



PERSECUTION ENSUED FROM RELIGIOUS ABSOLUTISM IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S PURPLE HIBISCUS

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Abstract: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel, "Purple Hibiscus" propelled the author as a genuine observer of human connections and an outstanding new voice. "Purple Hibiscus" is a multidimensional novel set in the Igbo locale of Nigeria and manages issues identified with abstinence in the catholic organization. The story is entirely woven around the life of the protagonist Kambili Achike, an adolescent girl who is quite and withdrawn. Her world view is based on her Papa Eugene's strict catholic rules. This paper aims to analyze Papa Eugene's imposition of discipline through surveillance and punishment of his family and the origin of his religious absolutism and repressive behavior using the term mimicry. Surveillance or observation of the dominator over the subordinate is one of the most powerful strategies for maintaining power and challenges the colonized subject in a way that establishes his identity in relation to the observer. Here, the religious violence results in the silence of Kambili, her brother, and her mother. Furthermore, this study focuses on the different forms of religious persecution caused by Papa Eugene.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Purple Hibiscus, Religious Absolutism

An award winning and prominent Igbo Nigerian female writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria in 1977, but grew up in the university town of Nsukka, where she attended primary and secondary schools. She is also a story teller, best known for her themes of politics, culture, race and gender. Her novels, short stories and plays have all received both public and critical acclaims. Adichie says that, she wrote "Purple Hibiscus", to explore the role of religion in contemporary Nigeria. Hence it is a historical fictional novel that is set in the 1960s in Nigeria Africa during post colonialism and after the second world war. Adichie attracts her audience with easy and comprehensible language.

As an Igbo woman writing about Igbo characters, all of Adichie's book contain short phrases in Igbo when applicable. Her choice of using Igbo might also relate to keeping the words and characters native to their home, challenging the domination of English and western influences. A well praised and received aspect of "Purple Hibiscus" is Adichie's ability to write from the perspective of a child named Kambili Achike, who is under the strict control of her catholic father, Papa Eugene.

Religion is a theme often used to oppress members of society, and this idea of dictating Eugene's actions is prevalent throughout the novel. Oppression is justified by Eugene's hypocrisy, his need of perfection from his children Kambili and her brother Jaja and by his duplicity of censorship at both home and his workplace. In addition to this, it also deals with the authenticity of customary Igbo religion and the flexibility of a populace confronted with political flimsiness and the intense neediness in the richest country.

Adichie's novel explores a number of issues such as religious absolutism, egalitarianism, feminism, domestic violence, politics and colonialism which in turn all highlight the main ideology of patriarchal power. The title "Purple Hibiscus" reflects the theme of hybridity. It is the clash of culture and a hope for the better future. The symbolism and dominance of the red hibiscus flower that surrounds and essentially envelops the

Achike home becomes a representation of the bloodshed, violence and abuse meted out to not only the women of household but everyone who occupies the space.

Eugene's patriarchal hegemony is visible as the red hibiscus becomes a reflection of his pervading almost overbearing presence in the home. Contrastingly, the purple hibiscus, is a symbol of rarity, peace and hope. It is coined and begins to bloom in Nsukka through experimentation. Hence its need to survive and thrive requires not only the removal of the red hibiscus, but a space that facilitates flexibility. Thus, it can be argued that Eugene, the dominant red hibiscus dies, it creates a room for the purple hibiscus.

The flower purple hibiscus symbolizes the emancipation and womanist agency of Kambili. Her inward quest for liberation is marked with the image of the flower which is purple, a rare and vibrant color of hibiscus. In addition, the vibrancy, energy, vivacity and beauty of life that Kambili and Jaja enjoyed at their Auntie Ifeoma's house are in contrast with the oppressive life at their own house. In this sense, the color purple is symbolic of Kambili's agency and her spirited womanhood which she achieves through her relationship with the young missionary priest, Father Amadi and through the guidance she receives from Auntie Ifeoma.

Many writers, speakers and critics expressed their perspective on this novel. The Research scholar Nicky Lindecrantz from Umea University, Sweden conducted a study on "Kambili's journey to Dignity and Self-empowerment: A womanist approach' to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus", using womanist theory as theoretical framework, this study has analyzed identity formation and self-empowerment. The researcher found that "Adichie articulates a womanist ideology that relates to universal human suffering."

Ruby Bell -Gam in her review of Purple Hibiscus commented that "Adichie's debut novel is a thoroughly engaging and exquisitely crafted piece of work." Ruby Bell - 9 Gam is the head of International and Area Studies and Librarian for African Studies and International Development studies. She mainly focused on Eugene's religious fanaticism. His overbearing hands end up imprisoning his loved ones. According to her Purple Hibiscus is a multidimensional novel.

Olatoun Gabi-Williams was TV host at the 1st Nigerian Cultural Trade show held October 2nd 2014. She has many years of experience delivering spoken and written word around literary culture, advocacy and education. Gabi Williams commented on Purple Hibiscus, "Purple Hibiscus is an urgent reminder of the Biblical axiom: wherever the Spirit of God is, there is liberty. Let's turn it the other way round: wherever there is liberty, there, is the Spirit of God. The God whose name means Love. Seventeen-year-old Jaja and fifteen-year-old Kambili, victims over their lifetimes of the hate and madness of their father, are given a taste of freedom and love in the home of Ifeoma, their father's sister and in the company of their grandfather, Papa Nnukwu."

In Ogaga's journal "Changing Border and Creating Voice: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus", he explores the growth process of the protagonist Kambili as she struggles to make her mouth function within the totalitarian temperament of her father's home. Here Kambili and her family members are persecuted in the name of religion.

Anthony Chennells journal, Inculturated Catholicism in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus explores through the religious aspects of this novel. He commented "Adichie's Purple Hibiscus belongs to a new generation of novels that take for granted Christianity as part of contemporary African culture and although the novel criticizes the Eurocentric and exclusive Catholicism of previous generations, and demands respect for Igbo spirituality, no attempt is made to recover traditional religion in everyday life or to inculturate Catholicism in religious practices that are no longer central to the majority of the people."

Margaret Fafa Nutsukpo in the article "Domestic violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus" discussed about the Gender based violence in the novel. How domestic violence is a regular feature in African homes. According to Margaret "This is largely due to cultural influences for, the patriarchal culture, inherent in the African society, encourages prejudices against women, and accepts the battery of wives by husbands as normal".

Anthony C Oha argues that the protagonist Kambili's a new voice crying out to be heard because of the torture and anguish in the impediments of governance and civilization around her, that "one needs to observe how this character reveals in somewhat innocent, silence", the painful realities in her society. She exposes several military oddities with the eyes of an innocent observe". Along similar lines, Susan Andrade in her paper "Adichie's Genealogies: National and Feminine Novels" also argues that while Purple Hibiscus represents politics of the family, at the same time it clearly tells stories of the nation. Therefore, "by illustrating across continental set of inspirations and inter texts" in the novel she "reveals Adichie's exploration of the contemporary Nigerian political crisis."

Persecution Ensued from Religious Absolutism

"Purple Hibiscus" critiques the associated violence of Christian religion and patriarchal domination. It explores the commonalities and differences between two religious beliefs in the contemporary Nigeria. From Eugene's viewpoint, his father spent his time worshiping Gods of wood and stone. According to Papa Nnukwu Christ does not represent anything more than a person that hangs on the wood outside the mission. Religious Absolutism has played a part in some of the worst social and political evils throughout history. In "Purple Hibiscus" the narrator explores how Christianity can be exploited and abused by the male gender to exercise extreme and devastating control within the family. And the ways in which three very different characters express their religion of the Catholic faith, as well as looking into the traditional Nigerian beliefs of Papa Nnukwu. Absolutism rejects rational arguments. Here, Eugene used his 'absolute faith' to obtain 'absolute power' and this leads to violence. Eugene is a religious zealot and vulnerable man. He treated his family cruelly and unfairly. Persecution is the right term to use here. Persecution is painful emotionally, psychologically, and even physically. Moreover, here the study intends to analyze different forms of religious persecution by Papa Eugene to the lives of his family members.

Kambili Achike

Kambili Achike is a fifteen-year-old girl who is diffident and quiet. She is a religious teenager and a member of a wealthy family in Enugu State, dominated by her devoutly Catholic father, Eugene Achike. She has a deep and genuine religious faith that is more than just a product of her father's upbringing. Although Papa is abusive, Kambili admires him and is proud of his charitable actions in the community. His small gestures of love made her happy. She is also a victim of religious persecution in this story along with her brother Jaja and mother Beatrice. One day when Kambili was looking at a painting of Papa Nnukwu, her grandfather, and Papa Eugene walked in and beat her until she ended up in the hospital severely injured. Because she was not supposed to have a relationship with Papa Nnukwu because he refused to convert to Catholic. Aunty Ifeoma influenced her life a lot afterwards is also a Catholic but more flexible than her father. Ifeoma helped her to become more confident in the future.

Chukwuka Achike

Chukwuka "Jaja" Achike is Kambili's elder brother and is seventeen years old. Jaja is a brilliant student, but he is very quiet like his sister Kambili. He indeed wants to protect his mother and sister but he is also afraid of Eugene. Eugene is an aggressive man, he will hurt Jaja if he disobeys him. He is also a victim of religious persecution, so there is little he can do to stop the abuse. Just like his sister, he also tries to keep his father happy. Jaja did this kind of things every day to please his Papa Eugene. Until Palm Sunday, that is, when Jaja decides to skip Communion, knowing his father will be furious and inflict punishment at home. What brings Jaja to the point of openly defying his father is his immersion in the family life of Aunty Ifeoma's household. Aunty Ifeoma is the main reason for the positive changes in their lives. The way her children share their opinions openly and how they are encouraged to speak out and are not punished for doing so. Their lives help Jaja see other ways of living righteously and the value of resisting unjust rulers. Though he resists Eugene continued his cruelty and this leads to Jaja's loss of freedom.

Beatrice Achike

Beatrice Achike, or Mama. She has been abused both mentally and physically by her husband. She watches passively as he violently abuses her children. Beatrice feels that she is not a fantastic wife, since she has only managed to give birth to two children. She is convinced that she must be grateful to Papa Eugene because he keeps her as his wife. She suffered a miscarriage because of his brutality. Her sister-in-law Ifeoma encouraged her many times to consider leaving the marriage but she refused. She sees divorce as impractical but continues persecution took her to a breaking point. There she solved the problem in an unexpected way. She killed him.

Ifeoma

Aunty Ifeoma is Eugene's sister and teaches at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. She is a widow who looks her children in her meagre wage. She is an opinionated person. She is not afraid to criticize the government, the University or her brother Eugene. Both the children of Papa Nnukwu are catholic. Unlike her brother she is an open-minded person. She treats her children with all respect and encouraged them to raise their voices. A practical lady, she knows how much importance one should give for their religion. She respects her religion but not an absolute like her brother. She is a practically deciding lady. Her style of parenting is

more effective than Eugene's. Because, there is an amazing bond between mother and kids. It is something out of love and respect, not from the fear of getting hurt. Ifeoma is a single parent, but that didn't stop her from being a good mother. Papa Nnukwu is very close to her than he is with Eugene. She even asked her sister-in-law to leave her brother and have a good life. Eugene thinks he is putting out a fire, but he is actually pouring gasoline all over his home. The family's country and home are on fire; the roof is collapsing on all of them. To Auntie Ifeoma, there comes a point where staying is no longer an option. Auntie Ifeoma has made a huge impact on niece and nephew, Kambili and Jaja. She helped both Kambili and Jaja to find their self and voice. She moves to America when the University fires her for speaking out against the administration.

Papa Nnukwu

Papa Nnukwu, the father of Papa and Auntie Ifeoma. He represents indigenous culture, specifically that of Igboland. He refuses to convert to Christianity. This caused a conflict between Eugene and Nnukwu. He is close with Ifeoma and her children. He lives in Abba, a town in Nigeria and is a traditionalist. Though Eugene treats him poor, he still prays for him and his family. Through his joy and warm spirit, Kambili learns that both family and faith are more complicated than what she has been taught. Kambili loved him despite her father's warning.

"Purple Hibiscus" is compounded by Roman Catholic prudishness towards the body and the view that sexual expression outside the bounds of matrimony is sinful. The trauma which warps Eugene is the memory of being discovered masturbating as a child by a priest, who punished him by soaking his hands in boiling water. As paterfamilias Eugene bears the responsibility of monitoring the purity and obedience of his wife and children, a task which he fulfils increasingly zealously, out of all proportion to the offences committed, as his children enter adolescence and begin to thwart his will.

Within the nuclear-family unit Eugene pronounces the Law of the father. He establishes a virtual Panopticon for surveillance and control, employing a set of procedures for identification, codification, narration and induction. He draws up schedules, issues edicts and checks for compliance himself and by means of his employees. Kambili loves her father, and delights in pleasing him. When she achieves his approval, she feels as if her mouth 'were full of melting sugar'. She feels as if she is in competition with her mother and her brother, wishing that she had made the correct pious platitude that garnered paternal approval.

For some time Eugene's wife, Beatrice, and the two children, Kambili and Jaja, are able to communicate with each other through a covert language of the eyes, which Kambili calls speaking with our spirits. They internalize the precepts of the oppressive father, avoiding contentious topics or the secret of the violence that they endure, and muting themselves to avoid provoking wrath or punishment. A failure to achieve top marks at school or at catechism classes results in punishment. Eugene injures Jaja's finger, causing a permanent disfigurement, for one such misdemeanor. Both Kambili and Jaja have boiling water poured over their feet by their father for spending some days under the same roof as their dying grandfather, who was being cared for by their aunt.

Aside from these instances of punishments caused by falling below the pinnacle of academic excellence, and by disobeying their father's injunction against proximity with heathens, even their own grandfather, some episodes of violence have a specifically gendered dimension. Eugene's absolutist intolerance of women's biological functions is exhibited when he beats the family with his belt as Kambili has consumed food with medication for menstrual pains, thus breaking her fast before Mass.

Further, although Eugene loses status in the community because of his small family, his vicious beatings cause his wife to miscarry a baby on at least two occasions. His most intense attack, which almost kills Kambili, occurs when she embraces the fragments of a painting of his father. In addition to physical violence, Eugene subjects his family to various forms of psychological trauma also, such as, a strict study regimen which denies his children many of their little joys like wearing play clothes, watching television or listening to music, they had lack of regular contact with their aunt and cousins, they were even disallowed them from making relationship with their grandfather. Eugene not only denies his children interacting with his father but also, he denies love, security, and financial assistance to his father until his father's death.

As a father, Eugene needs to protect his children from the dangers of life, provide them with stability and continuous guidance. But Eugene subjects his children to extreme physical violence in the guise of discipline. He slaps Kambili for getting to the car late when the driver picks her up from school. He lashes her with a leather belt for breaking a Eucharist fast. He mutilates Jaja's left hands and deforms his little finger for missing two questions in a catechism test. He scalds Kambili's feet with boiling water for being in possession of her grandfather's picture and worse for trying to prevent its destruction. The above incidents are written off as

accidents to protect Achike from being exposed of the monster that he is. Adichie highlights Eugene's inherent violence and the symbolic destruction at the opening of the novel.

As the narrative comes to a closure, Papa Eugene is dead. He has been poisoned by his wife, with the assistance of Sisi, their house help. Jaja claims the responsibility for poisoning his father and goes to prison. The public blames the government for his death, given his critical newspaper. Mama Beatrice continues to publicly say she poisoned him, but no-one believes her. Papa Eugene could have been killed by anyone. He was buried in the grave of colonial violence, which stopped him from believing in his name and language. He died when he got bitten by the colonizing mosquito with its deadly parasites, which kept multiplying in his blood until he was gibberish. Religion was his breath. He, therefore, was a violent product of the colonialism's epistemic violence and a religious absolutist. But Auntie Ifeoma's purple hibiscus offers a balm of healing in Nsuka.

Now the reader realizes that when Jaja triumphantly burst into the Palm Sunday space, defiantly riding the kingly colt of liberation, there were many crowds laying palm leaves and their cloaks for him to enter Jerusalem-to shake it up and to demand decolonization and human dignity. Perhaps these are the rare petals of the persecutions ensued from religious absolutism on "Purple Hibiscus."

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* belongs to a new generation of novels that take for granted Christianity as part of contemporary African culture and although the novel criticizes the Eurocentric and exclusive Catholicism of previous generations, and demands respect for Igbo spirituality, no attempt is made to recover traditional religion in everyday life or to inculcate Catholicism in religious practices that are no longer central to the majority of the people. Christianity can never be separate from the cultures in which it seeks to express itself, however, and the novel suggests that the Church should be inculturated in a post-modern Nigeria.

The central character Eugene's embracement over religion makes others to be forced to contend with agonizing situation. It reveals the general religious intolerance which created mainly by the failure to draw a border line between self and others. Adapting other's religion is always set to be crisis. Cultural and religious legacies played a crucial role in the home of Eugene. It never allows other members to burgeoning of their own autonomous role in the society. It also creates a great psychological impact on their mind. Adichie in "Purple Hibiscus" perspicuously manifests the defilement of religion.

From the character of Eugene, the readers will learn that one who holds the rigid religion often gets end for his course of traumatic action. Adichie reworks the role of religion on violence towards women and children projected by the head of the family which causes his family members to suffer both physically and mentally. Catholicism in religious practices that are no longer central to the majority of the people. Christianity can never be separate from the cultures in which it seeks to express itself, however, and the novel suggests that the Church should be inculturated in a post-modern Nigeria.

Intolerance, hatred and violence between faiths, and even within the same faith family, in this new century, will require that freedom of conscience and respect for believers of all faiths, and no supernatural faith, become paramount. Also, anti-absolutist ideals that are respectful of all religious stances must be revived.

In conclusion we can say that "Purple Hibiscus" has projected the diminishing of African culture as a result of the introduction of foreign culture on the continent. The art exhibited in "Purple Hibiscus" is beyond thoroughly on. This work set out to analyze the plot, characters, themes, settings, conflict, style of writing etc. There is no doubt that all these aspects of the novel had been thoroughly explored in this piece. It is hoped that this work will be an invaluable assert to future researches on the novel under consideration. The beauty of the text lies in the fact that one is able to return to the overly and enjoy at each time. It is also a story about love, faith, and religious fanaticism. The "Purple Hibiscus" represents the movement towards independence and the freedom to pursue goals and values of their own.

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