



Vol. 8, No. 2, 2017

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Binary Constructs: Gender and Power Relations in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

ABSTRACT. In the colonized African world there exists a binary order of oppositions in which imperialism and patriarchy are the major players. In this world, western religion is considered superior to African traditional practices, and the woman is reified, and considered inferior by virtue of being the *other*. One agent of imperialism which thrives till this day is the Christian church. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, this Christian faith is represented by extreme Catholicism. The woman is at the receiving end of the twin evils of church and patriarchy. And so if one considers the church as an imperialist agent, and then patriarchy as a culturally-determined construct, one can conclude that the woman is doubly marginalised. The author, in this debut novel, deconstructs existing episteme to uncover the underlying falsehoods in the Christian religion and patriarchy. Through a textual analysis methodology, and a deconstructive approach, this paper intends to explore how the author, through the instrumentation of strong and revolutionary female characters, a female narrative voice backed up by authorial presence, and an ingenious literary technique, reinvents the African woman.

KEYWORDS: Chimamanda Adichie, binary, purple hibiscus, gender, imperialism

Introduction

Gender issues and power relations have always featured prominently in postcolonial feminist discourse. But I must state here that long before the arrival of the Europeans on the African continent, gender inequality had always been a critical part of the grand narratives of patriarchy. Certain rituals and rites (kinship rites, succession and inheritance rites, initiation, etc.) often exclude the participation of women. In such traditional societies, specific roles are assigned to women; childbearing, housekeeping, farming, and such other duties considered suitable for them. The implicit intention is to make them seem inferior to men. Gender is thus to be considered as 'the roles and responsibilities of women and men that are socially determined' (Nwagwu, 2009, p. 3).

These roles and responsibilities are imposed social constructs, and they help determine how individuals are 'expected to think and to act as women and men because of the way society is organised and not because of... biological differences' (Nwagwu, 2009, p. 3).

On its part, colonialist discourse inaugurated 'the binary logic of imperialism' (Ashcroft, 2000, p. 19). Drawing from the pioneering work of Ferdinand de Saussure on the linguistic sign, the European created frames for fixing meaning and identity on the basis of binary oppositions. And so while it can be said that 'signs mean by their difference from other signs, the binary opposition is the most extreme form of difference possible' (Ashcroft, 2000, p. 18). This binary logic

is a development of that tendency in Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance. A simple distinction between centre/margin; colonizer/colonized; metropolis/empire; civilized /primitive represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates (Ashcroft, 2000, p. 19).

Thus, the imperial colonial structure of binary oppositions helped stoke the fire of gender inequality among colonized peoples, and patriarchy seeks to perpetuate it in 'a violent hierarchy, in which one term of the opposition is always dominant' (Ashcroft, 2000, p. 19). Let us consider the analogy which Ashcroft (2000, p. 93) draws between imperialism and patriarchy:

Both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance.

Not only are imperialism and patriarchy genetically related, they are also both extremist by nature. Patriarchy, just like imperialism is the cover under which sets of identities are created in an ever-evolving game of power in which the *other* is the ultimate loser. For Ropo Sekoni (2008, p. 15), patriarchy is 'the appropriation of social power by men to the exclusion of women and the inferiorization of women by men as a way of justifying the subordination of women'. But, beyond the Saussurian concepts of *signifier* and *signified*, and the arbitrariness inherent in this linguistic model, imperialism and patriarchy derive their *raison*

d'être from mental archetypes common in all human. This is to say that from time immemorial, the complexities of reality are such that the human thought process tries to reduce this reality to a binary reordering which makes it possible to create hierarchies which have come to stay, through discursive practices, as orthodoxies.

However, orthodoxies are constructs which serve to protect the interests of a particular society or class. In the colonial period, imperialism provided the impetus for the desecration of Africa, and in contemporary African societies, patriarchy is the bedrock of male dominance. In the Nigerian context, the socio-political, religious and economic domains consign the woman to the background, making her a victim 'of a dependent and impoverished structure of justice' (Lorapuu, 2015, p. 160).

Orthodoxies as constructs can be challenged to unearth underlying falsehoods; that is to say that they should be viewed not as finality, but rather as contingent reality. One can assume that if patriarchy continues to find expression in western imperialist language of identity and domination, feminism seeks to appropriate language in order to deconstruct it in a quest for a new wholesomeness.

The novel, *Purple Hibiscus* tells the story of an Igbo family in disarray. The patriarch, Eugene rules his household with an iron hand. In a vice-like grip, he rides roughshod over every member of his "fiefdom". Hiding under the cloak of an extremist brand of Catholicism, Eugene unleashes untold hardship on his wife and children. In the end what rescues the traumatised family from disintegration and demoralisation is maternal love and warmth.

In the present study, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie adopts a feminist stance in her denunciation of religious fanaticism, violence against women, and their exclusion 'from what Jean Franco would call male games of power' (Gikandi, 1991, p. 207).

The violence of religion and patriarchy

The church played a pivotal role in brainwashing Africans into believing in the omnipotence of the Judaeo-Christian God. The subjugation and domination of Africans through the instrumentation of the church was therefore deliberate. This domination of the church over the various colonized peoples in Africa was part of the discourse of binary oppositions. The assumption of the ascendancy of an imported religion over

African traditional belief systems is overwhelming. This is evident in the outright rejection of traditional ethos by the overzealous Eugene. His aversion for anything traditional comes to a head when he bars his own father from coming to his house, and subsequently forbids his children from accepting food from the grand patriarch, Papa Nnukwu because the old man pours libation to traditional gods. Eugene tries to impose this received religious dogma on his family. On one occasion, Kambili, the narrator tells Aunty Ifeoma:

Pagan, traditionalist, what did it matter? He was not catholic, that was all; he was not of the faith. He was one of the people whose conversion we prayed for so that they did not end in the everlasting torment of hellfire (Adichie, 2006, p. 89).

Later in the novel, Aunty Ifeoma, a moderate catholic, educates her young niece, Kambili. She tries to make the young girl understand that Africans have their own kind of traditional religion which they practised before the arrival of the Church. And when these two religions come in conflict, what one requires is compromise. On another occasion, when Aunty Ifeoma attributes the recovery of Papa—Nnukwu to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Kambili disagrees because as far as she is concerned 'How can Our Lady intercede on behalf of a heathen?' (Adichie, 2006, p. 173).

Kambili also recalls an event during which her mother had knelt down in the traditional way to greet the *Igwe* (traditional ruler) of their village. Her father rebuked her mother for bowing before a human being. But later when the family went to visit the Bishop at Awka, Kambili explains:

I did not kneel to kiss his ring. I wanted to make papa proud. But papa yanked my ear in the car and said I did not have the spirit of discernment: the bishop was a man of God; the *igwe* was merely a traditional ruler (Adichie, 2006, p. 102).

Through language, the West created subtle identities which have stuck. One of such identities is the term "pagan" reserved for Africans and other colonized peoples who do not practice Christianity. Thus, Christianity, as epitomised by the Catholic Church, wrought violence on the traditional way of life of the very people it sought to 'redeem' from the pangs of hell.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also denounces another kind of domination which occurs among her people. She hails from Abba, a community in present day Anambra state of Nigeria. She is therefore of the Igbo stock of south-eastern Nigeria. Among her people exists a deep-seated, pristine, patriarchal structure of social organisation which defines power relations in such a way that the woman is left at the margins. This patriarchal structure is entrenched in the folklore of her people. At one point in her novel, the reader finds an embedded narrative in form of a tale which Papa-Nnukwu tells his grandchildren during his stay in Enugu:

Long ago, when animals talked and lizards were few, there was a big famine in the land of the animals. Farms dried up and the soil cracked. Hunger killed many of the animals and the ones left behind did not even have the strength to dance the mourning dance at funerals. One day *all the male animals* had a meeting to decide what could be done, before hunger wiped out the whole village (Adichie, 2006, p. 165, emphasis, mine).

In the above opening formula of a traditional folktale, only the male animals have met, to the exclusion of the female ones, to determine the future of the community in the face of grave danger. Through these kinds of tales, patriarchy becomes 'ontologized'. Thus, In Igbo folkloric tradition, one finds an archetypal binary construct where animals belong to either side of the divide: strong/weak; intelligent/stupid; fast/slow; good/wicked, etc. Even the gods in the Igbo mythology are either male or female. *Chukwu* or *Chiokike* (creator of the world and other lesser gods) is the male principle and resides above the earth, while *Ani*, the earth goddess is the feminine principle, and thus lesser.

In the Igbo culture therefore, women are stereotyped. They belong to the category of the weak and vulnerable, just like children. And they are considered lower than men in terms of status. Ada Mere (1973, p. 3, quoted by Afam Ebeogu, 2008, p. 149) gives some reasons for the underestimation of the woman among the Igbo:

Because she is stereotyped as physically weak, fickle-minded, highly emotional and because she, traditionally, is involved in patrilocal marriage and does not perpetuate family name, (the women's) status in the Igbo traditional society is low.

In such a society, wife-battering and child abuse are phallic symbols of male strength and dominance. Women and children are never part of

the decision-making process. So one finds a binary structure where the levers of power and authority tilt to the advantage of the male members of the community.

Thus, one discovers that this binary ordering of things is carried over into the literary works of a majority of the male authors. They created in most of the early works, a binary world order which marginalised the woman. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), one finds a world of oppositions. The protagonist, Okonkwo tells his children stories of warriors and war, whereas his wives tell the children animal stories considered effeminate. Okonkwo's son, Nwoye is considered effeminate, and 'cold impotent ash' because he does not exhibit male traits of valour and violence. And do we need to overemphasize Okonkwo's excessive brutality on his harem?

Today, the advent of western education and Christianity has not diminished the overbearing influence of male dominance, especially among the Igbo. Eugene's Christian faith does not in any way suppress the bestial personality of the *pater familias*. In a flagrant display of patriarchal violence, he beats his daughter for 'eating ten minutes before mass' (Adichie, 2006, p. 109). His wife's pleas fell on deaf ears, and the narrator explains the sordid episode thus:

He unbuckled his belt slowly. 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 (...) I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back. Papa was like a Fulani nomad—although he did not have their spare, tall body as he swung the belt at Mama, Jaja, and me (Adichie, 2006, p. 110).

The reader of *Purple hibiscus* is alarmed when Eugene disfigures his son's finger, burns Kambili's feet with hot water, and later beats her to a pulp. The children move to Nsukka to stay with Aunty Ifeoma, where Kambili recuperates after a brief stay at the hospital in Enugu. The physical assault on their mother comes to its climax when she lost her six weeks pregnancy due to excessive loss of blood arising from beatings. The narrator recounts her mother's experience in a dialogue between mother and daughter:

You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly. (...) My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it (Adichie, 2006, p. 253).

Eugene's attitude is symptomatic of the violence of patriarchy. The violence which the African woman has had to contend with through the ages to the present times is both physical and psychological.

Deconstructing patriarchy and extreme Catholicism

If Flora Nwapa (*Efuru*) and Buchi Emecheta (*The Bride Price*) inaugurated the *belles lettres* of feminist writing in Nigeria, one can say that about forty decades on—from the time of the publication of *Efuru* (1966) to the date of publication of *Purple Hibiscus* (2006), some radical approach to the issue of gender should be expected, naturally. Even though Chimamanda Adichie was not born at the time when the African literary scene witnessed unprecedented effervescence, especially during the anticolonial struggle, she is enlightened enough to understand that women at that time hardly found any strong literary voice to carry out their protest. As far as African literature was concerned, Lloyd W. Brown (quoted by Gikandi, 1991, p. 207) corroborated this fact when he averred that women authors remained 'the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive and predictably male-oriented studies in the field'.

The first wave of nationalist writers romanticised and idealised the African woman in such a way as to mask her marginalisation. Gikandi (1991, p. 207) summarises the sordid situation thus:

Instead of attempting to ascertain the fundamental ways in which African women had been victimised both by colonialism and important aspects of African traditions, these writers felt that evoking an African whole was an important precondition for nationalism. The result was that in many important cultural texts such as Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mt. Kenya*, the desires and identities of women were effaced in order to empower African men. And in important nationalist novels such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngũgĩ's *The River Between*, the rehabilitation and legitimacy of African culture could only be achieved by repressing the marginalisation of women in the Igbo and Gikûyû cultures respectively represented in these novels.

And the representation of women in male-authored novels reveals a power structure clearly dominated by men. For Ramonu Sanusi (2015, p. 30) 'these textual representations reflect social realities and are rooted and implicated in power inequalities in societies that produced them'.

What this implies is that women are never central characters, and thus, are never given the opportunity to unfold. In earlier African works like those of Achebe, Soyinka, Ekwensi, etc., the women are kept at the narrative margins while their male counterparts take centre stage. According to Irène d'Ameilda (1994, p. 137)

La femme est rarement un personnage principal aussi bien dans la trame narrative que dans la thématique où elle occupe une place tout-à-fait secondaire, se situe à l'arrière-plan et ne se trouve définie que par rapport aux hommes.

The woman is rarely a protagonist in the narrative works, as well as in their thematic where she occupies a secondary position, relegated to the background and is only defined in relation to the men. (Translation is mine).

Today, if women have adopted new strategies for denouncing and deconstructing patriarchy, Chimamanda Adichie is one of the most erudite vanguards of a postcolonial counter-discourse. For Aduke Adebayo (2000, p. 288) some of these strategies include 'forging a new relationship with the female body, redefining maternity and appropriating language for self-identity'. For Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, characterisation, language, and counter—violence at the root of her rejection of patriarchal cum religious violence.

The central characters in her novel are women: Kambili, Auntie Ifeoma, Amaka, Sisi, and of course the narrator's mother simply referred to as Mama in the novel. Other episodic female characters exist, especially Chiaku who lends her voice as a social commentator. Eugene, one of the male principal characters in the novel, is presented at once as a villain, a despicable personality, but he is also pitiable in his condition as a relic of western civilization. At one point, he refuses to attend mass in Abba, his hometown, simply because he does 'not like to say mass in Igbo' (Adichie, 2006, p. 112). Eugene is a victim of imperialist indoctrination. He places the church above his immediate and extended family; he is cut off from tradition, and considers traditional rites as pagan. Through the character of Eugene, Chimamanda Adichie achieves a major breakthrough in the deconstruction of patriarchy and religious fanaticism. Religion here is seen as an imperialist instrument whose aim is to desecrate age long African way of life.

The author does not create weak female characters. Though some may appear to be weak at the beginning, but as the narrative progresses, they learn to rise to the occasion. This is the case with Beatrice, Kambili's

mother. At a point when she can no longer bear the excesses of patriarchy, she matures from a state of docility and resignation to become the ultimate liberator of her "body" and that of her children. She kills her husband, and tells her children without remorse that she poisoned him: 'I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor' (Adichie, 2006, p. 294). Sisi used to be a maid in the household of Eugene. She also observed the torments of her madam in the hands of the master of the house. It can be said that she agreed to the plan to eliminate Eugene as a show of female solidarity. She understands that Beatrice's predicament could mean her own (Sisi's) potential experience.

Chimamanda Adichie's use of an omniscient narrator is deliberate. The choice of Kambili, the youthful daughter of Eugene is not fortuitous. This innocent adolescent tells her story from the viewpoint of an insider. She is one of the victims of paternal highhandedness. The innocence of youth which she brings to bear on her narrative captures the very essence of verisimilitude. Here is another character that matures with time. Her romance with Father Amadi reveals the author's desire to challenge the myth of celibacy, and return the woman's sexuality back to her. One learns therefore that beyond the cloak of religiosity and imposed inhibitions, it is in the nature of all humans to love. She does not wait for the man to make the first move as she tells Father Amadi 'I love you' (Adichie, 2006, p. 280).

At the beginning, the reader sees Kambili as a young school girl who gives in to the whims of a brutal father. Her brief stay with Aunty Ifeoma helps to stabilise her psychologically. She appropriates her body, soul and sensuality. During an outing with Father Amadi, she recounts: 'He turned to me with an expression that I had never known, his eyes almost sad. He leaned over the gear and pressed his face to mine. I wanted our lips to meet and hold, but he moved his face away' (Adichie, 2006, p. 280). Kambili sustains the narrative of the text, giving minute details and vivid descriptions.

Aunty Ifeoma's role in the novel is epic. The presence of this strong and determined character foregrounds a major flaw in the character of Eugene: the abdication of responsibility. She serves as a counterforce to patriarchy. She takes her father to stay with her in Nsukka when the old man, Papa-Nnukwu took ill. Her elder brother, Eugene refuses to live up to his responsibility on spurious grounds that their father is a pagan. At

the death of the grand patriarch, Eugene wants a catholic funeral. Aunty Ifeoma rejects the idea vehemently, and in a fit of anger she declares:

I will put my dead husband's grave up for sale, Eugene, before I give our father a catholic funeral. Do you hear me? I said I will sell Ifediora's grave first! Was our father a catholic? I ask you, Eugene, was he a catholic? (Adichie, 2006, p. 195).

Aunty Ifeoma is herself, a catholic, but she does not denigrate traditional mores, besides African traditional religion has existed before the irruption of the West. To her Christianity and African traditional belief systems are two sides of the same coin, so that the issue of hierarchy of religion is at once dissolved. As the narrator puts it, adopting the indirect free speech technique:

Aunty Ifeoma was silent (...) then she looked up and said Papa-Nnukwu was not a heathen but a traditionalist, that sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar, that when Papa-Nnukwu did his *itu-nzu*, his declaration of innocence, in the morning, it was the same as saying our rosary (Adichie, 2006, p. 173).

Aunty Ifeoma's position, though not anticlerical, serves to negate the very discourse of the ascendancy of one religion over another. We observe that beyond the question of religion all good men are equal. After all, during his daily ritual of declaration of innocence, Papa-Nnukwu also prays for those who despise him: "Chineke! Bless my son, Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him" (Adichie, 2006, p. 175). Thus the extremist stance of Eugene is viewed in traditional circles as a curse.

The ideological thrust of the narrative is located in the character of Aunty Ifeoma. Adichie seems to be telling her reader that the woman does not require being a man's slave in order to survive. She warns her brother's wife of the danger in remaining under Eugene's roof in the name of marriage. She tells her sister-in-law that 'when a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head' (Adichie, 2006, p. 219).

Aunty Ifeoma also participates in social activism. She vehemently rejects the idea of a sole administrator for the university at Nsukka. Even when she was relieved of her position at the university, she secures another job in America and relocates with her children.

Of the female characters in the novel, one cannot gloss over Amaka, aunty Ifeoma's young daughter. She is a chip of the old block. She has a revolutionary spirit. She is also catholic like her mother, but this does not deter her from querying certain liturgical practices and rituals. One of such Christian rituals which undermine the African onomastic is Confirmation. It is believed in Christian circles that a Christian name is needed during confirmation in order to validate it. But the youthful Amaka thinks otherwise. She refuses a Christian name, saying, 'what's the point, then? Chiamaka says God is beautiful. Chima says God knows best, Chiebuka says God is the greatest. Don't they all glorify God as much as 'Paul' and 'Peter' and 'Simon?' (Adichie, 2006, p. 276).

Earlier in the novel, the reader finds Amaka locked in a philosophical dialogue with Father Amadi over the latter's missionary work in Germany. Her question takes the priest off-balance: 'The white missionaries brought us their god... which was the same colour as them, worshipped in their language and packaged in the boxes they made. Now that we take their god back to them, shouldn't we at least repackage it?' (Adichie, 2006, p. 271). It becomes clear at this point that part of the author's ideological project is the demystification of the Christian epistemology. Through 'authorial voice', the young Amaka tinkers, by asking probing questions, with the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Language and narrative forms

The use of Igbo idiolects and narrative art forms helps to appropriate language for "self-identity". The author understands the violence of imperialism as it affects African cultures. Terry Eagleton (1983, p. 215) recognises this fact when he posits that:

Imperialism is not only the exploitation of cheap labour power, raw materials and easy markets, but the uprooting of languages and customs (...) It manifests itself not only in company balance sheets and in air-bases, but can be traced to the most intimate roots of speech and signification.

In deconstructing the imperialist language of domination, Chimamanda Adichie reinforces what writers before her have done in their respective literary oeuvres. As Akakuru (2009, p. 99) puts it:

Whether it is in the form of transliteration, use of proverbs or borrowed words from African languages or even outright blend-words or amalgams of foreign-cum-local words, our writers have not been passive consumers of the Foreign languages they use to realise their works... You can see that in Achebe, in Elechi Amadi, in Ahmadou Kourouma, in Massa Makan Diabaté. Even in some earlier novels by Ferdinand Oyono... local African words are used. African sensibility, African culture, is pervasive.

This is to say that there is a deliberate attempt at 'arm-twisting the foreign languages they use to express African realities and sensibilities even if it is at some costs' (Akakuru, 2009, p. 99).

Let us consider the following Igbo words and expressions which confer on *Purple Hibiscus* some kind of Igboness: *Nnne, ngwa*. Go and change (16); Come and help me, *biko* (37); *Ke kwanu* (19); *Onugbu leaves* (20); *Ozugo* (22); *Ofe nsala* (23); *Umunna* (28); *Ogwu* (28); *ngwo-ngwo* (40); *Umu m* (42); *nno* (43), etc.

The pervasiveness of African language forms in the works of African literary artists is explained by Chantal Zabus (2007, p. 2–3 quoted by Akakuru, 2009, p. 161):

They (the texts of African writers) are indeed palimpsests, in that, behind the scriptural authority of the European language, the earlier imperfectly erased remnants of the African language can still be perceived. When deciphering the palimpsest, what is recovered is the trace in filigree of such African (source)-languages as Wolof, Ndût, Madinka, Fanti, Yoruba, Igbo and Ijo.

Obiechina (1975, p. 27), corroborates this fact when he says of African writers:

Western-educated, nevertheless, they are quite familiar with their own folklore, have a comprehensive knowledge of the popular proverbs and other traditional speech forms, and can speak their vernaculars competently. They also share the values, attitudes and structures of feelings... which are implicit in oral cultures.

The author of *purple Hibiscus* is not a cultural outcast therefore. Like her predecessors before her, she is very much at home with her culture and makes abundant use of local flavour to season her narrative

The names of her central female characters are derived from traditional Igbo culture. *Kambili* translates literally as *let me live* which implies freedom. *Ifeoma* is a *good thing*. And *Amaka*, as we have seen

earlier, is the shortened form of Chiamaka which signifies *God is beautiful*. Thus, onomastic, including idioms and idiolects, and traditional modes of narration, such as we find in embedded narratives form the basis for the domestication of the English language to apprehend the African world.

Chimamanda Adichie also shows mastery through the uses of rhetorical devices. Humour for example, is achieved through description of events and characters. The reader of the novel can hardly gloss over the vivid description of Eugene's countenance during communion in church. The narrator tells of how "he would hold his eyes shut so hard that his face tightened into a grimace, and then he would stick his tongue out as far as it could go" (Adichie, 2006, p. 21). Humour here helps to expose the hypocrisy of an atrocious father, while serving to douse the charged mood of her narrative.

The dialogic technique is also central to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narrative architecture. The role of dialogues in a text cannot be overemphasised. *Purple Hibiscus* is a story, and the story of any novel is that of characters who act, and interact among themselves in the evolution of the text. Dialogue helps to give voice to a hitherto voiceless species of the society, the woman. Dialogue also enables the reader to penetrate the psychology of individual female characters in their quotidian existence. Through dialogue, Auntie Ifeoma is able to persuade Eugene's wife to take action; Amaka is able to engage Father Amadi in religious discourse, and Kambili succeeds in penetrating most of the characters she describes. For example, she gets first-hand experience about the workings of patriarchy from her interactions with her mother. And her constant dialogue with Jaja, her brother, enables them to maintain the bond which maternal love has infused in them. Dialogue is therefore the author's ploy to give women the language of power within the dynamics of a male-constructed universe.

Thus, moving away from what Aduke Adebayo (2000, p. 293) considers the 'unidimensional and monologist narrative perspective of the classical novel', Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has rendered her narrative to accommodate the complex realities of her time, much as we have seen in the use of dialogue where multiple voices help to expand the reader's angle of vision.

The author also adopts the cataphoric mode of narration to create suspense. In what appears to be a prologue, the author ends the narrative from the beginning. Jaja's defiance is witnessed before the first

chapter. The title of the novel is a metaphor for Jaja's revolt against Eugene's dictatorial impulses. As Kambili, the narrator puts it,

Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do (Adichie, 2006, p. 24).

Jaja's defiance of paternal authority is also important to the understanding of Adichie's ideology. She imbues this young boy with a revolutionary spirit reminiscent of the spirit of resistance put up by 19th century King Jaja of Opobo who countered the economic exploitation of the British. Though a boy, Adichie seems to be telling her reader that the efforts of men are needed to compliment the struggle of the woman for total emancipation. At the end of the narrative, Jaja goes to jail for the crime of murder committed by his mother.

Conclusion

Feminist writing of the post-colonial era is a rejection of the image of the woman created through discursive subterfuge. Firstly, imperialism imposed binary oppositions which placed African values at the margin. The church as an agent of imperial colonialist imposition has been at the forefront of the profanation of African religious institutions. Secondly, some cultural practices have also given impetus to the marginalization of the woman. Church and patriarchy are therefore at the root of the commodification of the woman.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a feminist. Her novel, *Purple Hibiscus* is a response to the continued marginalization of the Nigerian, nay African woman. It is an outright condemnation of the brutalities of patriarchy, as well as the spurious claims of ascendancy of the Christian church over African religions. Chimamanda Adichie's characterization, use of Igbo idioms and onomastic and narrative techniques inherited from western literary canons, all conduce to deconstruct male domination, not only on the literary scene, but in society at large.

The author's brand of feminism is not radical, even though Beatrice kills Eugene. For Chimamanda Adichie, the support of the man is needed for the emancipation of the woman. Jaja's role in the novel is quite instructive in this wise.

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