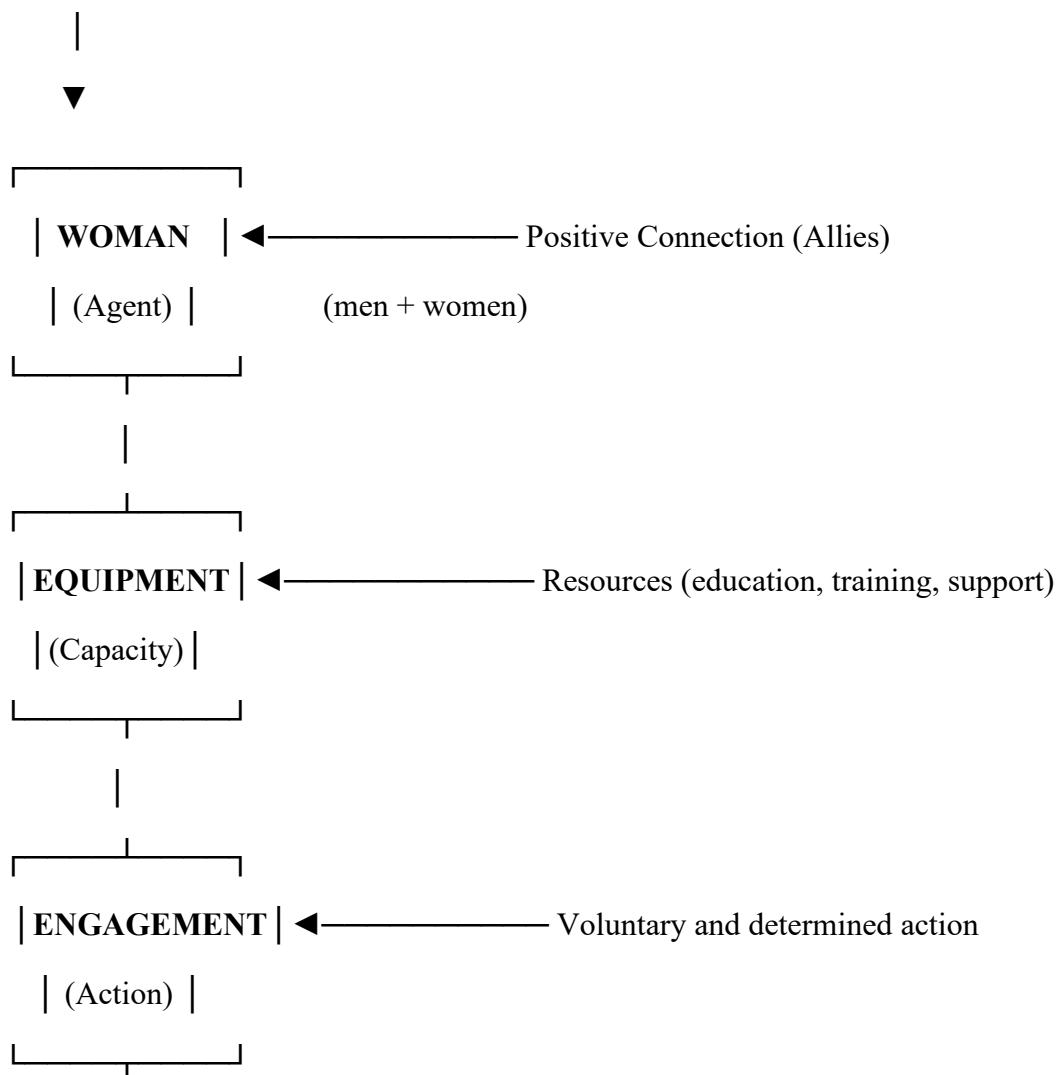
3.2.3 Third Pillar: Engagement

Engagement designates the voluntary and determined mobilization of the woman to transform her situation. Without engagement, neither connection nor equipment suffices. Beatrice, despite her limited equipment, finally engages in the radical action of poisoning. Ifemelu engages by returning to Nigeria to build her life there. Auntie Ifeoma engages by leaving Nigeria to preserve her dignity.

3.2.4 Diagram of the Model

The "Positive Connection" Model can be schematized as follows:

SOCIOCULTURAL ENVIRONMENT



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EMPOWERMENT

(Result)

This model is dynamic and circular: the empowerment achieved in turn reinforces the woman's capacity to establish new positive connections, to equip herself further, and to engage for other women.

3.3 Empirical Validation of the Model

The "Positive Connection" Model finds empirical validation in contemporary African current events. The appointment of Judith Suminwa as Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, under the presidency of Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, perfectly illustrates the three pillars of the model. Ms. Suminwa benefited from a positive connection with a head of state committed to gender equality ("positive masculinity"). She was equipped by solid academic and professional training. She engaged in political life with determination. Her empowerment is not only a personal victory, but a giant step for all Congolese women.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie offer a nuanced and profound analysis of the environmental challenges that hinder women's empowerment in Africa and the diaspora. Through complex and credible characters — Beatrice, Ifeoma, Ifemelu, Aunt Uju, Chimamanda herself — Adichie shows that empowerment is a difficult, often painful process, but always possible.

The literary analysis revealed Adichie's narrative mastery in the construction of complex plots, evolving characters, and rich spatio-temporal settings. The stylistic analysis highlighted her subtle use of narrative techniques (flashbacks, dialogues, descriptions), African oral resources (proverbs, linguistic borrowings, songs), and figures of speech (metaphors, personifications, hyperboles).

The "Positive Connection" Model that we have proposed constitutes an original contribution to the reflection on women's empowerment in the African context. It emphasizes that empowerment is not an isolated individual act, but a social process that requires alliances, resources, and political will. In the tradition of African Reformist Feminism, this model recognizes the necessity of transforming gender relations while respecting the cultural specificities of the continent.

Adichie's works, finally, are acts of literary resistance. They give voice to silent women, they denounce injustices, they propose paths of emancipation. As James Nwoye Adichie told his daughter: "Don't doubt yourself. Don't stop." This is perhaps the most powerful message of all of Adichie's work: believe in yourself, despite all obstacles, and never abandon the struggle for empowerment.

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