

“The Politics of Raising a Girl: Gender Formation and Feminist Intervention in Dear Ijeawele.”

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele* or *A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* has been presented as a guide that is useful for feminists and mothers seeking empowerment. The article argues that the readership does not tend to realize its main purpose, which is an examination of the process of cultivation of gender identity through subconscious processes. It presents the manifesto as a didactic tool based on Judith Butler's theory of performativity, as a representation of the construction of gender identity through repetitive lived experiences. Adichie expresses resistance through repetition, finding the intersection point where feminine identity is cemented (when individuals communicate with one another, express emotions, do chores at home, and form future aspirations). The manuscript goes on to report that this manifesto willfully utilizes an architecture of education to produce counter-statements and thus combats conventional citation practices thereby stopping these understandings from turning into concrete behavioral patterns. Motherhood is, as portrayed, an arena of politically salient significance, which disrupts social control by pedagogical interventions that shape children's perceptions of their identity. The work induces Butlerian theory by exposing the gender regulating process to start at infancy, and then African feminist criticism to focus on nonverbal methodologies instead of blatant adult resistance. Finally, the analysis shows how Adichie's scholarship is enhanced by a critique of the manifesto, which is related to modern discussions of normativity, performativity, and politicization of formative repetition...

Keywords: Epistolary Manifesto, Cultural Norms, Patriarchal Norms, Resistance, Agency, World-Building, Activism, Counter-Socialization, Micro-politics, Macro-level Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Gender development begins with what biological factors first express themselves, or when individuals begin to use gender-specific names or when individuals begin to obtain their first social feedback upon which they will learn how to identify themselves. The modern feminist theory has examined the manner in which society tolerates femininity as a natural condition but less attention has been taken by scholars on the era when an individual has yet to attain a coherent identity that occurs once a person begins to repeat and yet he or she does not notice his or her action. The conceptual space has to be revisited due to *Dear Ijeawele* or *A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie herself frames the project as an intervention in early gender formation when she writes, “**I matter. I matter equally. Not ‘if only.’ Not ‘as long as.’ I matter. Full stop**” (Adichie 10).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie takes up a leading role in feminist literature in the world. Her TED talks and her popular fiction which is extensively translated into different languages have made her a key figure in conveying African feminism in the modern world to the global community. Her piece of writing, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in fifteen Suggestions* (2017), in the form of a letter to a friend raising a daughter, has been interpreted by the audience as a user-friendly manual to the feminist principles that contains the practical advice and personal experiences and methodologies of teaching. Adichie clearly positions motherhood as a pedagogical responsibility when she notes that “**Your job, as her mother, is to teach her that she matters**” (Adichie 10). This is the analysis of the text in the lenses of empowerment and Nigerian patriarchy and liberal feminism and maternal advice literature carried out through the critical responses to the text. These methods that demonstrate its sociocultural meaning do not accept the theoretical structure of the manifesto that describes the mechanism of gender formation.

The article shows that there is a research gap that still exists among scholars as they have not carried out lengthy research of the manifesto that can be used as a tool to analyze early gender development. The analysis confirms that Adichie is in fact concerned with the preconscious stage at which individuals start to form their gender identity since it is a way of looking at the text as an instrument that will turn individuals to their potential. The manifesto sets out fifteen prescriptive suggestive propositions that serve as feminist value propositions as well as disrupting the systems that build the feminine identity in the act of birth up to young childhood. The feminist resistance approaches shift due to the fact that they aim at educational development rather than adult identity recovery.

It develops its theoretical framework about the intervention using the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler. Butler argues that gender identity is formed because individuals repeat their practices that refer to the

established social norms. Those repetitions that individuals engage in form their own realities in which people can cognize themselves in comparison to the social standards. As Adichie writes in one of her central suggestions, **“Teach her that the idea of ‘gender roles’ is nonsense”** (Adichie 27). Gender is viewed as a natural state of being as society continues to repeat the gender system. The manifesto is a counter-performative project as per *Dear Ijeawele* that demonstrates the way of forms of domestic practice and emotional preparation and economic desire and repetitive language exercises create the usual feminine conduct. The writing acts as a disruptive force which interferes with the current systems by having its own alternative scripts that form new modes in which children can conceptualize their world.

This article demonstrates that the Butlerian theory is applicable to early socialization as it evaluates infant performance as a controlled space. This argument has 4 stages. First, the current academic material on Adichie and feminist pedagogy is analyzed to identify the problem area. Second, the theory of performativity developed by Butler is expounded on its three major parts that comprise repetition and normativity and subversive citation. The paper gives specific analyses of certain guidelines that explore the ways that the manifesto applies its pedagogical method to build a counter-script and confront motherhood as a place of disruption. The paper looks at the functioning of African feminist discourse alongside limits that performativity creates in postcolonial contexts.

Literature Review

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been popularly discussed as one of the most powerful female African feminist authors of the contemporary period. Her publications such as *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, have drawn the critical interest of theorists in the feminist theory of postcolonialism and nationalism and motherhood discourse. The manifesto has a pedagogical tone and easy to understand feminist materials that critics will agree with, but few studies have dealt with the theoretical framework of the document that outlines how gender is developed and identity made by means of performance.

Numerous feminist interpretations locate *Dear Ijeawele* in the feminist traditions of liberals and Africans as well. According to the scholars, Adichie introduces a vision of equality that is based on the values of personal freedom and self-esteem and the goal of fairness. The fact that children are supposed to learn how to deny the social acceptance along with the knowledge of traditional gender norms serves as her primary tool in realizing the empowerment based on usual everyday struggles. Her critics hold that she relies on her commitments towards language and household tasks and economic autonomy as valid approaches to promoting feminist agendas. The studies introduce the manifesto as a feminist introductory text that relates the theoretical notions to real human experiences.

Other critics place the work of Adichie in the area of the Nigerian nationalism and postnational identity formation. Her feminist work that the researchers analyze is the one that tries to find the ground between the traditional cultural practices of the native and the feminist values of the West. By making it clear that gender equality is an ethical norm of the modern African society, the book *Dear Ijeawele* exposes African feminism to the international audience. According to scholars, Adichie also puts colonial binaries to the test by retaking motherhood and the domestic space as a form of political important instead of traditional limitation.

Another significant vein of criticism is motherhood discourse. The manifesto turns out to be a radical re-defining of the maternal responsibilities based on various studies. Adichie introduces motherhood as a political movement rather than depicting it as a form of self-denial. The text demonstrates to the readers how mothers ought to shape the way their daughters should perceive life through their words and actions and their collaboration at home. The everyday realities of motherhood are feminist activism since it opens space to social change within this context. Postcolonial interpretation of the manifesto indicates ways through which Adichie regarded postcolonialism in exploring her literary research on identity and belonging as well as social conditioning. Theorists make comparisons of *Dear Ijeawele* with her previous fictional texts and believe that her manifesto reflects three key themes that comprise gender expectations and cultural scripts and the pursuit of true identity. Its interpretations reveal how Adichie developed her intellectual way since the manifesto is her hypothetical extension that she employs to interpret her narrative fiction.

These readings have not explored the fundamental relationship of the manifesto with gender formation mechanics. The text demonstrates that it was designed feministically but the readers do not see the connection between it with the performativity theory presented by Judith Butler that indicates how individuals construct their gender identities by their constant demonstration and expression and physical behavior. The current academic literature on the manifesto views the manifesto as an ideological map that educates individuals about the domestic processes and maternal performativity that shape their identity since their birth the rest of their lives. **Feminist Pedagogy**

Feminist pedagogy is the required theory according to which the reading of *Dear Ijeawele* can be viewed as a pedagogical text since education can be described as a way to attain freedom that can turn classrooms into the space to build a critical awareness and resist oppressive command. Hooks proves that feminist teaching needs to be put in practice since it changes the perception of students concerning authority and their voice. Her emphasis

on dialog and experiential learning alongside physical learning activities justifies the arguments of Adichie that feminist values ought to be applied in practice rather than academically investigated just with the help of academic work. By her Complaint, work and examining institutional feminism through studying it, Sara Ahmed demonstrates that feminist activism most commonly proceeds by daily struggle against the existing systems. Through her analysis of the complaint, Ahmed shows that, institutions uphold their standards by means, which remain unseen, and which perpetuate social inequalities. Her work proves that gender norms are developed practices that individuals apply to communicate with others as well as engage with them in an emotional state. The analysis of African feminists who analyze African feminist thought reveals that Oyeyeronk X Oyeyedele and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie build their feminist theories basing on their cultural heritage that discredit the legitimacy of western universalism. African feminist pedagogy makes community and maternity and social responsibility as the primary educational priorities that see learning as a collective venture that goes beyond individual growth. Adichie puts forward her manifesto as an element of a historical movement that views the maternal teaching as a fundamental aspect of political power. The real analytical structure of the research relies on these methods of instruction that are auxiliary factors in carrying out the research. The components of the educational system in the manifesto are made clear due to the way they are depicted but the text does give evidence to the fact that it has full knowledge of how gender identity can be formed through repetitive movements and physical experiences.

Butler in Literary Studies

The key theoretical framework of the study is built on the fundamental works of Judith Butler that comprise Gender Trouble as well as Bodies That Matter. Butler illustrates that gender is a social performance that individuals cultivate through constant exercising instead of something that individuals are born with. The concept of performativity is different to theatrical performance because it explains the use of language and body language by people to produce an illusion that something is in its natural form.

The recurrence of gender in the process of regulation systems gives a perception that gender is constant since individuals continue to refer to it. According to Butler, repetition produces the image of naturalness. The society constructs its concept of masculine or feminine with the speech patterns and gestures and emotional reactions. Social expectations are repeated and they define boundaries on how people should behave so as to conform to the set standards. The regimes that prevail prior to the individual being born give the construct that defines who the individual will be.

Butler has made a significant contribution in the world of literary studies through his theory. The scholars have employed performativity to examine the manner in which narrative voice and physical presence and character development collaborate in fictional and theatrical literature. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Shane Phelan are critics who explore how gender norm instability is exhibited in texts by the use of narrative repetition and citation. The literary analysis shows that the characters either accept or struggle with gender expectations resulting in the break of social norms. The current studies have focused on three key themes that are namely the formation of adult identities and the performance of adults in theater and the expression of overt resistance. The focus is more likely to be made on conscious subversion than on subconscious formation.

Theoretical Framework: Performativity and Socialization at an Early Age.

This paper has its theoretical basis on the notion of performativity by Judith Butler as presented in Gender Trouble. Butler explains gender as a repetition that individuals re-enact that develops the illusion of stable presence. Gender identity is not born by an interior truth that is pre-social but through repetition of norms which pre-exist the subject. It is through the repetition of cultural scripts that people perceive themselves to be naturally feminine and masculine. The continuous production of gender is as a result of the controlled ways through which no currently existing nature of gender is displayed. The subject exists within the set regulation that defines its existence based on the explanation by Butler in Bodies That Matter. The norms that constitute intelligible gender identities exist before the individual and they define the field of intelligibility in which an individual may fit in as a socially coherent person. To attain their identity, the subject needs a system of norms that define how they speak, behave physically, how they react emotionally, and how they relate with others. The systems of power take effect to define the identity of the subject. Gender norms act as restraints that restrict the natural and moral identity that individuals can express to others. There is individual self, which is a historical, social expectation, which has evolved over the years.

The process of repetition and sedimentation works as P3 since it shows how Butler applies repetition to form permanent social standards. Daily repetitive activities that involve sitting and speaking and caring and desiring and aspiring movements end up accumulating to generate personal identity. The formation of sedimentation leads to temporary behaviors of the process that take up permanent features. The constant reference to the expectations of the culture leads to the transformation of the latter into the stable behavioral patterns. The process of naturalization works in unobtrusive ways since individuals do not realize the presence of the process whenever they see recurrent patterns.

Gender being a fundamental reality is in existence because individuals undertake its manufactured nature unknowingly. Gender truth is a reality in the form of repetitive behaviors that produce gender by the way of their

repetitive performance. Butler has determined performativity to be a movable power that cannot be controlled by adhering to predetermined patterns as per P4 Subversive Repetition. The repetition of words by means of performance results in the creation of genders but this process allows gender to transform. Repeating something leads to a flawed performance since each subsequent reference to this piece is a new interpretation of the original one. The unstable state of a system leaves a gap that allows artists to subvert by using repetitive patterns and to radically re-write the already existing scripts. Social actors disclose the instability of social forces by displaying ways that demonstrate how they reiterate real world social norms.

This paradigm views resistance in the light of internalization of the language that develops in the form of given discourse. This explanation makes Butler related to Adichie in terms of insight because of the repetition, identity is formed by the repetition but transformed with new patterns of repetition. Butler clearly states the way people form security by means of repetition but mainly her study focuses on how individuals form norms by interacting with social systems. The initial instance when humans cite infancy first should be explained further. The presence of norms at this point defines the patterns of social behavior but human behavior prevails as an inborn capacity.

Analysis

The title in the book *Dear Ijeawele or A Feminist Manifesto in fifteen Suggestions* has the number fifteen due to the fact that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie decided to frame her work. Numbering is a conscious decision that the authors went with. The manifesto theory practice has affirmed that the use of enumeration amounts to the development of urgent content and institutional power. A manifesto contains its information in form of structured statements that make ideological beliefs practical in execution. Adichie set up fifteen numbered rules to imitate the official school system that utilizes policy documents and commandments and teaching curriculum modules to educate students. The numbering process makes a standard vocal utterance. It produces the illusion of some official religious teachings that are found in official records rather than in some informal consultation. The authority is created by structure in the manifesto format. The system is a counter-institution in the sense that it employs the normal method of education in generating new knowledge via its educational contents which it applies in imparting knowledge to other people. Adichie develops new rules that fight the unseen force of patriarchy that sustains its hold on the society by silent but continuous rules.

The power of persuasion in the manifesto is done as a result of the imperative forms of verbs that have been used such as: teach her... never tell her... reject... do not... The verbs are instructional skills since they require learning outcomes. This rhetorical strategy appears throughout the manifesto, for example Adichie writes, **“Teach her to question language. Language is the repository of our prejudices, our beliefs, our assumptions”** (Adichie 24). The two limitations in the piece are in the form of direct commands which the writer desires to convey. The imperative mood of this text is recurrent just as gender norms that work according to the set rules. The Butlerian relationship proves to be the central focus point. Gender norms still exist since individuals reproduce them as Judith Butler explained in *Gender Trouble*. The force of citation can be executed by means of instruction that is its key approach. The social structure sets a repetitive pattern according to which girls are told to act in a polite and quiet way as well as to be likable, thus making them internalize the said instructions as part of themselves. Adichie makes the opposing references by using her imperative commands to establish the oppositions to the established gender norms in the society that defines how people ought to act. They introduce new gender behavior rules to substitute the current gender behavior rules set in the society.

The research questions what aspects of the character of an individual generate the impression of his or her likability. Adichie cautions against training girls that they have to make everyone happy. Girls are culturally groomed to fit the feminine norm that the society portrays as the correct way of being feminine by giving praises to girls who behave properly by displaying their vital feminine traits. Adichie directly addresses this cultural expectation when she advises mothers: **“Teach her not to be concerned with being ‘likeable’”** (Adichie 23). Butler makes a case regarding the Body That Matter that demonstrates how the accepted norms shape the boundaries of intelligence. The aspect of likability is a social norm since it is not limited to individual characteristics. The system establishes the types of feminine qualities that are given social approval to be recognized. The development of a gender-based requirement starts at the moment individuals are praised to live according to rules and are punished because of the strong will-power. This is the first point of development that Adichie sets this procedure. In teaching mothers to refuse to train girls to be liked, she reveals the aspect of likability as a performance and not a character trait. Close reading shows how the appearance of such a small detail could be so strong as the mechanism of gender sedimentation.

Embodied gender repetition is one of the most grounded on the suggestion of Adichie that boys should do things around the home. The practice of performing household chores that individuals believe are women chores has been institutionalized as a norm that individuals adhere to in the day-to-day lives. Girls are obliged to contribute to the family and boys are not. Adichie challenges this norm when she writes, **“Teach her that there is no such thing as ‘boys’ chores’ and ‘girls’ chores’”** (Adichie 27). The common arrangement of women cooking and men taking breaks forms an apparent portrayal of gender social order. Adichie tries to transform her social structure

by using her teaching to mothers regarding the equal distribution of chores. She disrupts the material process that alters work into feminine identity and the free time into masculine privilege.

Adichie urges against the so-called differential praise - praising girls more than intelligence, or obedience more than bravery. Praise and shame enables people to manage their emotional conditions. Adichie highlights this conditioning when she observes, **“We spend too much time teaching girls to worry about what boys think of them”** (Adichie 30). Butler states that social rewards help individuals to be in their current norms. Human beings are more committed to adhering to a norm since they receive social approval. Children gain social expectation as they make need to obtain social recognition. Affective conditioning process allows humans to repeat their actions. Adichie is able to take over praise and change it into critical thinking and the ability to make independent choices using her intervention. The manifesto touches on anger and politeness as well. Women are taught to conceal their anger and boys are allowed to express the same through aggression. Adichie explicitly argues against emotional repression when she advises mothers: **“Teach her that it is okay to be angry”** (Adichie 32). Adichie is also against feminine docility as she teaches that mothers must tolerate any emotional expression they encounter among their daughters. Emotion in this case is social behavior that people are in control of. Subsequent emotional correction procedures turn into an identity of an individual. This transformation of such repetition creates new identities of gendered subjects.

The first institution found in the manifesto is motherhood that introduces cultural norms to evaluate the growing human beings. The mother acts as the principal route that allows or disallows the passage of citation. Adichie frames maternal pedagogy as a political act when she states, **“Feminism is not only about women; it is about a different way of looking at the world”** (Adichie 12). The Butlerian model demonstrates the process in which the mother defines the boundaries of the knowledge that can be understood. She transforms the abstract standards into the real behavior. Repeat of the mother determines how the subjects will carry out the already existing norms prior to their birth. Her perception of childcare as a social duty requires ideological participation rather than making it a domestic requiring. The manifesto proposes that gender hierarchy does not start in adulthood, but in infancy through repetition, praise, instruction, as well as example. The entire assimilation of Butler demonstrates the fact that motherhood acts as a stage of revolutionary performances of repeated actions. The mothers develop the gaps in the establishment of social inequality by actively adjusting their everyday lives. Personal political spaces can be found in domestic spaces where individuals will be able to alter already existing social rules before they can be instilled as their new social identity. Dear Ijeawele can be seen as a feminist advisory work since it is a means to explain gender development based on early socialization that most importantly is the main platform of gender development and the first stage of resistance to gender development.

The analysis shows that the present-day African feminist discourse has been having an overhaul that has warranted the early-stage development to be a more significant factor than the resistance among adults. Most of the feminist theories of Africans in history have been exploring the role of women in resisting apparent systems of oppression that comprise marriage, state violence, religious patriarchy, and labour inequality. The African social classes should have a certain cultural interpretation as suggested by Oyerapon Oyewunye who is opposed to the Western notions of gender. According to Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, African feminism is a social movement, which brings about community development and social progress. Amina Mama sets the political analysis as one of the essential elements of the African postcolonial analysis. The researchers focus on how adult women can work to their benefit according to the systems available.

The current interpretation of Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in fifteen Suggestions suggests a change in complement: feminist politics starts even before resistance on the level of formation. Adichie begins her journey to discover how individuals embrace their traditions prior to their permanence. Childhood has now become the space of political activity of African feminist discourse. There is the fight to deal with what is so apparent about the patriarchal systems and the initial practices that makes it normal.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie employs sophisticated techniques of storytelling and character development in her novels to show how the limitations of gender in the society work. Fiction allows us to show the ambiguous elements that are filled with conflicting information that is realized over time. The form of manifesto determines its regulations that the document adheres to due to the direct interaction with the standing standards.

The fiction displays characters that grow up with the repetition of their actions as the manifesto permeates the repetition of their behavior. The text does not include the storytelling aspect and rather introduces information in a very simple way. The new genre of this work has another purpose since it demonstrates the impacts of gender norms that people consider as true. The manifesto is used as a reference to that tool that individuals employ to evaluate their values rather than disclosing their narrative.

Performativity as an analytical framework by Judith Butler is a powerful research instrument but its application brings about fundamental issues. The former question is, can the cultural differences be explained by the way of performativity as a whole? Butler constructs her knowledge about the normativity by exploring Euro-American philosophical traditions. African social organization, kinship and postcolonial pasts pose the difficulties of trying to formulate universal theories that will elucidate the manner of development of gender. The Nigerian societies

show that their norms operate under different systems that extend beyond the first definitions of Butler; these systems entail communal and religious and extended-family networks. The theory of material conditions should be further developed. Performativity proposes primary emphasis on discourse along with repetitive aspects of it, but the economic precariousness alongside the legal injustices and structural violence also define a way different people perceive their gender identity. Adichie addresses the issue of women being economically independent, but performance-based analysis would minimize the importance of the institutional facts. These boundaries are identified in the study, which increases its theoretical strength. The process of repetition and naturalization is demonstrated in the Butler frame, but to come to a complete comprehension, the African feminist studies need to be researched on the issues of culture and material.

Conclusion

This paper has established that *Dear Ijeawele* is a feminist advisory text and active protest that influences the gender identity development process during early years of life. The manifesto forms its principal form of developing gender identity with its orders and linguistic interpretation and attention on domestic affairs. Adichie's concluding advice reinforces the transformative potential of feminist upbringing when she writes, **"Teach her that feminism is about fairness, about dignity, about the simple idea that women are human beings"** (Adichie 15). In the text analyzing the Butlerian performativity the text reveals that Adichie dwells on the first level of gender citation that prevails prior to the emergence of other levels.

The main theoretical foundation of the given research builds up the performativity, applied to infantile behavior. The paper demonstrates that the first example of gender as per the theory of gender repetition by Butler is the case of infants. Parenting is a system that regulates the interaction between the cultural norms and the maturing person. The analysis starts with the development of people socially through their childhood that contributes to the performance of behavior when they are in the adult age. The study will examine the comparison between the African feminist manifestos and fictional literature that illustrates how the development in childhood takes place. In its study of the early pedagogy, the research will examine how African literature depicts how gender identity is brought to maturity in the educational and domestic spaces, in a number of written works. Feminist childhood studies have now established the possibilities of research that bridges the fields of literature criticism and developmental theory, as well as African feminist philosophy. The paper demonstrates how infancy is the key feminist battlefield by feminist movements that can assist in the study to examine how gender norms are opposed to and actively transformed pre-emptively..

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