

Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

This discourse 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. The protagonist is involved in crisis with religious and domestic stakes at the beginning of the narrative, she seems to be a mere observer and victim, but as the novel drags towards denouement she realizes her voice and role in the home after her awakening. The paper also equally explores the allegorical slant of the text as the growth and development of Nigeria is calibrated by the growth process of the protagonist. Invariably, Kambili begins as the teller in the tale, and at the end she becomes the tale, which eventually intercepts that of the nation. Thus, to give the discourse its desired theoretical thrust, silence is conceptualized in order to articulate how the dominant group employs it to regulate the existence of the subservient group around the margins and how the subservient group attains power and agency in the subversion of the of the weapon of domination(silence) to negotiate their existence around the margins.

The cardinal thrust of African writing has been bi-focal from the very beginning. It is either geared towards decolonization or, appraising the postcolonial aftermath. The reason for this bifurcation is understandable. They are the experiences the writers know at first hand. Charles Nnolim (2006) chides African writers for this backward glancing at the expense of envisioning a new Africa. Because of this incessant struggle to re-habilitate the African personality contracted by the colonial incursion and regular lamentation over the moral depravity of African rulers, he contends that, "African literature in the twentieth century thus operated on a narrow canvas ..." (2). Colonialism and post-colonialism have become the twin sources that continue to inspire the African writer.

Although Nnolim's contention is incontestable, African literature will continue to pendulate between these two pools, because they are no doubt, the experiences the African writer understands too well- experiences which are responsible for the present state of the socio-cultural, political disenchantment and alienation of the African people, which in turn leaves them with amputated, hope. The creative art for the African writer is not just an art form that seeks to entertain the audience, it functions beyond that, it is more of a social document geared towards the reconstruction of the socio-political configuration of the African people. Helen Chukwuma (2003) contends that the novelist does more than simple story telling in a beautiful manner, "He arouses in the reader a true sense of himself, evoking his past and linking it to the present" (vi). In the same vein, Samuel Asein (1978) cautions that "a writer should play a purposeful role in the human drama of his times (74). Invariably, when assessing the African writer, the critic should pay attention to the social context from which the creative art emanates. The African imaginative construct cannot be devoid from its social context, because it is the context that animates it. It is against this background that Oladele Taiwo (1986) argues that: "for criticism to give a true reflection of the work of art, the critic must understand thoroughly not only the language of the author but also the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the work" (2).

Chimamanda Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* encompasses both stand positions- the colonial and the post-colonial, with which she explores the existential wrangling of the African identity, with history as a lightening rod. Abiola Irele (1981) suggests that, "the outstanding attribute of the modern African writer... is his immediate engagement with history" (69). Eldred Jones (1996) is categorical about the focus of African literature when he remarks that African literature will continue to "be intensely political and destined to remain so for some time. The writers are in the thick of the fight for the true liberation of their countries..." (3). Midred Mortime (1990) however suggests that if both stand positions are summed, "African literature of the past two decades have transformed the theme of disillusionment" (3).

Purple Hibiscus begins with crisis and this crisis runs through the book glowing and hauntingly gripping. This crisis seems to be the artistic cum structural plank on which the entire narrative anchors. The book begins in media res, realizable through flash back. The novel traces the physical and psychological development of the protagonist, Kambili and her brother Jaja. A development which designates their struggle to define themselves, beyond the stiffened, and funless world their Calvinistic father has fashioned for them. Their fussy mercantile father builds a world stuffed with materialistic wholeness, a world that lacks ventilation, which guarantees a steady relationship with the outside when the inside becomes too suffocating.

The narrative is woven around Palm Sunday, yet the development of the protagonist and her brother has a quadrilateral dimension; their home in Enugu, school, church and Nsukka. The later has the most amazing effect on their developmental process.

Eugene, Kambili's father is a religious maverick and his bigotry belief is anchored on the theological standards of Catholicism. He leads a life of Rosary and Crossing and carries himself with a donnish air of Catholic superiority. His over-zealous attitude and clipped religious tones reduce members of his family to the size of midgets. He works hard to ensure his family lacks nothing. His houses are capacious yet stifling, and the bedrooms, are very roomy yet stuffy. Kambili's description of the contrast between their commodious apartment and its airlessness is telling. "Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated". (7).

The entire narrative is relayed through Kambili's eyes. Though a novel about coming-of-age, it also glaringly captures the socio-political evolution of Nigeria. The novel tells numerous stories that run simultaneously. This discourse shall therefore, focus on the developmental process of Kambili, physically and psychologically vis-à-vis the Nigerian nation. Kambili's father owns a conglomerate of which one is a publishing house reputed for its astuteness and unbiased reportage of the Nigerian political situation and above all its antipathetic posture or stance towards the virulent political temperament of the military regime in Nigeria. He urges his editor, Ade Coker to ensure that the *Standard* speaks out, yet he continues to muzzle his wife and children. Silence in Eugene's home is so magnified to the extent that it could be heard. The function of Kambili's tongue is so constricted so that her struggle to express herself usually terminates with a stutter, making her classmates observe her with familiarity laced with contempt. Because of her inability to make her tongue function in school she is labeled a "backyard snob" (53).

To make matters worse, when the closing bell rings, she dashes off to her father's waiting car without exchanging pleasantries with her classmates before she is chauffeur-driven home. Her classmates see this as aristocratic arrogance. They are unaware that her life is dictated and regulated by a schedule scrolled in her heart. Eugene's sense of production enunciates his stance as a capitalist, from time to time, as he brings a new product home from his factories to be assessed by his reticent family who have become so dopey in their pathetic state of taciturnity, created by his phallocentricism. This phallic and capitalist drive is extended to his children's academic enterprise. Coupled with the sickening and choking home characterized by her father's sense of material acquisition, her academic business begins to lack creativity and enchantment. Both her home and school become a prison for her, as she slips down the academic ladder. The kind of educational system Eugene wants for his children is dehumanizing. He is mechanical in all spheres of life, and he condemns and discourages all forms of leisure. When Kambili comes second in her class rather than encourage the girl to put more effort into her academic business, he petulantly asks a mechanical question. "How many heads has Chinwe Jideze?"-The girl who beats her to the second position. (Emphasis mine 46). He didn't stop there, he brings out a mirror and gives it to Kambili, in order to ascertain the number of heads she has. For fear of being tortured, Kambili devices a new method of studying:

It was like balancing a sack of gravel on my head everyday at school and not being allowed to steady it with my hand. I still saw the print in my textbooks as a red blur, still saw my baby brother's spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood. I memorized what the teachers said because I knew my textbooks would not make sense if I tried to study later. After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back (52).

Eugene's educational standards are not only placidly faulty, it is banal and unproductive; hence Kambili turns the entire academic enterprise to cramming and calculation. Eugene's educational standards stress the training of the intellect without any complementary ties with the emotion and imagination. To him only the human reason is important. Kambili and Jaja's lives are reduced to facts and figures thereby subjecting them to mental torture. From Kambili's account, her father though, stands for something repellent, nevertheless respectable. His utilitarian posture is what eventually leads to the crumbling of his family's psychological configuration. Eugene is a symbol of rugged individualism. His entire world is woven around self-assertion, power and material success. The items in his agenda are strict and tight, making him lack interest in ideals or ideas – except the idea of being the perfect definition of a self-made man. This is what he uses to intimidate his family. “I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools” (49). He is so mechanical to the extent that he regards his house help, Sisi as “that girl”. All through the novel, he never addresses her by her name. He runs his home with a zero tolerance in its grossest and most intransigent sense, and this in-turn reduces his family to a resonating silence in almost all their endeavors, outside and inside the home. As the narrative develops, one notices varied forms of silence. Kambili, Jaja and their mother speak with their spirit. Sometimes they converse with their eyes. Kambili's mother hardly talks and when she does, it is in monosyllables. Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1998) observes that:

Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure (75).

In *Purple Hibiscus* silencing is not only a mechanism or weapon of patriarchal control but of domestic servitude. Kambili, Jaja and their mother device ways of survival within the utilitarian calculus Eugene has created for their minds. One of the strategies is the domineering silence with which they observe situations and the other is a filial bonding. Through bonding, mother and children are able to survive the domestic quagmire and the prescriptions of the religious zealotry of their father.

Purple Hibiscus has a feminist thrust but the brand of feminism is very subtle at the first couple of chapters, so that one may hardly deduce from the text the gender tensions. Adichie artistically tries not to create in the traditional standard where women are not only completely marginalized but the masculine voice triumphing over the female. Sometimes she uses irony to contradict situations, but then, her feminist intension is discernable. For example, Papa Nnukwu gets frustrated by his son's dereliction of his responsibility to him, and blames the missionaries for the gulf created between him and his son. Ifeoma tries to exonerate the missionaries for Eugene's lackadaisical attitude towards Papa Nnukwu by affirming that both of them have the same elementary upbringing, she remarks that, "It was not the missionaries. Did I not go to the missionary school, too?" (83). Papa Nnukwu laments with a passionate fidelity, "but you are a woman. You do not count". The veracity of this statement is incontestable yet the monumentality of the statement is veiled and attenuated when the old man remarks that, "I joke with you *Nwam*. Where would I be today if my Chi had not given me a daughter?" (83). When Kambili narrates the issues of spouse beating, she does so with a sense of ordinariness and opacity that one can hardly describe Eugene's home as a domestic war zone. From her narrative it seems as if spouse beating is a normal phenomenon. The helplessness of the traditional African woman is only articulated very vibrantly when Kambili's mother in complete actuality remarks that, "where would I go if I leave Eugene's house?" (250). Her conviction of the above assertion makes her silence in the home even more galloping. This strategy is what Rachel Duplessis (1985) designates as, "writing beyond the ending":

Writing beyond the ending means the transgressive invention of narrative strategies, strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narrative. These tactics among them reparenting, woman-to-woman and brother-to-sister bonds, and forms of the communal protagonist, take issue with the mainstays of the social and ideological organization of gender, as these appear in fiction. Writing beyond the ending, "not repeating your words and following your methods but ... finding new words and creating new methods", produces a narrative that denies or reconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed hegemonically poised. (5)

The psychology of Kambili's development and her brother, Jaja's is unstable. They are deprived of any outlet for emotional life except for themselves. They live for each other. The constrictions and deprivations of Eugene's religious philosophy strengthen the bond even more, because when confronted with any form of adversity, they look inwards. Their home becomes a fort for them and at the same time a symbol of vitiation. Even the culinary world of their mother is equally circumscribed. The doctrinaire attitude of their father creates a cyst around them, which makes rays from the outside impenetrable.

Even within this circumscribed space, Kambili continues her quest for her voice through eavesdropping. She tries to make sense of her father's conversation with his guests whenever they come calling. The process towards locating her voice begins with what would have been a normal ritual of another silent Christmas celebration if her aunt Ifeoma had not shown up with her family. The process of creating her own voice begins with Kambili's location of her month, which has been in a perpetual state of incapacity. Ifeoma's presence in Aba during the Christmas celebration is fumigating, because the vector of silence that has clipped Kambili's lips and the cyst shielding rays of humanity from her life begins to shade into a mincing voice.

The conservative mindset of their father makes them observe anything he labels as evil abominable to them without any rational or dialectical questioning. Kambili's doughty aunt, Ifeoma, becomes a symbol of the iconoclastic identity and demystifier of patriarchal and despotic establishments. Though a catholic devotee like Kambili's father, she creates the leeway that would give her brother's family leverage from domestic servitude. Since her perception of religion is at variance with her brother's, it is not surprising that the conflict between the two of them subtly detonates on the dining table. Eugene almost blinds his family with prayers during lunch. It is only the ebullient Ifeoma who is able to express the implication of lengthy prayers at meals: "Did you want the rice to get cold, Eugene?" She belongs to the category of women who Rosemary Moyana (1996) describes as "women who refuse to be compartmentalized into their chiseled up roles" (30). Eugene only grants his children audience with their grandfather for fifteen minutes. Anything more is abominating and sinful and must be confessed before the priest for remission of sin. From their father's prayers and remarks, they conclude that their grandfather must be very paganistic. Eugene would not allow his father into his premises because their religious beliefs are polar- a polarity which is characterized by a kind of inverse correlation. It is Ifeoma who gives Kambili and Jaja the exclusive benefit of knowing their grandfather beyond the atheistic portraiture their father has cartographed in their mind. Kambili observes her grandfather, Nnukwu with filial attachment from a distance because she has been zipped up by her father's doctrinaire stance towards Papa Nnukwu, which is informed by Kambili's father's inebriated sense of religion.

Ifeoma is able to discern the cosmetic life her callow nephew and niece are leading. She observes that their expressions are glacial unlike her children who have plenary rights to converse inside and outside their home. In order to initiate an osmotic pressure in their lives, she prescribes a trip to Nsukka, for Kambili and Jaja. A trip that marks an eclipse of Eugene's unbridled religious hegemony. Although Eugene's acquiescence to this proposal is a welcome development to their mother, he gives them a schedule they would strictly adhere to, because the schedule becomes a symbol of his authority and their mainstay.

“Things actually started to fall apart” when Kambili and Jaja embarked on the trip to Nsukka. Ifeoma’s house boisterously glows, yet it is not obstreperous. On arrival to Nsukka Kambili and Jaja are stunned by the polarity between the frolicking temperament that pervades the cramped apartment in Nsukka and their forlornly existence even in the midst of everything that should make life relishing. Kambili becomes confused by the untrammelled grace with which everybody carries himself or herself in the house. Her inability to comprehend this disposition makes her dissolve even further into silence.

Just as Kambili continues to search for her voice, so also Nigeria continues her search for self-definition and nationhood. Chimamanda Adichie employs a rhetorical device through which she interrogates the Nigerian socio-political situation. Just like Kambili, Jaja and their mother, the Nigerian people continue to be subjected to silent spaces, - a phenomenon Wole Soyinka (2003) describes as the art of stealing a nation’s “most precious asset – its voice”(8). The novel displays the imperceptibility of government to the plight of the people who continue to wobble in their zigzagging fate and the insidious character of government. The people are subjected to different forms of subjugation, ranging from poor supply of potable water, epileptic power supply, the paucity of petroleum products to the gradual appropriation of their dreams. They protest their deplorable plights through industrial actions and demonstrations of different forms. In the novel the *Standard* becomes the voice of the people. With its vitriolic attack on the government, the people create their own voice in industrial actions and incessant demonstrations where they make vituperative statements about the depravity of government. In a bid to ensure the people’s voices are drowned, the editor, of the *Standard*, Ade Coker, is intimidated with periodical abduction and incarceration.

The entire narrative conjures up familiar incidents during the regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, regimes reputed for the bureaucratization of murder. Ade Coker is killed via a letter bomb while Nwankiti Ogechi is killed by soldiers in a bush in Minna, and his corpse bathed with acid so that he does not resurrect. These two characters bear semblance with two martyrs who fought for political and economic emancipation and the inequitable distribution of resources- Ken Saro-Wiwa and Dele Giwa. They were slain by the most despotic regimes in the recent political history of Nigeria- despots who are so depraved beyond imagining. Just as Kambili is in a state of flux, Nigeria, according to Paul Beckett and Crawford Young (1997) remains in “Permanent transition” (4). Although, back at home in Enugu, Kambili gets exposed to the Nigeria’s deplorable political state, through discussions between Ade Coker and her father and on some other occasions through the *Standard* Newspaper they read once in a while, it is in Enugu she experiences the realities in the consequences of what she usually reads in the *Standard*. She experiences the immediacy of government depravity first hand, through violent demonstrations, fuel hikes and the proliferation of *Okada* as a means of dousing the fiery ambiance of the incessant dearth of fuel.

For Kambili, Nsukka does not only represent a town where her aunt lives but a symbol of liberty as the concluding chapter evinces. Her teenage development becomes complete in this town because for the very first time her mouth performs almost all the functions associated with it. She smiles, talks, cries, laughs, jokes and sings. Through Ifeoma, Kambili discovers Papa Nnukwu's sense of pantheism, as she watches him from a distance commune with his [G]ods- an occasion which proves the old man a better believer, who understands the intricate arithmetic of religion, most especially, the relationship between God and man, thereby disproving and debunking her father's stony fundamentalism. For the very first time they live a life not dictated by schedule, though the items in the schedule are concretely engraved in her hearts, Ifeoma consigns her nephew and niece's schedules and customizes them to her world – a world characterized by the application of the commonest of senses. In Ifeoma's house everybody has the liberty to say anything, provided elders are not insulted. This enthusiasm with which discourses are introduced and sustained is not only mind boggling to Kambili, but also causes consternation in her psyche.

Through Father Amadi she discovers a new brand of Catholicism, which is not mechanical and dictatorial but lithe, which is a direct contrast to the one her father and Father Benedict practice- one which makes room for dissent. Father Amadi discerns with relative ease that Kambili is gnostic, even though she is conditioned by the ritualized sense of religion her father has created for her. He devises a means with which to wring her from her silent space. Since her sense of Catholicism is ritualistic, and Jesus or God becomes the common denominator, it becomes apparently glaring that, she will be willing to do anything provided it is associated with God or Jesus. Through this device Father Amadi cracks her frozen sense of compartment and broke through her programmed psychic networking. Father Amadi takes advantage of her dogmatic naivety as she falls for the bait and runs for it:

“Do you love Jesus?” Father Amadi asked, standing up. I was startled. “Yes. Yes, I love Jesus.” “Then show me. Try and catch me, show me you love Jesus.” He had hardly finished speaking before he dashed off and I saw the blue flash of his tank. I did not stop to think; I stood up and ran after him. (176)

As Father Amadi continues to cosset her, she beams her first smile, though icy, it is a process towards voicing. On their way home, Kambili opens her mouth and laughs a mirthless laugh.

At the time her grandfather dies she is only beginning to know him. Her aunt's children and Jaja seem to be closer to him, but she was too distant- a fact she hates herself for. Amaka, her cousin, gives her the uncompleted painting of their grandfather she did, while he was alive- a painting, which symbolizes something she earnestly desires but cannot have. She handles the painting sacred as their father takes them home to Enugu, the painting, which becomes the link, between her aunt's world, and Enugu.

The rift in the novel begins when they returned home from Nsukka, while they were mid-way in their metamorphosis. Invariably the novel begins in page 255, when everything begins to change; Adichie recounts every other incident through flashback which she handles with expertise. Jaja asks for the key to his room, which has been in the possession of their father. The request marks the beginning of their quest for emancipatory rights. Their father, who is astounded by this demand, decides to take pragmatic and overt steps to ensure he un-teaches his children that have been removed from the borderline of his doctrinaire standards. As a means of cleansing from the sinful dust of Nsukka and the paganistic temperament of the air of Ifeoma's home, he bathes Kambili's feet in hot water. The cleansing rituals did not produce the elutriating effects Eugene desires. As stated earlier, both kids brought with them different items from their aunt's. Jaja brings seeds of purple hibiscus while Kambili brings the uncompleted painting of their grandfather. Both items represent freedom from the rigid life style of their father's world. With these items, they are to sustain a steady link with their aunt's airy world en route liberation. With these items they hope never to plunge into the border of frustration, disillusionment, alienation, and the existential solitude of the world they know too well. The items will help cram the vacuum created in their lives. Kambili's painting is suddenly, discovered by her father as she and her brother are admiring their grandfather. Like the extremist that he is, Eugene takes the painting from his children who claim ownership of the painting simultaneously. Stunned by this development, Eugene destroys the painting as if it is Papa Nnukwu himself. Kambili could not hold back anymore. She is not ready to watch her father tear something she holds sacred from her just like that. She is not willing to observe her father truncate the stable transition of her development- which the painting will help her realize even within the circumscribed radius of her father's walls. The painting symbolizes freedom to her and at the same time the remains of her grandfather which she never had while he was alive. She hurriedly begins to piece the destroyed painting on the floor together solemnly. Her father cannot believe his daughter can degenerate to such low ebb of heathenism. Like Lousa in Dickens' *Hard Times* who collapses before her father, a condemnation and disintegration of the unproductive upbringing that her father, Gradgrind has given her, Kambili remains in her solemn state in order to string the pieces together. The furtiveness with which she handles the painting embarrasses everything her father stands for. He becomes stunned at the confutation of his conservative religious standards- an occasion where he is completely subdued by the first shocking witness of the result of his rigid religious matrix; Kambili's handling of the pieces of the painting symbolizes the collapse of his father's system. Rather than realize and admit that his philosophy is in human and inefficacious, with a doleful expression on his face, he degenerates into an uncontrollable fit of anger and duffs her up heavily, until she falls unconscious. The trip to Nsukka becomes a domino effect on the developmental process of the children. Contrary to Anthony Oha (2007) contestation on the passivity of Kambili, he erroneously contends that "Kambili is not a contributor character. She never acted to change neither her situation nor the things around her" (207). To have pieced the torn portrait of her grandfather destroyed by her father is a potent statement of her assertion of her identity and an indication that she has transverse her limitations; at this point she is no longer a victim but an actor.

Through this incident Kambili succeeds in breaking out of the social and religious silence of her earlier life. She disinclines to acquiesce the status quo- escaping from her entrapment, by debunking her father's authority, a definitive statement of rebellion against the phallogocentric and autocratic set up.

The most amusing character in the novel is Kambili's father who is a pack of contrast. He is so religious that he is unable to draw the lines between social responsibility and religious commitment. He forbids his family from identifying with traditional tenets yet he takes the traditional title 'Omelora'. He admonishes members of his immediate family not to bow before any mortal being, yet when Kambili proudly refuses to bow before Father Benedict during communion he spans her. He refuses to marry a second wife, when his wife is unable to give birth to more children even when his relatives heavily pressure him, yet he does not treat his wife as a partner in the matrimonial enterprise. His barbarous act makes his wife suffer chains of miscarriages. His missal, which is supposed to be sacred, judging from his parochial sense of religion, becomes a missile which he throws at Jaja, thereby destroying the figurines on the *etagere*. This scene sums up the entire narrative. As the figurines go down, the foundation of his family begins to crumble and everything about him begins to have a downward trajectory. The shards of the figurines represent the gradual disintegration of his authority in his home and the gradual fragmentation of the organic and psychological wholeness of his family.

His fussy sense of Christianity is anchored on just heaven, hell and sin, so that when Papa Nnukwu dies the only question that comes to his mind is. "Did you call a priest to give him extreme unction?" How can Ifeoma initiate Papa Nnukwu into Christianity at death, when it is expected of the initiate to be conscious of the initiation rite and process. He is blinded by his religious dogmatism, his high handedness that he does not see beyond his warped philosophical cum religious standards, which are wrecking his home.

As noted earlier, Adichie creates a vent in Eugene's household from where she explores the Nigerian nationhood and the plight of the ruled. Eugene's home becomes a microcosmic of the entire Nigerian nation. Eugene's hegemonistic cum religious rule coupled with his idiosyncratic posture articulately parallels the despotic disposition and histrionics of General Ibrahim Babangida's regime. Adichie satirizes various aspects of society. The satirical methods she employs include exaggeration, irony, sarcasm and contrast. Just like Eugene gives his children fleeting moments with their grandfather, Papa Nnukwu- a character symbolic of democratic ideals, which connotes freedom. So also the military regime deceptively initiates a transition programme that would return Nigeria to a democratic state. Just like Eugene is a pack of contrast, the head of state, a military ruler insisted on being addressed as a president, and ensured he never uses his beret. He orchestrated a transition programme which he truncated at the point fruition. No ruler in the history of Nigeria has ever pursued democracy with such enthusiasm denuded of forthrightness- little wonder he was never forthcoming.

During this regime, democracy was a grail. The junta established two political parties- The National Republican Convention and the Social Democratic Party and drafted their manifestoes. The manifestoes replicate Kambili and Jaja's schedules. Eugene allows his children a little air of freedom but tries to regulate their life styles in his absence with his doctrines instilled in their hearts via his schedule. The government gives Nigerians numerous opportunities to democratize but regulates the entire process with a pervading aura of despotism. The regime, squandered colossal sum pursuing this ideal, by establishing numerous bodies and organizations to forestall his uncongenial transition programme. They include Mass mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and the Institute of Democratic Studies. These bodies are just like the *Standard* financed by Eugene to speak for the voiceless masses yet his autocratic doctrinaire standards muzzle the voices of members of his family. *Purple Hibiscus* articulates with clarity the socio-cultural topography of dictatorship.

Babangida is so ambidextrous that he ensured the governors that ruled with him towards the terminus of his regime were democratically elected- although he sacked them as his transition programme lingers on without focus.

Papa Nnukwu does not only stand for traditional standards, his character is symbolic of freedom and democracy hence Eugene wants no trace of democracy around his home which is anchored on totalitarian bricks- thus he is always ready to discipline his children for sins, both real and perceived. Like Babangida, Eugene gives his children minute opportunity to stay with their aunt, under the cover of embarking on a pilgrimage. The children embrace their aunt's world, which is vital for their growth and future. By the time Eugene discovers that his children have been redeemed, he devices crude and overt mechanics to contract their new found freedom, which they exhibit through different rebellious formulas. Babangida's government gives the Nigerian people an opportunity to explore democracy within a military ambience. The redeeming and innovative air of democracy became very compelling, so that Nigerians embraced it with their hearts. As the people yearned for it with their collective mandate they gave to Chief Abiola, the government, amputated the transition programme, but the people are no longer willing to remain in their voiceless and sorry state, hence, June 12 becomes a day when the people file out yearly to reemphasize their aspiration for the democratic ideal.

Kambili's mother, an embodiment of the traditional African woman, who is unsophisticated and content with the economic security her husband guarantees, decides to liberate her children and herself from her husband's sinking philosophy. She is about the most interesting character in the novel. She steps out of her enervating state, fractures the patriarchal social structure and demystifies the idealized traditional images of the African woman. She puts behind the psychological rift between her body and mind and liberates herself from the marginal status she assumes at the beginning of the novel, as she begins to doctor her husband's meals. It is this aspect of the novel that gives it a very radical feminist outlook.

Just like the term patriarchy continues to defy definition, *Purple Hibiscus* cannot be contracted to just a narrative that borders on man-woman relationship. One of Adichie's minor agenda in *Purple Hibiscus* is to unearth the conformation of male domination in Nigerian society. She explores the shades of female marginalization stemming from patriarchy and how it relates to the experience of government's exploitation of the masses. The issues of patriarchy and political corruption and subjugation are separate, but Adichie has been able to conflate them. As Adichie interrogates Eugene's inordinate religious stance and the traditional phallogocentrism that conditions his attitude towards his family, she tactically creates a vent in the narrative through which she explores the dehumanizing and exploitative disposition of the Nigerian government. Paulina Palmer gives an encompassing description of patriarchy when she remarks that the:

Scope and opportunity to create complex multifaceted representation of male dominance. Inspiring a plethora of inventive strategies and designs they enable writers to convey to the reader an impression of both the ubiquity and the intricacy of systems of male power. It is, in fact, as a vehicle for the depiction of the workings of male power that concepts of patriarchy and patriarchal relations are most effective. There can be few women who at some time or other in their lives, have not experienced the frightening sense of being trapped in a conspiracy of male domination either in the work place or the private domain of the home (69).

Adichie does not only artistically illustrate the presence of patriarchal postures, she also artistically advocates a radical feminism. Her portraiture of male domination of the lives of women and feminine resistance to marginalization is striking. When Papa Nnukwu admonishes and prays for his widowed daughter, Ifeoma to have a fine husband who will take care of her and her children, she wishes her father prays fervently for her to be promoted to a senior lecturership position. She does not seem to want any form of masculine authority over her life. She is strong enough to father and mother her children. When Kambili's mother suffers the last miscarriage as a result of the over bearing and barbarous instinct of Eugene, Ifeoma advises her not to return to her husband. Kambili's mother rises up from her docility and poisons her husband, a counter measure to redeeming herself and her children from the marginal border of taciturnity. These are all firm indications of Adichie's feminist intention.

Although, Jaja is the most pathetic character in the novel because he suffers greatly for a crime committed by his mother, he clinically takes responsibility for his father's death. By so doing he identifies and sympathizes with his mother who suffers marginality and alienation the traditional phallogocentrism his father's authority engenders.

By poisoning her husband, Kambili's mother realizes her voice through a new kind of silence. Kambili's metamorphosis becomes complete before Ifeoma travels out of the country. She finally falls in love. Her ability to express this emotion justifies the liberational quality of her voicing, which is self-defining and cathartic. It becomes glaring that Kambili has become mature and she is capable of independent thought and action. Silence plays a vital role in the developmental process of Kambili's life,-or perhaps, it could be described as a collateral. It inundates the entire narrative. The word silence, its verb, adjective, and adverb forms appear forty seven times in the novel. The book begins with silence and ends in silence. However, the silence at the concluding phase of the book, which also marks the wholeness of Kambili's metamorphosis, is distinct. At the beginning of the book, the children and their mother rely heavily on silence and live on assumptions. This silence is dopey and empty. At Nsukka, a different kind of silence descends upon Kambili - this silence is dialectical. The two types of silence are different from the one she experiences at school. With Jaja's confinement, another form of silence eclipsed them but this one is only fleeting. After the death of her husband and the incarceration of Jaja, Kambili's mother cracks and retreats into silence. Jaja while in prison cloaks his worries and pains behind an air of insouciance and silently observes his mother and sister. Kambili on the other hand retires into silence in order to liberate herself from the realities of the predicaments that have stormed her family. The death of Eugene no doubt, further irrigates the silence. On the whole the last shade of silence that beclouds their sense of imagination could be said to be furtive, because it is a silence characterized by hope and dreams.

To grossly sum, Adichie's choice of narrator, a teenager who stutters, is appropriate. In a radio interview, Chimamanda Adichie explains the reason for her choice of narrator, "I think a younger narrator made me more careful not to overburden my fiction with polemics, or with my own politics, it is also more believable to see the complexities and absurdities of religion through the eyes of a younger person who is not cynical or jaded". This preference for teenage protagonist cum narrator finds echoes in numerous African writings. In comparing the portrayal of the child in stories from Africa, India and Australia, S.K. Desai remarks that:

the concept of the child as manifested in the African stories is, what one might say, modern. The child is no Romantic angel, he is a raw soul, a bundle of impulses, sensations, emotions and perceptions, facing life, struggling to comprehend it, trying to piece together his fragmentary experience, he is a complex being with an unformed mind, often more complex than the adult, subjected to an unpredictable process of growth (45).

Adichie's choice of narrator does not only intensify youthful powers of observation, it also articulates the development of the plot of the novel. This narrative strategy does not only trace Kambili's development in her quest for voice and identity, it is also a strategy for Adichie's attainment of voice in the male dominated literary turf. The epistemic tension in the novel projects the socio-political dimensions of the novel.

Her biggest asset is her strength of description. She has the ability to describe characters and scenes vividly thereby creating a sense of immediacy. She appeals to the readers' senses in her descriptions. However, she unconsciously unearths and animates a time-worn phallic cliché that, "it is only a man's wife that can easily destroy him". This is portrayed in a matter-of-factness which makes her feminist intention bold and uncompromising, though, it is only an invocation of pre-existing stasis, and it is an emphatic statement of resistance to the dominant group.

Socio-political problems are explored as analogous themes to patriarchal dominance, though, both are polar; they are related forms of domination over subservient social categories. Adichie has been able to explore artistically the socio-political tensions in her country in particular and Africa at large. Her vision as a writer emphasizes that exposure; fortitude and audaciousness are the ergonomic designs that can rupture these tensions. For Adichie, literature goes beyond exhuming a socio-political/historical past; it is not a personal expedition; it is a private statement about a collective existential angst, the angst of the Nigerian people and Africa at large.

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