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LITERATURE

Paula Wieczorek

University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, Poland
pwieczorek@wsiz.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7295-8619

Beyond the Single Story: Black Futures and Feminist Critique in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Visit*

Abstract. This paper analyzes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Visit* (2021) as an example of Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist fiction that uses speculative storytelling to critique gendered power. It examines how a Nigerian dystopian satire can challenge assumptions about patriarchy by imagining a society where women hold institutional power and men face the same moral policing, economic control, and social expectations usually imposed on women. The paper uses close reading informed by feminist theories, including Judith Butler's performativity, bell hooks's critique of domestic roles, Sara Ahmed's idea of the "feminist killjoy," and Virginia Woolf's reflections on creativity as well as African feminist approaches from Nanjala Nyabola and Sylvia Tamale that emphasize local context and histories. The analysis finds that *The Visit* uses satire and inversion not to propose an easy solution or utopia, but to reveal how gendered domination depends on social norms, respectability politics, and internalized beliefs. It also emphasizes how the story's Nigerian socio-political context reshapes feminist theories commonly applied to speculative fiction. Instead of offering a neat resolution, the story leaves readers with unsettling questions about their own complicity in systems of inequality. The paper concludes that Adichie's work demonstrates the power of speculative fiction to expose social hierarchies, disrupt stereotypes about African societies, and encourage critical reflection necessary for imagining more equitable futures.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Visit*, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, feminist theory, speculative fiction, literary studies, social communication

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1. Introduction

Science fiction has long centered on Western, white, male protagonists, projecting futures where people of African descent are rarely imagined as innovators, leaders, or world-makers. This bias reflects broader imperial histories that have marginalized African perspectives and denied Black futures in the cultural imagination (Dery 1994, 180–181; Yaszek 2006, 42–43). Afrofuturism emerged in the 1990s as a creative and critical response to this erasure. As Ytasha Womack explains, Afrofuturism is "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation," serving both as an artistic movement and a methodological framework for re-envisioning history and futurity through a Black cultural lens (Womack 2013, 9–10). It encompasses diverse forms—from literature and music to visual art and film—that envision "Black futures that stem from Afro-diasporic experiences" (Womack 2013, 9).

Afrofuturist works often engage histories of racial oppression while imagining alternative realities that empower Black communities, blending science fiction with African mythologies, alternate histories, and magic realism. Seminal figures like Octavia E. Butler and Samuel R. Delany helped define this speculative tradition by exploring intersections of race, gender, and futurity. More recently, African and diaspora writers such as Nnedi Okorafor and Nalo Hopkinson have expanded Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist storytelling by grounding their visions in specifically African settings and cultures. Nathaniel and Akung (2022, 191–193) underscore the importance of distinguishing Africanfuturism as a framework centered on African perspectives, histories, and epistemologies, pushing back against the diasporic or technocentric focus that has dominated Afrofuturist discourse.

At its core, Afrofuturism is not merely an aesthetic but a critical practice of resistance. By blending heritage, technology, and speculative storytelling, it challenges colonial histories and dominant Western paradigms. Centering on African traditions while imagining alternative modernities, Afrofuturism disrupts reductive portrayals of Africa as static or peripheral (Womack 2013; Eshun 2003). This decolonial critique resonates with Sylvia Tamale's analysis of how colonialism imposed rigid, binary gender hierarchies onto African societies, naturalizing patriarchy within modern state structures (Tamale 2020, 100–105). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Visit*, with its speculative inversion of gendered power set in Nigeria, similarly exposes these colonial legacies by revealing gender hierarchies as contingent, socially constructed, and therefore subject to critique.

While writers such as Butler and Okorafor have shaped Afrofuturist aesthetics, Adichie's short story *The Visit* (2021) offers a distinctive intervention. It fits within this broader Black speculative tradition despite lacking overt high technology or spacefaring settings. Set in a transformed future Nigeria, it imagines an alternative social order grounded in the African context, aligning with what Okorafor (2019) describes as "Africanfuturism": a mode of speculation deeply rooted in African cultures, histories, and worldviews. The story appears in the anthology Black Stars, described as "a multi-di-

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mensional collection of speculative fiction from Black authors" that explores a range of futuristic visions (Shawl and Peterson 2021). Edited by Nisi Shawl and Latoya Peterson, the collection showcases both cosmic and socially grounded narratives by Black writers.

Adichie's contribution, though relatively grounded and social in its speculative element, shares the Afrofuturist impulse to reimagine the future of a Black society that challenges existing paradigms. Afrofuturism is not limited to space travel; it also embraces visionary reimaginings of social structures. In *The Visit*, the speculative twist is societal rather than technological: a reordering of gender power dynamics on a global scale, seen through African characters. By placing a traditionally marginalized group (women) in power and subjecting men to restrictions, Adichie's story addresses core Afrofuturist concerns of liberation and identity – albeit focusing on gender hierarchy as the axis of change. The story's Lagos setting and inclusion in a Black-authored sci-fi series emphasize its rootedness in the Black cultural context. In essence, *The Visit* uses the Afrofuturist technique of an alternate future to pose questions about justice and equality, reconfiguring who holds power in society. This approach resonates with Afrofuturism's ethos of "looking forward to thriving in the future" despite a troubled past and present (Womack 2013, 9). Though subtler in its speculative elements than other tales in *Black Stars*, Adichie's story expands Afrofuturism's literary range by applying it to gender politics in an African setting, thus contributing to the evolving tapestry of Black speculative fiction.

Although Afrofuturism has received substantial critical attention, most studies focus on its technocentric or diasporic forms, with limited engagement with African-set social dystopias that center on gender politics. Similarly, feminist readings of Adichie's work often emphasize her realist novels and essays while neglecting *The Visit* as a site of speculative feminist critique. This paper addresses this gap through a close reading that interprets *The Visit* as an Afrofuturist dystopia employing gender inversion and cognitive estrangement (Suvin 1979, 4) to challenge patriarchal and imperial narratives of heroism and power. Grounded in both Global North feminist theory (including Butler's performativity, hooks's critique of domesticity, and Woolf's analysis of creative suppression) and African feminist thought (such as Nyabola's call for locally grounded critique and respect for intersectionality), this analysis foregrounds issues of gender, power, and systemic inequality while situating *The Visit* within broader debates on postcolonial resistance and the diversification of Afrofuturist literature. The analysis employs a close reading grounded in intersectional feminist theory, revealing both the universality and the cultural specificity of Adichie's feminist vision and demonstrating how combining Euro-American and African feminist perspectives can enrich the field of speculative fiction studies. While Western feminist readings might interpret the gender inversion in *The Visit* primarily as a rhetorical device exposing patriarchal hypocrisy, closer attention to its Nigerian setting reveals a more unsettling critique. Adichie does not simply reverse gender roles; she exposes how specific Nigerian socio-economic formations complicate the applicability of Global North femi-

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nist frameworks. The story suggests that dismantling patriarchy cannot be reduced to performative shifts in power but requires confronting and decolonizing the structural logics of authority that persist irrespective of gender.

2. Satirical Inversion of Gendered Power

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Visit* offers a powerful example of what Darko Suvin terms cognitive estrangement, which can be defined as a "formal device of making the familiar strange, which permits a transformation of the reader's perspective" (Suvin 1979, 4). Set in a near-future Lagos, the story envisions a Nigeria governed by a matriarchal elite that enforces the systemic subordination of men. Women hold power across politics, economics, and social respectability, while men are expected to remain at home, perform domestic labor, and submit to rigid moral scrutiny (Adichie 2021). By constructing a dystopian matriarchy that mirrors and exaggerates real-world patriarchal oppressions, Adichie defamiliarizes the reader's assumptions about gender and power. This speculative inversion creates a critical distance that allows readers to see patriarchal norms not as natural or justified but as socially constructed and inherently oppressive.

This mechanism of estrangement becomes particularly visible when read against theories of gender performativity. Rather than employing gender inversion alongside cognitive estrangement, Adichie mobilizes inversion as the primary mechanism of estrangement itself, forcing a re-evaluation of Judith Butler's concept of performativity within a Nigerian context. While Butler theorizes gender as a stylized repetition of acts, Adichie's narrative demonstrates how, in a postcolonial Nigerian setting, gender performance is rigidly enforced not only through social norms but also through economic precarity and communal surveillance. Obinna's internalization of his role is evident when he restrains his desire to visit a club because it would not look respectable. This moment reveals that in Adichie's localized satire, gender performance is less a matter of individual identity construction than a compulsory adherence to a communal script of respectability required for social inclusion. The story thus demands a reading of performativity refracted through African communalism, where performance functions as a transactional condition of safety, legitimacy, and status.

The narrative centers on Obinna, a stay-at-home husband whose wife, Amara, is a high-ranking corporate executive and the family's sole breadwinner. Obinna once abandoned his personal ambitions; he wrote poetry because Amara expects total domestic devotion. Their marriage is defined by economic dependency and social performance; Obinna must maintain the household's image while tolerating his wife's sexual infidelities, which are tacitly condoned so long as he remains grateful and compliant. Adichie illustrates this double standard in painful detail. Obinna's family even advises him that the crucial thing is that Amara comes home to him every day (Adichie 2021, 10), mirroring how real-world patriarchal societies normalize male infidelity while expecting female forgiveness.

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Adichie's *The Visit* deploys sharp satire to expose the gendered logics of power by systematically inverting them. Rather than offering a simple narrative of role reversal, the story constructs a series of pointed, often exaggerated situations that mirror real-world patriarchal norms, making them newly visible and strange. Obinna's experience reveals how men in this speculative society endure moral policing, respectability politics, and economic dependency, all enforced by institutional power and internalized beliefs. Adichie satirizes global discourses on reproductive rights (a theme explored in detail in later sections) and critiques political leadership through exaggerated scenes of female elites trivializing governance (Adichie 2021, 3). These moments are not merely comic but critically incisive: they compel readers to confront the absurdity and violence of patriarchal structures once stripped of their cultural naturalization. By refusing to present this dystopian matriarchy as either a utopia or a simplistic revenge fantasy, Adichie demonstrates that gendered domination is a socially constructed system rather than a biological destiny, and therefore always open to critique and transformation.

Adichie's use of cognitive estrangement is not intended to offer a comforting utopian alternative but rather to expose the structural logics of domination that can characterize any gender hierarchy. Literary scholar Cláudio R. V. Braga (2023) offers a sustained analysis of *The Visit* as feminist speculative fiction. He argues that Adichie uses satire and role inversion with a distinct "feminist gaze," deliberately designing an oppressive matriarchy to compel readers to rethink the social construction of gender inequality (Braga 2023, 211). Rather than suggesting that simply swapping who holds power would achieve justice, Adichie's narrative highlights the deep cultural and institutional foundations that sustain oppression. Her approach aligns *The Visit* with a broader tradition of feminist speculative fiction, including Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Naomi Alderman's *The Power,* that employs dystopian exaggeration and inversion not to fantasize about revenge but to provoke critical reflection on how power operates and how challenging it is to imagine genuine liberation. Through this ethical provocation, *The Visit* demands that readers confront the contingency and violence of gender hierarchies and consider the complex, ongoing work of envisioning more just futures.

Importantly, Adichie does not depict this matriarchal order as a utopia of female empowerment. Instead, she carefully constructs it as a dystopian satire designed to reveal the social construction and cruelty of patriarchy by inverting its logic. Through speculative inversion, *The Visit* functions as Afrofuturist social speculation, using its African setting to interrogate both local and global gender politics (Womack 2013; Okorafor 2019). Crucially, this approach speaks directly to Adichie's own critique of the "single story," i.e. the tendency of dominant narratives to flatten complex societies into one-dimensional stereotypes. As Adichie argues, "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (Adichie 2009). In Western imaginations, African societies are often essentialized as uniformly patriarchal, static, or "backward." By imagining a future Nigeria with rigidly enforced matriarchy, Adichie disrupts this single story and forces

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readers to see gender hierarchies as contingent social constructs rather than cultural inevitabilities.

By setting this inversion in a specifically Nigerian context, she localizes her critique while contributing to the broader Afrofuturist project of imagining alternative African futures free from the singular narratives imposed by colonial and patriarchal histories (Womack 2013; Okorafor 2019). Through this satirical strategy, *The Visit* demands a more nuanced, plural, and critical engagement with questions of gender, power, and cultural specificity.

3. Reproductive Politics and Bodily Autonomy

One of the most striking features of Adichie's *The Visit* is its opening satirical gambit: the televised announcement of the new "Male Masturbatory Act" in the United States. The scene shows Obinna watching CNN as the female president addresses the nation with moralistic gravity: "I applaud the court for this just and moral decision. We must never lose sight of what this is about—a waste of a potential child" (Adichie 2021, 3).

This deliberate pastiche of anti-abortion rhetoric functions as a satirical inversion. By criminalizing male masturbation as the "waste" of potential life, Adichie transposes the logic of reproductive control onto men's bodies. Her target is the pervasive, state-sanctioned policing of women's reproductive autonomy, a reality in many countries where abortion is restricted or banned under the banner of "protecting life." By having a female president use the same moral arguments once aimed at women to target men, Adichie reveals the underlying gendered hypocrisy of these laws. As Tamale notes, colonial legal systems restructured African family law to institutionalize patriarchal control over women's sexuality and reproduction (Tamale 2020, 133–140). Adichie's satirical inversion of reproductive policing in *The Visit* exposes the same logic of moral surveillance and legal coercion, now turned on men's bodies.

Crucially, the story does not remain at the level of abstract satire but gives this inversion personal urgency. During their conversation, Eze describes the grim consequences of the law for someone he knows: "I have a friend who is doing five years in prison. Five years! Because a stupid ex-girlfriend reported him for masturbation and secretly filmed him" (Adichie 2021, 14). This detail illustrates how moral surveillance breeds fear, betrayal, and state intrusion into private life—echoing real-world policies such as Texas's Senate Bill 8, which incentivizes private citizens to inform on others seeking abortions (Texas Legislature 2021). Protesters in the story's broadcast hold signs like "Government hands off my seed. Our Body Our Choice" and "Respect the bodily autonomy of men" (Adichie 2021, 3), directly mimicking real-world feminist slogans. Those lines force readers to confront why such slogans are necessary for women—and why they are often contested by those claiming moral authority. Adichie's inversion is pedagogically effective in the sense described by Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement: "the formal device of estrangement permits a transformation

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of the reader's perspective" (Suvin 1979, 4). By making men the targets of state moral regulation, she denies readers the comfort of distance and compels them to recognize the violence inherent in reproductive policing of any form. The absurdity of jailing men for masturbation makes clear that the issue is not merely who is policed, but that such policing exists at all.

Adichie's satirical "Male Masturbatory Act" is not just a comic reversal of anti-abortion laws but a sharp critique of how moral authority over reproduction can serve as an instrument of state coercion. Sophie Lewis's *Enemy Feminisms* provides a useful lens for this reading by tracing how historical feminist movements often adopted maternalist (2024, 65–75) and carceral (150–165) strategies that justified surveillance and control over marginalized bodies in the name of moral reform and protection. By criminalizing male masturbation in the story, Adichie reveals the structural logic behind reproductive policing: that it is less about protecting life and more about enforcing moral discipline through legal punishment and social surveillance. Lewis warns that such logics can become seductive even within feminist movements themselves, producing what she calls "enemy feminisms" that legitimize punitive control while claiming to defend the vulnerable. *The Visit* can thus be read not simply as a role-reversal fantasy but as a cautionary tale about the ease with which moralist feminism risks replicating the very forms of domination it seeks to oppose.

4. Policing, Respectability, and Public Space

A central mechanism of gendered oppression in *The Visit* is the policing of men's movement and moral behavior in public space. The most striking example of this inversion occurs when Obinna and Eze—simply out for a drink and dancing—are stopped at a police checkpoint. The officers, all women, subject them to humiliating interrogation and ask Eze: "Is that why you are dressed like a prostitute?" (Adichie 2021, 17). The insult deliberately mimics real-world sexist policing practices in which women out at night face suspicion, moral judgment, and sexualized insults. In many national contexts, such as India, Nigeria, and parts of the United States, women are told that going out alone, wearing certain clothes, or socializing at night makes them "fair game" for harassment or police scrutiny. Adichie's inversion reveals that these practices depend not on any essential quality of women but on power enforcing gendered respectability. African feminist scholar Sylvia Tamale critiques colonial respectability politics as a tool for social control that reshaped gendered behavior to align with Eurocentric moralities (Tamale 2020, 205–221). Adichie's police checkpoint scene satirizes these dynamics by exposing their arbitrary and contingent nature.

What makes the scene even sharper is how quickly the officers shift when they learn Obinna is married: "If I had known you were somebody's husband, I would at least show you some respect, even if you are dressed like a prostitute" (Adichie 2021, 17). This line is a mirror of how women's respectability is often defined relationally—

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not by their personhood but by their attachment to a man. The phrase "somebody's husband" inverts the patriarchal norm of being "somebody's wife" as a marker of social legitimacy. Adichie in this context dramatizes Judith Butler's (1990, 25) insight that gender is performed within power structures that define which performances are legitimate. Moreover, the officers' interrogation highlights the hypocrisy and class dynamics of respectability politics. Obinna and Eze are not committing any crime as they are simply out enjoying themselves. However, their mere presence in public at night is treated as suspect. Those lines in *The Visit* expose how gender policing is less about preventing crime than about enforcing moral codes that restrict marginalized groups' freedom and pleasure. Adichie's satirical Lagos reverses the familiar logic of respectability politics, showing that these expectations are not natural but imposed and therefore open to critique.

Adichie's depiction of the police checkpoint serves as more than a generic reversal of street harassment; it anchors the narrative in the specific sociopolitical reality of Lagosian state power. When the female officers harass Obinna and Eze, questioning why Eze is "dressed like a prostitute," the scene mirrors the notorious policing of women's bodies in Nigerian public spaces. However, the threat escalates beyond verbal abuse when Eze recalls that police recently "sodomized a group of men... with sticks." This detail alludes to the systemic police brutality often critiqued in Nigerian discourse (e.g., the #EndSARS movement), suggesting that the violence of the state apparatus in Nigeria is not merely a byproduct of patriarchy but a structural feature of authority itself. By retaining the checkpoint, which can be seen as a symbol of arbitrary state power and corruption in Nigeria, Adichie argues that a matriarchal shift, which fails to decolonize these violent state structures, will merely replicate the same brutality, regardless of the gender of the officers holding the guns.

As Sara Ahmed argues in *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*, respectability is maintained through social pressures that demand compliance and silence in the face of inequality. The "feminist killjoy" is the figure who disrupts this smooth surface by naming the violence hidden beneath politeness and moral propriety (Ahmed 2023, 2–4, 23–24). In *The Visit*, Obinna's anxious protest, "I can't just go to a club. I'm a married man" (Adichie 2021, 16), reveals how thoroughly he has internalized these norms of domestic responsibility and moral duty. His guilt mirrors traditional expectations that demand women subordinate their desires for the sake of family respectability. By contrast, Eze refuses to accept these restrictive moral codes: he pushes Obinna to question his complacency and remember his lost ambitions. Eze bluntly confronts him, saying, "You were supposed to become a great poet, not get married a year after graduation" (Adichie 2021, 17). This moment of personal challenge embodies Ahmed's idea of the killjoy who disrupts the social agreement to "get along" by exposing what is unjust (Ahmed 2023, 23). Eze's refusal to respect the codes that keep men at home and to let Obinna forget his own desires demonstrates that liberation begins with rejecting these roles entirely. His critique is uncomfortable but necessary, showing that actual change requires disrupting the norms that define respectable masculinity in this dystopian society.

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Furthermore, *The Visit* suggests that policing is not merely about enforcing law but about maintaining social hierarchies. The female officers' moral judgment exposes that power is not neutral: it is gendered, classed, and moralized. Adichie's world does not propose that women are inherently better rulers; it shows that if given unchecked power, any dominant group can replicate oppressive structures. By making men the objects of this discipline, Adichie challenges readers to recognize these norms as socially constructed mechanisms of control, inviting a critical reevaluation of how freedom, pleasure, and public space are differentially granted or denied along gender lines.

5. Domestic Power and Gendered Labor

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Visit* offers a layered feminist critique of domestic power, gendered labor, and the internalization of oppressive norms. Through satirical inversion, Adichie reimagines Lagos as a matriarchal dystopia where men are confined to domestic roles and denied economic agency, not to advocate female dominance, but to expose how systems of power corrupt regardless of who wields them. Obinna, the story's protagonist, is a stay-at-home husband whose wife, Amara, is a corporate executive. He confesses to his friend Eze: "I've been out of the job market for so long that the only positions I can get now would be entry level, and she says it will look terrible for someone of her position if her husband has such a low-level job" (Adichie 2021, 13). This exchange is not merely personal conflict but a window onto social respectability and class performance. The domestic oppression Obinna experiences is inextricably linked to the Nigerian class performance of the "Big Woman," i.e. a satirical inversion of the "Big Man" syndrome. Amara's dismissal of Obinna's job prospects is rooted in status anxiety specific to the Nigerian elite: "she says it will look terrible for someone of her position if her husband has such a low-level job." Here, Adichie complicates the Western feminist critique of domesticity by introducing the intersection of class power. Obinna is not only a housewife figure; he is a status symbol whose leisure serves as a marker of Amara's wealth ("Ife adigo! We have arrived!"). Furthermore, the presence of Emmanuel, the "houseboy" whom Obinna dislikes yet relies upon, adds a layer of specifically Nigerian domestic stratification. Obinna acts as the oppressor of the male servant while being oppressed by the female executive, revealing that in Adichie's Lagos, gender inversion does not dismantle class hierarchy but rather reconfigures it, leaving the structures of servitude intact.

Adichie's vision in *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) provides a crucial framework for understanding *The Visit*'s satirical inversion of domestic power and gendered labor. She argues that gender is not an essence but a socially constructed script enforced by cultural expectations: "[Gender] prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are" (Adichie 2014, 34–36). *The Visit* literalizes this critique by showing Obinna confined to domestic roles and moral respectability, forced to sacrifice personal ambition to uphold family reputation. His labor is tightly controlled to

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protect Amara's professional image, mirroring how patriarchal marriages have historically relegated women's ambitions to the private sphere while enforcing dependency. By making Obinna the stay-at-home spouse tasked with preserving middle-class respectability, Adichie demonstrates her claim that "culture does not make people, people make culture" (Adichie 2014, 45), revealing these hierarchies as contingent and open to critique. This inversion also satirizes status anxieties; the way respectability depends on carefully managing who earns money, how, and in what roles, highlighting how gendered control of labor reproduces class privilege. Such politics are not inherently masculine or feminine but are socially constructed strategies of control. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993, 186–229) explains, respectability politics function as a double-edged strategy in which marginalized groups police internal gender roles to gain social legitimacy—even as they entrench internal hierarchies and inequalities. Adichie's Lagos shows that these dynamics can operate under matriarchal rule just as they do under patriarchy, exposing them as power-laden strategies rather than expressions of any essential gender difference.

Her critique also aligns with classic feminist analyses of marriage as an institution of economic dependence and control. As Sylvia Federici (1975) argues, capitalist economies have historically relied on unpaid or underpaid domestic labor that is feminized, invisibilized, and devalued. In *The Visit*, Obinna performs this labor while Amara advances her career. But his role is not empowering since it is tightly policed and surveilled. He tells Eze: "She prefers that I do charity work. I started an NGO last year, but when I told her I wanted to scale up, she told me it was better to keep it small" (Adichie 2021, 14). Even when he seeks socially valued work, his ambition is curtailed to ensure it does not threaten her status. This mirrors real-world dynamics where wives are encouraged to do volunteer or "hobbyist" work while husbands' careers are treated as serious and worthy of investment.

Obinna's experience also dramatizes what bell hooks (1984, 22–31) describes as the ideology of domesticity—the expectation that one partner's duty is to support the other's ambitions through unpaid care work. In Adichie's satire, this logic is reversed but equally coercive. Obinna is expected to sacrifice personal goals to maintain domestic stability and social respectability, echoing how women have historically been relegated to the private sphere to enable men's public success. His emotional burden is palpable. He confides to Eze his resentment and sense of humiliation but feels trapped, aware that any defiance would risk social ostracism and worsen his precarious situation. Adichie's depiction underscores how domestic power operates not only through material dependence but also through psychological conditioning and fear of public shame.

Another powerful aspect of Adichie's critique is the suppression of personal ambition in the name of domestic duty, which is a dynamic that has historically constrained women. Obinna's artistic dreams are belittled by Amara's casual dismissal: "Your poems are okay, they'll never be great" (Adichie 2021, 15). This remark undercuts his creative work and erodes his self-worth, mirroring how patriarchal marriages have traditionally treated women's intellectual or professional pursuits as hobbies unworthy

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of serious attention. Eze challenges this complacency: "You were supposed to become a great poet, not get married a year after graduation" (Adichie 2021, 17). His rebuke functions as both accusation and lament, a recognition of how the system demands the sacrifice of personal growth for social conformity.

Feminist scholarship has long analyzed how women's creative ambitions have been sacrificed on the altar of domesticity. Virginia Woolf's (1931/1942, 237) call to "kill the Angel in the House" resonates here with the genders reversed. Adichie's Lagos insists that this sacrifice is not an inevitable result of femininity but a socially imposed demand of domestic ideology. Making Obinna a poet is itself significant. Poetry, with its intimate engagement with language and emotion, symbolizes the interior life that authoritarian social orders seek to regulate. By denying Obinna the freedom to develop his art, the society in *The Visit* denies him full personhood—a critique that applies to any system that subordinates individual development to rigid gender roles.

Perhaps most unsettling is Obinna's own internalization of the very gender ideology that oppresses him. He justifies excluding men from government roles by arguing it is necessary to maintain Nigeria's international respectability: "A man should not be in charge of such a sensitive post, it's too important. ... And how will it look when we go to OPEC meetings and it turns out that only Nigeria has a male minister? They won't take us seriously" (Adichie 2021, 16). This justification mirrors real-world arguments historically used to exclude women on grounds of respectability and international perception. This is an example of what Simone de Beauvoir (1949, 60–63) calls *immanence*, which can be defined as the process by which the subordinate internalizes imposed limits until they appear natural. Judith Butler's (1990, 25–33) concept of *performativity* is also relevant: Obinna enacts subservient masculinity by aligning his behavior and beliefs with social expectations, regulating himself in conformity with oppressive norms. Adichie's satire here is subtle but devastating, showing that systems of power reproduce themselves not only through external force but also through ideological capture. Obinna believes and defends the very system that constrains him, illustrating how oppression persists precisely because the oppressed internalize and reproduce its logic. As Paulo Freire (1970, 30–33) argues, true liberation requires recognizing and rejecting these internalized terms of subjection. Adichie's narrative suggests that any meaningful transformation demands confronting such deep-seated cultural assumptions that naturalize inequality.

From an African feminist perspective, Adichie's Lagos is not a generic dystopia but a specifically Nigerian satire that demands attention to local cultural contexts. As Nanjala Nyabola (2022) argues, African feminisms insist on attending to local histories, hierarchies, and power relations that shape gendered labor. Adichie's narrative does not offer a universalist fantasy of role reversal but instead delivers a grounded critique of how patriarchal expectations of respectability and economic subordination can be reproduced even under regimes claiming to invert them. Nyabola (2022, 100) emphasizes that African feminisms are intersectional and decolonial, rejecting frameworks that flatten diverse African experiences. Adichie's inversion technique aligns

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with this approach, asking readers to see domestic politics through the lens of culturally specific gendered subordination. In Nyabola's terms, African feminism as method "theorises power relationships within a society refracted through the experiences of African women" (2022, 107). Adichie's Lagos reflects this complexity, showing that oppression depends not on the inherent nature of men or women but on institutional structures, social respectability, and economic dependency.

Finally, *The Visit* refuses any comforting narrative of escape or revolution. The story does not end with Obinna overthrowing the matriarchal regime or even articulating a plan of resistance. Instead, after Eze's departure, Obinna is left in quiet contemplation, aware of his constrained freedom but unwilling to act. This deliberate choice denies readers the catharsis of a redemptive arc or revenge fantasy, forcing them to dwell on the discomfort of unresolved systemic injustice. As dystopian theorist Tom Moylan (2000, 147) argues, open-ended dystopias confront readers with the reality that social change is neither easy nor inevitable but demands sustained critique and struggle. Adichie's refusal of resolution is politically strategic, resisting the fantasy that simply reversing gender hierarchies would achieve justice. Obinna's lack of rebellion underscores the internalization of oppression, mirroring real-world dynamics in which the oppressed absorb and reproduce their subordination. Adichie's ending suggests that recognizing injustice is only the beginning and perhaps an incomplete one. Ultimately, the unresolved conclusion serves as an ethical provocation, handing responsibility back to readers. The discomfort they feel at Obinna's quiet resignation is meant to mirror their own complicity in tolerating or failing to challenge gendered inequalities in their own societies.

6. Conclusion

The unsettling resignation at the end of *The Visit* hands responsibility back to readers, asking them to reflect on their own complicity in sustaining gendered inequalities. Building on this provocation, this paper has argued that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Visit* exemplifies how Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist fiction can serve as both cultural critique and ethical challenge. Rather than offering a simple fantasy of gender reversal or utopian revenge, Adichie uses speculative inversion to reveal the socially constructed, contingent nature of gendered power. By imagining a near-future Lagos governed by a matriarchal elite, *The Visit* disrupts any assumption that gender hierarchies are natural, exposing the shared logics of domination that persist regardless of who is in power.

Through detailed satirical strategies, Adichie interrogates the policing of reproductive autonomy, the regulation of respectability, the economic dependence built into domestic arrangements, and the suppression of individual ambition. Her critique shows that oppression is not simply maintained through overt laws and institutions but also through internalized expectations, cultural scripts, and social shame. Drawing on both

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African feminist thought and broader feminist theory, the story demonstrates how respectability politics, economic control, and gender performance enforce inequality in ways that adapt to different contexts. By deploying inversion as a form of cognitive estrangement rooted in Nigerian realities, Adichie demonstrates how speculative fiction can estrange not only gender norms but also the theoretical frameworks through which they are often read.

At the same time, Adichie anchors her speculative critique in specifically Nigerian cultural and social dynamics, resisting universalist readings that would flatten African experience into a single story. By situating the narrative within the concrete socio-political realities of Lagos, including the everyday mechanics of police checkpoints and the layered stratifications of domestic class relations, Adichie underscores the necessity of an Africanfuturist framework. Her work demonstrates that speculative fiction emerging from the continent cannot be fully interpreted through a generalized Afrofuturist lens alone but requires sustained engagement with the local histories and epistemologies advocated by Nathaniel and Akung (2022). African feminist theorists such as Nanjala Nyabola and Sylvia Tamale have likewise emphasize the importance of attending to localized histories, hierarchies, and colonial legacies when analyzing gendered power. The Visit aligns with this perspective by revealing how patriarchal logics of control may be reinscribed under new political regimes, including those that claim to invert traditional gender orders. This layered critique insists that enduring transformation cannot be achieved through role reversal alone but instead demands a critical confrontation with the cultural assumptions and institutional structures that continue to sustain inequality.

Ultimately, Adichie's *The Visit* challenges readers to reject comforting narratives of easy resolution or redemptive rebellion. By ending on Obinna's quiet resignation rather than triumphant revolution, the story denies the fantasy that flipping power relations can deliver justice. Instead, it asks readers to reflect on their own complicity in systems of domination and to imagine the more complex, more necessary work of transforming social norms, dismantling institutional hierarchies, and building genuinely equitable futures. As such, Adichie demonstrates the power of speculative fiction not to escape reality but to illuminate it by provoking critical engagement with the question of how more just and humane societies might be envisioned, debated, and created.

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