

Gender-Violence and Domestic Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Gender-based violence is an issue that has become a part of modern society, cutting across cultures, race, ethnicity, and status. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, gender-based violence manifests in the form of domestic violence, projected through the Eugene Achike family around whom the story, set in eastern part of Nigeria, revolves. Clearly, the domination of women is the most fundamental form of female subjugation in the African society. This is largely due to cultural influences for the patriarchal cultural, inherent in the African society, encourages prejudices against women, and accept the battery of wives (and, by extension, children) by husbands as normal. Domestic violence is therefore a regular feature in many African homes, a situation which is portrayed by Adichie in her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, as she advocates change in the attitude of society to this anomaly. The success of her advocacy is the focus of this article.

Key words: gender-violence, Domestic violence, domination, oppression, and emotional mishaps.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an award-winning novelist and social commentator. She is representative of the black literary writers with African roots and young female cosmopolitan, who write in English. Her works differ strongly from the postcolonial wave, roughly beginning in African countries in the 1960s. It brought international acclaim to first

remarkable Anglophone female novelists like Flora Nwapa, Nadine Gordimer, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emencheta or Zaynab Alkali. Recently, she received wide critical acclaim and high profile reviews, winning several main awards such as Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book in 2005, the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction (2014) and nominations, for instance for the Booker Prize and the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004).

Her works including *For Love of Biafra* (1998), *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *The Things Around Your Neck* (2009), *Americanah* (2013) and *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014). She was selected by the New York Times as one of the ten best books of 2013. Adichie, who divides her time between the United States and Nigeria, runs a summer writing workshop and delivers academic lectures both at Nigerian and American universities.

She examines the extent of women's struggles to overcome marginalization in a sexist and patriarchal society. Our text of study have affirmed that peace will continue to elude us in the home front. Strong measures must be taken to tackle the violation and the continuous subordination of women. Love, war, conflict and the persistent inequality between men and women are among the dominant themes in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Adichie, however, projects womanhood in a positive light. She upholds female potentialities which the patriarchal structure has repressed. She also makes role models out of her female protagonists. Women's impassioned struggles to free themselves from the shackles of male brutality and dominance are what hold us spellbound to Adichie's most alluring and extremely powerful novels. Adichie remarkably dramatizes in her works, women's determination to survive in the face of violence, sexual assault, extreme starvation, senseless brutality and ceaseless threats to their lives and property. Through her main characters, Adichie reveals how the physical, psychological and mental abuse of women can have negative effects on their well-being. The liberation of women from all strictures against their

peaceful co-existence alongside men deserves the support of all humanity. This study concludes, therefore, that every African woman must face the realities of her sexist culture and assert her rights. This is undoubtedly a demanding choice brought with its own dangers. A woman needs to come out of the system and set up her own parameters within the society.

Every human being has a right to freedom. If this freedom is, denied, there is a tendency to revolt. When one revolts, one takes a strong or violent action against one's offenders. In *Purple Hibiscus*, women relentlessly struggle to achieve the much desired freedom from the clutches of tradition. In the Nigerian society which Adichie's novel realistically portray, more and more women are banding together in order to put an end to many years of deep rooted oppression and senseless subjugation. Today, Nigerian women are perceived as articulate, forthright, fearless and well respected. The Nigerian women have contributed immensely to the positive transformation of the Nigerian society. They have won fame, recognition and taken their positions, alongside the men, as co-participants in nation building. In their context are cannot help but sing their praises. The list of such Nigerian achievers will be incomplete without the inclusion of the indefatigable Dora Akunyili, the enigmatic Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the amiable Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke, the charismatic Oby Ezekwesili – and so on. These women have excelled in various domains in spite of the subjugation of men.

Feminism, helps women to relentlessly struggle to life from their subordinate state. It enable them to carve out new roles and identities for themselves. Akachi Ezeigbo, for instance, explains that feminism is the awareness that women are subjugated. They are determination to correct their subjugated. In Chimamanda Adichie's novel, women are the primary catalysts for reform. However, their exploitation and deliberate oppression, as revealed in *Purple Hibiscus*, have become obstacles to their progress.

Female assertion has continued to be a compelling trend in modern literature as observed by Helen Chukwuma. She further states that female assertion is an ideological focus which sets out to correct the traditional image of women as an indeterminate human being who are heavily dependent, gullible, voiceless and stuck in the background of patrimony which marked most African society. Adichie's works wholly indict the patriarchal oppression of women and also encourage women to assert themselves irrespective of cultural norms and archaic traditions which have denied them human rights and have largely promoted their subordination.

Gender bias supports and reinforces the notion that women are weaklings who can be treated violently. Adichie, in her novel, identifies and confronts various sources of oppression. For instance, Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* have found that women are more reviled in the sanctuary of their own home and by the people they love most. Marital incompatibility and extremely harsh patriarchal laws and conditions can leave women totally devastated and even debilitated for life. The protagonists of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* have taken charge of their lives by taking decisions which may leave the readers absolutely breathless. Adichie's novels are populated by psychopaths, rapists, religious fanatics and ruthless rulers that terrorize women. Her novels are instruments of self-discovery and healing for the abused women in Nigeria who may have undergone some traumatic experiences in their marriages.

The paper highlights the place of women and in the male dominated Nigerian society. Nigerian women face numerous challenges as they attempt to establish their position in the society.

Nigeria is a country of political instability and economic disorder. *Purple Hibiscus* is set in post-colonial Nigeria. It revolves around the story of a wealthy family with the main

character Kambili Achike, who is a teenager (15 years old) for much part of the novel. Her father, Eugene is presented as a dominant person who is religious minded and subjects his wife, Beatrice and children including Kambili to psychological and physical violence. So, the whole story is told by Kambili about the struggles of her family is living in their father's sister, Ifeoma's house. Here, they find a totally different environment which is open towards self-expression. During the story, Kambili falls in love with Amadi, a young priest. He raises sexual awareness in Kambili. After the story reaches a critical point when family members are unable to cope up with their father's violence, Beatrice throes him in prison. However, Jaja assumes the responsibility of crime and is sentenced to prison. Now, Kambili is eighteen years old and shows much confidence in herself. Jaja is also about to be released from prison. However, their mother, Beatrice, has fallen to illness due to psychological effects on her mind. At the end of the story, it is portrayed that the family has the opportunity for a better future.

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, it extend of domestic violence that prevails in the patriarchal society of Nigeria is projected through the characters of Chief Eugene and his wife Mama (Beatrice). The light of this woman is not limited to those occasional damages he caused her. The frequent battering she undergoes from him seems to become a normal phenomenon among the members of the lovely family.

It is quite surprising that Eugene, a man who has dedicated his life to fight for his people's political freedom from the threats of the nearly emerged government is harasses his wife. His wife Mama seems to be a very calm, reserved and of repressive nature. She comes out as a woman always quite, silently accepting his torture which he inflicts in the guise of religious ideology. Eugene's extreme devotion for the new religion drives him to adapt harsh and insensitive villainous measures in the treatment of his wife and children's religions

mistakes. Otherwise he is not a fanatic. It is this excuse that is used by his wife Mama to tolerate Eugene's violence.

Mama, like other woman in Nigeria is traumatized as a result of physical and domestic violence which she experience on various occasions from her loving husband. Eugene beats his wife severely to the point of miscarriage for trying to stop the will of God by putting her desires first. As a result, she is not only a victim of physical assault but also of mental breakdown. Kambili says:

I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parent's hand-carved bed-room door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and papa was trying to open it", "I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count", "I stepped out of my room just as Jaja came out of his. We stood at the landing and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border", "There's blood on the floor," Jaja said. "I'll get the brush from the bathroom. (32)

Mama also suffers unjust beatings from her husband for allowing Kambili her daughter to eat on the day of the Eucharistic fast. The father is not as understanding as the mother. The feelings and attachment that a mother has for her child is beyond human explanation. Kambili is ill and cannot fast for that reason. Mama gives her some cornflakes to enable her to take a pain reliever. Eugene, the violent father didn't demand for any explanation but went straight ahead to deal with them for breaking God's rule and for their violation religious rule: "It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm", "he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja, and me." (102)

Mama loses another pregnancy to her husband Eugene's violence, because he beats her unscrupulously and also smashes a table on her belly. This is what some unlucky women go through in their matrimonial homes. The devilish egos men possess, drive them to do lots of crazy things. Eugene crosses miles to satisfy himself demonically whenever he loses his patience. Women who are married to hot tempered men experience the same trauma. In the case of Mama, she has witnessed various forms of domestic violence. These and many other forms of domestic violence are experienced by some Nigerian women. Many other writers have highlighted this problem that plagued Nigerian women in their works. For instance, Buchi Emacheta's *Joys of Motherhood* remains good example to illustrate the plight of women in Nigeria where Nnu Ego, the protagonist of the novel undergoes extreme battering from her first husband for her inability to bear him child.

Conclusion

As far as trauma is concerned, there are various forces behind its emanation as well as disposition of experiences. We understand the strain as the act of witnessing an event which involves threats to life or physical integrity that results in feeling of fear, helplessness or horror. So, this novel would not only consider domestic violence, emotional ills or societal troubles as traumatic but also subjugation and oppression from distant and external forces. Threats to life and physical integrity are seen in all facets of oppression especially, that by tyrannical leaders. Nigeria as a nation, witnessed various kinds of oppression and leadership after gaining colonial independence from mother England in 1960. Several military rules afflicted the country between 1966 and 1999 apart from a short-lived return to democracy between 1979 to 1983. The effect of these military rules went beyond economic, social and religious, to psychological and spiritual due to its disastrous nature.

In *Purple Hibiscus* however, the upshot of military rule among other calamities, claimed Ade Coker's life through a letter bomb that blew him up right in front of his wife Yewande, leaving her forever traumatized. It devalued Nigeria's economy by fuel scarcity, and inflation of food prices. It automatically drives a lot of people to poverty. Ifeoma is not only a victim of these, but also, of occupational threats from the dictating government. Therefore, she becomes gravely traumatized for threats to her life and physical integrity.

In contrast, Mama's trauma is unlike that of Aunt Ifeoma. Mama's victimization results from Eugene's transfer of aggression. Being at the receiving end of Eugene's sorrow, as caused by the cruel military rule which closes down his wafer factory, claims the life of his reporter and also rendered lots of people jobless to which he has to shoulder their responsibility. Mama reports: "Eugene has not been well. He has been having migraines and fever". 'He is carrying more than any man should carry. Do you know what Ade's death did to him? It is too much for one person.'" (250). Thus, Eugene takes vengeance on the poor Mama, beats her up devilishly, torture her emotionally; ultimately causing her to be earnestly traumatized. "Her face was puffy from crying and her lips were cracked, with bits of discolored skin peeling off". (213) these are the traumas that Nigerian women underwent during the days of military rule in Nigeria.

So if women must have the will power and educational empowerment to make a difference in their lives like Beatrice and Aunt Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus*.

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