



A STUDY ON THE THEME OF RESISTANCE: FOOD AS METAPHOR AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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Abstract: Culinary art also known by the name, “the table arts” has garnered global consideration among different scholars, and the people who specialized in this area are known as “chefs” or “cooks”, the commonly used names are “culinary artist” and “culinarian”. There is a relationship between food and culture, and the study of this aspect is known as gastronomy. In the field of literature, the civilizing impact of gastronomy is interrelated with the issues of race, class, and gender.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a prominent female Nigerian writer and one of the true feminists. The present study strives to examine the relationship between food and identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s celebrated novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) from the lens of colonialism and postcolonial theory. This research paper with textual references offers a deep insight into how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents the motif of food to question the power in a male-dominated culture and how food becomes a metaphor for resistance and identity. Food and the practice for the preparation of food are important for cultural expression. Food and its eating habits not only signify the contentment of eating, but it also signifies the power of colonial rule. The type of food people eat and it’s way of preparation and techniques speak a lot about people and their relation with the culture and environment.

Keywords: Culinary Art, Colonial Rule, Food and Culture, Identity, Male Domination, Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Food is an essence for an individual to live on and develop. It provides one’s body nutritional support to carry on a daily routine. Food is mainly plant-based or animal and has essential nutrients like carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Cultural differences and geographical divisions have led to the creation of different style of cooking and their presentation. Food has religious and regional significance also. Due to cultural interaction, and hybridity of culture, many new cuisines have evolved continuously, this is also known as fusion cuisine. Fusion cuisine combines styles of cooking of different countries or cultures. The function of food is also assumed to portray the culture of a country or a community, which can be used as an agent of communication.

Gastronomy: It is the study of relationship between food and culture, the art of discovering food preparation, and essential nutrients in food which help in supporting good health. Two types of gastronomy are; Practical and Theoretical gastronomy. In Practical gastronomy, the study and the preparation of various foods across countries are taken, while Theoretical gastronomy focuses on the recipes and techniques of the food. The origins of gastronomy date back to the French reign of Louis XIV also known as Louis the Great or the Sun King, who was the King of France from 14 May 1643, and lasted until his death in 1715. People in his era took interest in differentiating between good and bad styles of culinary taste, the classy food, and its ritual became gastronomic illustrations for the French, with the extensive use of French vocabulary in gastronomic literature. However, gastronomy has evolved from being a marginalized subject matter in France to a universally admired interest.

Culinary Art: It is the presentation of food mainly in the form of a meal, which involves the consumption of food at a certain time; it is also known by the name the table arts. The art of cooking can be traced in primitive times, when human got to know how to cook meals using fire. Humans in the earlier time just put some raw meat in the flames and watched it sizzle. Another theory states that humans might have by chance discovered that roasted meat which suddenly fell in the flaming fire was more chewable and digestive than raw one. The technique of food presentation improved with the invention of pottery and improvement in cultivation (Wrangham).

Anthropology is the study of human behavior, culture, language, and society scientifically within past and present social interaction. Social anthropology and cultural anthropology which is the branch of anthropology study the rules and values of society. Cultural anthropology focuses on the study of variations of different cultures which are present around the world; these different cultures have different social practices, food styles, social hierarchal ladder, and even differences in gender roles. While as social anthropology is the study of human behavior in society and culture. The combined study of these two is known as sociocultural anthropology, this branch of anthropology focuses on the study of society and culture.

Oliveira and Krisbergsson, argues that, traditional foods are those types that are passed through generations (85-86). According to culinary anthropology, traditional cuisines are inherited orally, in a small or large scale in a community, and it is a part of one's culture and identity. Anthropology connects the systematic study of individual culture and its historical point of view with modern issues in food production and consumption. The authors claim say in earlier times food was not viewed as being the central point of academic focus, as it dealt with cooking and eating as a part of daily routine or as having a religious significance, but the study of the introduction of food as a key insight into modern life got introduced later on in 20th century (Klein and Watson 3).

Food is consumed by everyone on a daily basis, and the consumption of food develops an identity as it defines a relation between social class and hierarchy in a family and also in a nation. It is a cultural act; the way of preparing food and how it is consumed is highly intertwined with the belief of any community or nation. Food as a symbol is used by many critics as a literary device. Many writers around the world have written books, articles, and theses on the relationship between food and culture, food as a means of communication, food as a symbol of resistance, food as a metaphor for colonial power, and so on. Civitello tells that throughout history there has been a major connection between culture and food, and the historical events have affected the food tradition and diets of many societies. (3). Cuisine does not only require information about styles of cooking but how it is cooked and consumed is also important which help in understanding one's beliefs and of others.

The present study focuses on how the representation of food and culture is portrayed in the selected novel of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as a symbol for identity formation, and as a means of resistance against patriarchal domination.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

Colonialism is the practice of exerting power and having control over other people or areas with the aim to dominate them. The one who exerts power imposes their culture, norm, tradition, religion, and language over the colonized. Fanon claims that colonialism has its effects on the thought process of both colonized and the colonizer. The labeling of black natives as ungodly, wicked, and conservative continuously by the white colonizer has severely affected the psyche of the colonized because the natives come to believe themselves to be malicious, infidel, and orthodox. In the process of seeing himself through the eyes of the white or the colonizer, the black man loses his sense and self-identity. And for this reason, he began to relate the true meaning of man with the white man. The native men tend to believe that the values which are imbued and practiced by white men are the only true values that matters. The black man tries to be as white as possible, by taking western values, language, religion, and practices and rejecting his own traditions. He puts a white mask over his black skin and eventually suffers from a schizophrenic condition as a result of this duality.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on September 15, 1997. She has her hands on novels, short stories, and non-fiction. She is a critically acclaimed young author of a new generation luring audiences towards African literature. She is the author of *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), and *Americanah* (2013). Her first debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004. She portrays characters who are subjected to violence and by the course of time how they voice against injustice and transform themselves from weak to strong-willed individuals. Her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* got 'Orange Prize' for fiction in 2007.

Food in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents class and shows how this upper class is alienated from its traditional consumption of food. Food becomes a metaphor for resistance through the characters in this novel. Food and resistance are the focal points in *Purple Hibiscus*. The story is narrated in the First person Kambili; she is the daughter of Eugene who has a dual personality. In the public, he offers huge donations to the churches and schools, and through his newspaper *Standard* voices against the ills of corrupt government, but at home, he becomes another person, who regularly beats his wife, unleashes terror upon his children by controlling their lives in deciding what, and when to eat. He is a colonial product who views western life to be superior and the only perfect way of living, he has distanced himself from the traditional culture by having factory-made foods, and juices, and eating Jollof rice with a fork which the traditional people eat with their hands. He also controls his children's school schedule by giving them the timetable of how many hours to study and how much time they should take rest. But things started to change when one day Jaja, the protagonist's brother did not go to communion. When Eugene along with his family except Jaja returned from the church, Eugene asks, Jaja, you did not go to communion, to whom Jaja replied the wafer gives me bad breath, and the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me (6), and this became the first step of defiance.

The term wafer is very important in the church communion, although the wafer which has a religious significance in the church could have been simply made from the local maize plant, the Spaniards associate superiority with their culture, according to them the European wheat can only be transformed into the body of Christ and not the inferior native maize plant. The same applies with Eugene, he would insist his family members call it the 'host', because the word host has a closer meaning of sacredness to Christ's body, and the wafer has a secular significance to Eugene because it was made from one of his factories (Santhiya 6). In *Purple Hibiscus* Papa Eugene became very furious seeing the resistance in Jaja's words, he tells him:

It is the body of our lord. Papa's voice was low, very low. His face looked swollen already. With pus-tipped rashes spread across every inch, it seemed to be swelling even more. Eugene tells Jaja that he cannot discontinue receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that. Jaja replied that he will prefer death then. Fear has darkened Jaja's eyes to the color of coal tar, but he looked Papa in the face now. Then I will die, Papa. (PH 7)

Food is associated with domestic violence, resistance, and punishment in Eugene's home. Seeing defiance in the eyes of Jaja, papa became angry, and he threw the heavy missal which was on the table and flung it towards Jaja, but the missal missed the target and instead hit the figurines which Beatrice his wife has placed on the shelf, it breaks into pieces. Kambili would always notice that her mother used to polish those figurines of ballet dancers placed on the shelf. Kambili's mother would spend hours cleaning the figurines. When it breaks there were no tears in her eyes, she has cleaned it only two weeks ago, when her swollen eyes were still like the black-purple color of an overripe avocado (11). It was not only the pieces of decorative ballet dancers which broke down, but along with it the fear in Beatrice's eyes also vanished.

According to Marxist thought, in a society, there is never-ending battle of class struggle between two types of class, the owner and the working class, wherein the upper class known by the name feudal landlords or factory owners tries to control the working class known as serfs or factory workers. This process of dominating another class in a society is the central feature of Marxist thought. In the process of domination, the working class imbibes certain traits and behavior from the high class. Apart from economic beliefs, it also includes religious, and moral beliefs and behavior, and ideas about taste and social power. In a similar way Eugene wanted to control everything in his home, and in order to control he unleashes domestic violence on everyone. One form of domestic violence he does on his family is through the consumption of food. His factory produce bottled juice and he forcefully made his family drink it, not only he wanted all of them to drink it, but they have to praise it also. Tasting the juice becomes a terror in Kambili, Beatrice, and Jaja's life. When one day Eugene makes them drink a new juice from his factory, 'the cashew juice', it has the same old label that the other products made in the factory have. Eugene poured juice for everyone, and everyone commented on it by saying this juice tasted very good, although it looked like a watery yellow like the color of urine, with no taste. When papa asked Jaja to say something, he replied, I have nothing to say, and pushed his chair back saying, Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Papa. Thank you, Mama (13-14). This was another blow on Papa's face, as till now nobody has ignored his words, or said anything to him.

Food in Kambili's house is also linked with restrictions and punishment, Eugene decides the menu of what to eat for half a portion of the month, and then changes it to another list of menus for the other half of the month. Kambili associates food with punishment. One day Eugene tells them that they are going to a Mass, and strictly prohibited them from eating any solid food an hour before Mass. But Kambili got her periods and was in severe pain, her mother suggested her to eat some solid food before taking medicine for pain relief. Her brother Jaja poured some powdered milk and cereal into a bowl for Kambili, she was about to finish the bowl when her father suddenly opened the door and screamed at Kambili why was she eating when he has strictly forbidden them to eat anything before the Mass. Beatrice tells Eugene that Kambili got her period and was in severe pain, Jaja also came in support of her sister by telling his father that, it was he, who told Kambili to eat cornflakes before taking any medicine for pain relief. Eugene instead of understanding the situation tells them; has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him? Has the devil built a tent in my house? He was such a ruthless figure that, he did not bother about Kambili's pain, but what mattered for him was that by eating food Kambili has disgraced him and the Mass. In order to make them disciplined he unbuckled his belt and thrashed Jaja on his shoulder and Mama on her upper arm, and finally the belt landed on Kambili's back (102).

The cultural conflict between Christian Catholicism and Igbo traditions; it is set in postcolonial Nigeria. Colonialism does not only stand for domination through occupying land or physical and geographical space of others, but it also refers to the occupation of psychological, cultural, and spiritual space of others (Dube 4). Food in *Purple Hibiscus* is also related to the class difference. In Kambili's home, they have food in abundance, which includes fufu, coconut rice, yam, meat, tea, juices, with matching tea and dinner sets, and on the other side, the food of their grandfather was simple, with flaky fufu, soup with a watery texture and no meat in it. He does not live with them because Eugene wanted him to convert to Christianity and does not like his traditional way of preaching religion, he called his father a pagan.

The word Bildungsroman has its origin in German where 'Bildung' means formation and 'roman' stands for a novel, so the combined words mean novel of formation. The characteristic of the bildungsroman is that the good character in search of inner peace leaves home and shifts to another environment, the dilemma in the character's mind enables him or her to see her or his growth, which is being tested by critical conditions and finally she or he reaches the zenith of growth where that person is able to take the decision of his or her life independently (Nilima 2). Jaja and Kambili's association of food with fear got changed when they move to their Aunt's house in Nsukka. It is because of Aunty Ifeoma that Jaja and Kambili got to know the value of defying oppression. Aunty Ifeoma teaches them the real meaning of freedom, 'freedom to be, to do' (16). Kambili in her Aunty Ifeoma's house got to know how to do cooking because at her house they have a maid Sisi. The home environment at her aunt's house was very healthy, unlike her house where the cloud of fear and silence always hung over their heads. Aunty Ifeoma was not rich like her brother Eugene but she has given her children a free environment, where they can laugh, cook, eat according to their taste and place, and discuss things, unlike Eugene. Aunty Ifeoma said tells Jaja being defiant can be a good thing sometimes. Defiance is like a marijuana ___ it is not a bad thing when it is used right (144).

It is in Nsukka that Kambili gained her voice when Anty Ifeoma asked her to help in preparing *orah* leaves; Kambili shook her head and says she does not know how to prepare it. Kambili's cousin taunted her by saying because rich people do not prepare *orah* leaves in their houses? Won't she take part in eating the *orah* soup? (170). Aunty Ifeoma tells Kambili to answer her cousin back to reclaim her identity. Hearing this Kambili replies to Amaka and tells her she need not shout at her, if she does not know how to do the *Orah* leaves, she can teach her. Kambili does not herself know how such a reply came from her mouth so easily. Kambili's cousin laughed upon hearing such a response from her meek cousin and tells Kambili, so your voice can be this loud, Kambili (170). Kambili then with the help of Amaka learn how to prepare the *orah* leaves, and her hunger for knowing herself and her culture got satisfied at Nsukka.

De Beauvoir has argued that the concept of patriarchy emerged because men always stereotype women, and women in return accept this stereotypic image of theirs because they were told and taught from traditions that good women's job is to please her husband, give birth to children, do household chores and to suppress her wishes and voice, thus giving power to others to oppress them. Women are always seen as inferior to men and labeled as other. Thus in a society, there is always a Subject Other relationship between men and women, where the Man is the subject and the Woman is the other. Simone De Beauvoir says that the notion of Women being inferior to men is constructed by society and men. As she puts it 'One is not born a woman rather becomes a woman' (267). But De Beauvoir says that woman must raise their voice, so that she becomes in charge of her own life, instead of being dependent and inferior to man. A woman must become Subject rather than Object in her life because when a woman stands for herself she stands for the whole social transformation. Nsukka has the power to lift the silence. Beatrice, the wife of Eugene is the victim of domestic violence most in *PH*. She does not have a say in her house and is totally dependent on her husband. She is a good wife, and a good mother, but bears physical violence at the hands of her husband. She suffers several miscarriages because of domestic violence, but gradually she reclaims her voice and took a stand for herself. Things began to change for Beatrice also when; she visited Nsukka without informing them. She told Aunty Ifeoma that, she was in the hospital, and that she came here without informing Eugene. Everyone was puzzled as to why was she hospitalized, she turned to Kambili and said, her father broke the table on her belly where they used to keep the bible, she was six weeks pregnant at that time. She tells her that when she visited the doctor, the doctor replied that he could not save her baby. After narrating her experience, Beatrice cried for a long time, until she fell asleep. She cried until Aunty Ifeoma finished cooking the putrid meat in a highly spiced stew (249).

Women should not confine themselves within the four walls doing only household duties because there is no such concept of a feminine role. Post-colonialism is a crucial scholarly study in terms of the cultural, political, and economical legacies of colonialism; its focus is to discuss the impact of exertion of power and control on the colonized people and their lands. Post-colonialism corresponds to an ideological reaction to colonial notions and a response to departure from colonialism. It examines the socio-political power relationships between the colonizer and the colonized (Fuller). According to Ashcroft et al., Post-colonialism is intended at disempowering the intellectual and linguistic as well as social and economic theories by means of which colonialists perceive, understand, and know the world. Postcolonial theory thus establishes intellectual spaces for subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and produce cultural discourses of philosophy, language, and society which balance the imbalance of power relations between the colonized and the colonizer (168-73). One of the notable theorists of postcolonial theory is Fanon; he describes that the nature of colonialism is mainly destructive, as it mentally and physically subjugates the native people by imposing its own colonial identity. According to Fanon in order to liberate themselves from tyrannical rule, the oppressed natives must violently resist colonial subjugation in order to restore self-respect (250). Wollstonecraft rejects the traditional concept of women being weaker than men. She says that women are not inferior it is the lack of education which places women in a secondary position. She stresses the notion that women must consider themselves equal to men rather than considering themselves to be mere wives of their husbands. She says that the roles which are prescribed for women are socially constructed they are not natural. She says that society relates the traits of beauty, and romance with women, so as to make them true feminine. Beatrice in this *Purple Hibiscus* also took a stand for herself after her abortion. There was a new kind of look at Beatrice's face, a different kind of woman as if possessed by some sort of fiend. She decides to go back home. A different kind of silence pervades now in Eugene's house. She no longer lowers her voice to whisper, did not hide her little smile now, and openly takes food to Jaja's room along with a matching plate. Nobody knew the cause of this new kind of difference when one day Beatrice made a phone call to Jaja and Kambili as they were again in Nsukka, to inform them about the death of Eugene. She tells Kambili on the phone that, factory men informed her about Eugene's death, he was found lying dead on the desk in the factory. Beatrice kept repeating the words, like a recorder. Kambili visualizes her mother repeating the same words to her brother Jaja, in a similar manner. Although Kambili heard Beatrice's words, she still asks her, did he get a letter bomb? Was it a letter bomb? (287).

It was after quite a few days that Beatrice got a call to inform her that Eugene was poisoned as an autopsy was done on him. They did an autopsy, she said. They have found the poison in your father's body. She was so comfortable while saying this as if they all knew about it. And she acknowledges committing this crime so calmly, by telling them, she was poisoning his tea before she came to Nsukka. She tells them, that she got the poison with the help of their maid, Sisi whose uncle is an influential witch doctor (290).

Adichie challenges the male stereotypical society and enables women to emerge as new women, with their own identity as empowerment. Said is regarded as the originator of postcolonial theory explaining the theory of orientalism he claims that, orientalism is an Occidental approach for controlling, regenerating, and having control over the Orient. He says that Western Europe has intellectually divided the world into the Occident and the Orient using the binary social relation. Said states that, this us-and-them binary relation is socially constructed, and both are mutually dependent on one another. The concept of the East according to Said was constructed by the West in order to suppress people from expressing themselves and their culture. This led to the creation of the notion that the oriental world is inferior as opposed to Western Europe which was now considered as superior. Power allows Europeans or Occidentals to redefine and thereby control Orientals into imposing colonies. In the same way in a patriarchal society, Men dominated women. Therefore, it becomes important for women to have their voice, and to learn the art of articulation for identity formation. Initially, the tea symbolized the love sip because Eugene usually shared his tea with Kambili and Jaja to show his love, although, the tea used to be hot, but both the children would drink it. And when Jaja did not go to communion, Eugene did not share his love sip with him, because he was angry. For Beatrice the tea becomes a symbol of freedom, nobody could have imagined that Beatrice in order to end her, and children's suffering would use this love sip or tea against Eugene to put an end to his cruel regime, she poisoned him slowly through the tea until he died.

CONCLUSION

The research paper begins with a general introduction to food culture, tracing its origin, implication, and its types. The present study has managed to examine the intertwined relationship between food, culture, and identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's celebrated novel *Purple Hibiscus*. Papa Eugene is the embodiment of the colonial legacy and its violence, while Aunty Ifeoma at Nsukka promotes a hybrid postcolonial environment which seeks to create space and freedom of to be, and to do. Adichie in this novel use

food as a metaphor for power to control others, and at the same time food is used by her as a symbol, to defy the oppressions through characters like Jaja, Kambili, and indeed Beatrice that are subjugated in order to reclaim one's identity, and thus shifts from being marginalized to the center.

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