

Religion And Corruption As Portrayed In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

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Abstract

Purple Hibiscus is a symbol of the violence that has resulted from the cultural struggle. Colonial violence, according to Ania Loomba, is epistemic violence that disregards other people's culture, religion, and beliefs. She also states, "Consequently, colonial violence is understood as including an 'epistemic' aspect, i.e. an attack on the culture, ideas and value systems of the colonised peoples" (54). Likewise, G. Spivak in Morris' Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea discusses "the epistemic violence of imperialism" (Morris 43). Epistemic violence, according to Spivak, arises when particular voices in Western discourses are marginalised. This practise of othering is a colonial policy since these voices belong to the subaltern' and Said's notion of 'otherness' in Orientalism. Eugene's persona reflects a severe influence of colonisation on certain Africans, since he despises his native tongue, Igbo, and only speaks English. The novel is a compelling narrative beautifully presented by a strong voice with a lot of promise for the future. The novel is set in post-colonial Nigerian communities where people are heavily reliant on nature. The novel's location varies from one rural town to the next. Nature is cherished, worshipped, and in some cases mistreated by the characters in the novel. This Paper Environmental principles, natural resources, environmentally

acceptable lifestyles, and a spectrum of natural and human-induced environmental challenges are all present in the communities.

Keywords: violence, subaltern, environment, caste.

Introduction

Adichie appreciates and discovers underlying significance in flowers, creepers, trees, and insects. She is always connected to nature and feels at one with it. Her connections to the moon, daylight, night, and sun, among other things, represent the many moods of her characters. Her work encourages readers to see man and environment as inextricably linked and interconnected. Nature is revered and celebrated in all ancient cultures. The fundamental elements are recognised in folk traditions. Their awareness stems from the reality that human existence is reliant on water, earth, air, fire, and, most importantly, space. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Papa-Nnukwu's religion is deeply Nigerian. It is tied to "Ani, god of the land" (PH 65). In Nigerian culture, the earth is extremely significant. It is revered as a mother goddess who reigns over all beings and gives birth to new generations. Earth is said to hide life, preserving it from drought and rejuvenating it when the rains arrive. Without Her, all living things on the planet would perish (Nature). She is thought to be a strong spirit who rules over life. When she is enraged, she brings death and causes mountains and forests to shift.

Igbo people are strongly embedded in their surroundings and the natural elements they encounter on a daily basis. They make connections with nature in all they see and experience. Even regular fruits, trees, flowers, and other objects impact them so strongly that the memories of these little things are imprinted in their minds forever. Kambili continues to link Papa-Nnukwu to Nigerian items in *Nsukka*. Kambili compares Papa-physique Nnukwu's to both Nigerian items and the Nigerian country as she watches him pray at Auntie Ifeoma's house. The Igbo people have a strong regard for the land on which they dwell. They keep their homes and surroundings clean and safe because they understand that a healthy atmosphere promotes healing. Trees are revered as gods of life. Igbo people like the wonderful aroma of beautiful flowers that they grow. They devote a significant amount of effort to watering and maintaining their gardens. They believe that their home should be complemented by a lovely landscape. As a result, Auntie Ifeoma has taken great care to keep her garden in good shape.

In Nigeria, there are customs, taboos, and superstitions originating from the natural environment, which are founded on ancestral rules relating to environmental protection and respect for

nature. This emphasises man's relationship with nature as well as environmental responsibility of nonviolence. The unseen world's harmony with God and spirits, as well as the visible world's harmony with humans and the rest of creation, would be regulated "by moral order which is preserved by tradition and, if followed, have the power or force to sustain the existence and operation of the universe, ensuring a bountiful life for humanity" (Magesa 72). There are conventions, stigmas, and superstitions in Nigeria that are inherited from the natural habitat and are founded on ancestral norms addressing environmental protection and respect for nature. This emphasises man's relationship with nature, as well as the need of environmental ethics. The peace between God and spirits (invisible world) and humans and the rest of nature (visible world) would be governed by this rule.

Any person or nation striving to forge a new identity must first confront its history. For nations, this entails acknowledging the contributions of all cultural groups (including colonial groups) to the development of a national culture. This entails assessing events and seeking to make sense of situations that may be beyond their comprehension for youngsters. Papa-Nnukwu represents indigenous culture in *Purple Hibiscus*, notably that of Igboland. Eugene and Ifeoma's father is Papa-Nnukwu. He and his children are not Roman Catholics, but rather follow the ancient Igbo faith. Papa-Nnukwu embodies native culture, and he is the figurative personification of indigenous peoples. This culture, in combination with the conquering culture, has given birth to the Nigerian siblings Eugene and Ifeoma represent: authoritarianism and democracy. He is a parent who must let his children become their own individuals—informed by, but not clones of, Papa-Nnukwu himself—much like indigenous culture yielding to colonisers. Papa-Nnukwu, on the other hand, is sceptical of the usurping Anglo-Catholic culture, because it is replacing the religion he knows with a mystery religion that makes no sense to his experiences.

Papa-Nnukwu is sceptical about Christianity, asking, "Who is the person who was murdered, the one who hangs on the wood outside the mission?" They stated that he was the son, but that the father and son are equal. It was then that [Papa-Nnukwu] knew that the white man was mad" (*Hibiscus* 84). For someone unfamiliar with Christianity, for someone who associates Christianity with usurpers, the picture of Christ on the crucifixion is violent and guaranteed to instil fear in the outside viewer. To Papa-Nnukwu, Christianity is a civilization that celebrates the heinous sacrifice of an innocent human. Those on the conquering road regard aboriginal population's lives and traditions as collateral damage, whose sacrifice is justified by the gain the occupiers obtain or feel they are providing for the colonised.

Despite Eugene's prohibition, Kambili and Jaja are able to see their dying grandpa, Papa-Nnukwu, in Nsukka. His death is a watershed moment, enabling both Kambili and Jaja to approach maturity with a deeper understanding of themselves and a heightened awareness of their familial and cultural contexts. However, this is not an easy transition. Kambili starts her quest when she watches Ifeoma praying for Papa Nnukwu's healing. When Papa prayed for Papa Nnukwu, he asked only that "God convert him and save him from the raging fires of hell" (PH 150). Kambili, who had previously been exposed only to a religion (and worldview) that is quite confined, somewhat terrifying, and does not allow for diversity (much like Eugene), sees a new way of life in Ifeoma's prayers. She learns to recognise that there are other paths to a prosperous and Godly existence. Whereas Eugene's prayers are solemn and centred on everlasting condemnation, Ifeoma's prayers for her father are joyful and hopeful. Papa Nnukwu's personal prayers are joyful, which provides Ifeoma with a degree of solace that is lacking in Eugene's family. Due to her exposure to many modes of interaction with God and the universe, Kambili comes to understand that she will have a say in her own future. Kambili, who had previously been exposed only to a religion (and worldview) that is quite confined, rather terrifying, and does not allow for diversity (much like Eugene), finds a new way of life in Ifeoma's prayers. She learns to recognise that there are other paths to a prosperous and Christian existence. Whereas Eugene's prayers are solemn and centred on everlasting condemnation, Ifeoma's prayers for her father are joyful and hopeful. PapaNnukwu's personal prayers are joyful, which provides Ifeoma with a degree of solace that is lacking in Eugene's family. Due to her exposure to many modes of interaction with God and the universe, Kambili comes to understand that she will have a say in her own future:

[A subaltern] agent cannot hearken back to pre-colonial, pre-orientalist discourse in search of an „authentic“ identity or out of „nostalgia for lost origins“. . . colonial discourse has forever marked colonized and excolonised societies (and for that matter colonial and ex-colonial powers), so that it is impossible to recuperate any identity uncontaminated by it. (Kapoor 652)

Papa Nnukwu must disintegrate because the indigenous culture in its purest and unadulterated form no longer exists.

Eugene's first query to Ifeoma following Papa-death Nnukwu's is not whether there was any agony or final words of wisdom, but whether Ifeoma had summoned a priest to conduct severe unction. Additionally, Eugene refuses to participate in a conventional funeral. Although it is eventually revealed that Eugene did contribute finances for such a "Pagan" funeral, his reasons are suspect—connections Eugene's with

traditional, non-Catholic society often profit him in some manner, most often through prestige or power. Eugene's strategy is to utterly obliterate his father's indigenous identity, even in death, when PapaNnukwu cannot resist him. Ifeoma believes that the biggest disgrace she can inflict on her father is to prevent him from receiving his customary funeral. When a civilization dies, its memory can be preserved. To do differently (as usurpers seek) is to lose not just the culture's memories, but also the lessons learned and preserved via ethnic heritage. Papa-picture Nnukwu's embodies his cultural memory: upon its destruction, the painting becomes something that exists outside of the physical sphere, never to be recovered save in memory. Memory, like innate completeness, diminishes with time. Similarly to how indigenous societies cannot be reclaimed once a coloniser arrives, Papa-Nnukwu perishes under colonisation. Thus, Eugene abandons his religious convictions and adheres to white colonialism's religion and Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand, in his article "The Role of British Missionaries in the Rejection of Igbo Religion and Culture in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* he clearly express that

because British priests refer to Igbo rituals as the devilish superstition of pagans leading the unconverted natives to the gates of Hell...Eugene trusts the colonisers who insist that renouncement of African traditions is the prerequisite to happiness in both worlds. He forbids his family to speak Igbo at home and warns them against coming into contact with unconverted Nigerians ... As a wealthy man, Eugene Achike feels deeply indebted to the whites who acquainted him with British culture, helped him rise from poverty and converted him to Christianity to save him from the eternal damnation that traditional Igbo religion would lead him to. Rather than pondering on the disastrous economic and cultural consequences of colonialism, he panders to his white masters who deprived him of his history, language and identity. He is grateful to British missionaries for their contribution to his success and reminds Kambili of her chance to be a student in such missionaries. (44)

British colonialists, according to Achebe, wrecked the Igbo society's traditionally rich and well-regulated culture and wrecked devastation on the rest of Africa by bringing violence and hatred for "

High Culture is so to speak normative; it considers itself to be the model of human comportment, and it spurns Low Culture as a miserable distortion or aberration. It may treat Low Culture with indifference as well as contempt, or alternatively it may feel that, in a perfect world, Low Culture should be transformed in its own image (Geller 39).

The indigenous people were destabilised when British colonialists and Christian missionaries arrived and imposed their cultural system on them. Residents were torn between rejecting and embracing the new

culture. They have been so successfully indoctrinated by whites that they are befuddled by the reality of change and frequently thrilled by the new opportunities that their own government has denied them for decades. The indigenous people were entirely captivated by the enhanced abilities and possibilities offered to them by Christian missionaries, which served as the fundamental foundation for their categorization.

While Kambili was a child, she was only exposed to history and culture as authorised by her father; she was the newly captured territory, the infant country of nascent Nigeria, and her father shaped her whole worldview. On the other hand, as she reaches adolescence and early womanhood, Kambili begins to build her own identity. She has begun to investigate her past and the forces that shaped her (Papa-Nnukwu and the Igbo culture, while irreversibly altered by English colonisation, shaped Kambili through their influence on Nigerian history)—yet, with Papa's death, Nnukwu's Kambili loses direct contact with this history and must navigate solely through her memory of it. Thus, this history behaves similarly to Papa-grandpa Nnukwu's behaviour toward Kambili: they become immovable and fixed. Eugene worries Papa-Nnukwu and his potential impact on the development of Kambili and Jaja, much as colonists fear the history and mythology of the conquered peoples. Where these narratives remain in the public consciousness, they may serve as rallying points for conflict. As a result, when Eugene sees the artwork, he destroys it, exactly as invaders occasionally do with indigenous items such as temples. Following Eugene's effort to prove his authority, "the painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something [Kambili] had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at Papa's feet lay pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors" (PH 210). Kambili had never known her own past, and now that history, with its "earth-tone hues," was fading away, an ironic echo of the Biblical saying "to dust you shall return." Nigeria's history, the history of the Igboland people, is today inextricably linked to the ambitions of external Western influences

When one aboriginal culture dies, a new one must emerge to fill the void. Eugene Achike (Papa-son) Nnukwu's takes up the job of defining Nigeria, substituting the colonial culture for the indigenous culture. Eugene is the quintessential coloniser, attempting to impose order on his family as he sees fit. He is a supporter of Western ideals, European religion, and materialism, and he tries to instil these values in his wife and children. Eugene thinks that his children's needs are the same as his own, just as every conquering power treats the people under colonial authority. He doesn't consider the possibility that their demands are unique and matched to their circumstances. Kambili "had never thought about the university where [she] would go or what [she] would study. When the time came, Papa would decide" (PH 130). Kambili

accepts her father's rule without question; she has not yet made her break for independence, nor does she realise that she has influence over her own destiny. This condition is a metaphor for the Nigerian people's acceptance of colonial powers. According to Ernest Gellner,

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Despite his Igbo ethnicity, Eugene Achike has chosen to identify with the conquering British culture for personal gain. Eugene has amassed personal power as a result of his adoption of Westernized commercial tactics and his affiliation with British Catholicism. This is referred to as the "liberal bargain" by Amalia Sa'ar in her article *Postcolonial Feminism, the Politics of Identification, and the Liberal Bargain.* :

The concept of the liberal bargain refers to a particular process whereby members of disadvantaged groups become identified with the hegemonic order, at least to a degree. Despite the hierarchical and selective character of liberal orders, quite a few members of marginalized groups stand to gain some benefits from them, or seem to believe that they do. Many of those who face exclusion because of their demographic attributes (notably their ethnic or racial background, and their gender in the case of women) may at the same time enjoy some advantages, thanks to their education, occupation, or to other ascribed traits that are less stigmatized (681).

Eugene has utilised his intelligence and adaptability to propel himself to the top of the colonial power structure. This action, however, will be dangerous, because colonial guardians of individuals who have struck such a pact are no longer present in the postcolonial paradigm. Eugene is now in the spotlight, and he may not be able to hide from those who see him as a danger. Eugene's intellectual allegiances are to the past colonial rule rather than the current one. He, like Ade Coker, serves as a rallying point for opponents of the current regime. Eugene crams European Catholicism down the throats of his church members, particularly his own family. His merciless invasion of other territories depicts the savage invasion of colonial forces; he strives to eradicate native cultures, religions, and languages—except where it benefits him as a coloniser. Eugene argues that the Igbo's religious concerns are as Nigerians "were wrong; we cared too much about huge church buildings and mighty statues. You would never see white people doing that" (PH 104). The paradox is that "white" churches do exactly this; the Catholic

Church is extremely affluent, and the Vatican possesses one of Europe's, if not the world's, best art collections.

Eugene's friendship with Kambili is intertwined with his relationship with God. Eugene fears God's judgement, but Kambili fears her father's; Eugene strives to purify his family via punishment, while Kambili seeks to purify herself by self-denial. His view of sin redemption is that as long as one is punished on Earth, one will not be punished in Heaven. He tries to strike the right balance between the anguish of the now and the promise of happiness in the future. Biafra was also meant to be a dreamy place, a haven for the Igbo people, who had been oppressed (and even killed) for their unique heritage. Both sides in the Nigerian-Biafran War, however, were striving for an unattainable ideal. Nigeria's coalition authorities desired a unified Nigeria in which the many cultures might meld into a single nationalist whole. Eugene is a representation of this dualism. In the religious sphere, he is a coloniser, but in the cultural sector, he represents the Igbo people. Despite his refusal to accept pagans inside his home, Eugene offers his home to his traditional tribe over the Christmas season, as long as they pretend to be Christians. The men of the village wait for alms while the ladies prepare food knowing that they would be allowed to take home any leftovers, so filling their tables considerably more than they could have done on their own.

Eugene exudes the arrogance of a man whose authority is undeniable, unquestioned, and limitless. Ifeoma believes he is battling the highest power in the universe: "Eugene has to stop doing God's job," says Ifeoma; "God is big enough to do his own job" (PH 95). As a result, Jaja's disobedience of his father is an attack not only on his father's authority but also on the ruling class's power. It is the struggle of the oppressed classes against colonialism's dominance. This resistance also calls into question the ruling class's basic beliefs, namely, that they have a divine right or obligation to rule over other races. As a result, Eugene struggles to accept Jaja's impending adulthood and attendant self-rule, because Jaja's independence (whether of thought or deed) calls into doubt Eugene's divine right to govern. Eugene notices Jaja and Kambili staring at Amadi's painting of Papa-Nnukwu, which signifies a link to their original culture, their past (both Igbo and familial), and their extended family. Eugene is understandably enraged as a coloniser. Eugene considers the picture to be treacherous. It reflects a cultural and religious foothold that he is attempting to suppress. It also reflects Ifeoma's family's philosophy, which prioritises individual liberty and free expression, both of which are threats to Eugene's home rule. Kambili, on the other hand, had no regrets about bringing the picture home. Perhaps she has no remorse for its discovery and subsequent destruction. Kambili appears to be content with the course of events that have unfolded since

the painting's discovery. She wonders if "perhaps it was what we wanted to happen, Jaja and I, without being aware of it. Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka—even Papa—and things were destined to not be the same, to not be in their original order" (PH 209). The old order, of course, died with Papa-Nnukwu; but, Eugene represented the ancient order to Kambili, who had never known anything other than fascism until her journey to Nsukka. After seeing democracy for themselves, the children are unable to accept their father's misuse of power. Things must inevitably come to a head, with the children having to choose between reintegrating into the oppressive lifestyle and seeking their own separate identities. Eugene's demise begins long before he dies physically. Eugene discovers that his authority is not all-encompassing after the assassination of Ade Coker. In the face of an indigenous people that desires to be self-sufficient, colonisation forces are weakening.

Eugene's reaction to Ade Coker's death is one of Kambili's turning moments. She sees him "crumpled on a sofa in the living room, sobbing. He seemed so small. Papa who was so tall that he sometimes lowered his head to get through doorways. . . now he seemed small" (PH 206-7). Until now, Kambili's view of her father had been overblown. She inflated his talents and capabilities; the picture of a guy too tall for entrances is evocative of a tiny child's impression of any outstanding adult. However, now that she has seen part of the truth and Eugene has recognised to himself that he is not omnipotent, he has been reduced to what he truly is—both in Kambili's and his own eyes. Eugene's death in Nigerian history is an emblem for the end of colonialism. He is poisoned, as is the death of fallen administrations, which is a brutal and purposefully produced death. Eugene's wife, Beatrice, poisons him, which adds to the importance of the situation. Beatrice appeared to be the ideal colonised person on the surface, a lady who acquiesced to maltreatment in her own household via silence. However, Beatrice's willingness to accept her colonial status is called into doubt. After a horrific beating that results in a miscarriage, she finally puts an end to Eugene's tyranny (although the novel suggests that this has happened before). As a result, Beatrice's actions suggest that she is taking a stance to safeguard Nigeria's children—to stop colonial control, as it were. Poisoning is also a method of assassination, implying that Beatrice represents a subjugated people's opposition. It's no coincidence that the two deaths in the novel happen virtually at the same time. Governmental changes are inherently upheavals, and this upheaval is no less severe because it takes place on a smaller scale. The home has unquestionably altered dramatically.

Eugene is not just a coloniser, but also the absolute authority figure; revolting against his control is unfathomable for Kambili, who has never tasted true independence. Eugene operates almost like a

mediaeval monarch, whose law is absolute and whose reign is both unchangeable and everlasting, at least in Kambili's eyes. Kambili never explores the fact of a regime change. She never considers "the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die. . .he had seemed immortal" (PH 287).

Despite the little rebellions she has about Papa-Nnukwu, Kambili finds herself without a guiding force when Eugene is slain. Even these uprisings were an attempt to seize external authority, because Papa-Nnukwu symbolises a regime, albeit one that has been defeated by the colonial powers that Eugene symbolizes. These forces are quite European in nature; "most of the wars of European colonial expansion, from 1500 to 1950, can be seen as wars of coercive regime change" (Orend 190). Eugene's authority and social status signify imperialism's government shift; Eugene's assassination indicates yet another abrupt regime change, this time the downfall of colonial powers. Eugene's death is military at its core: the old guard is overthrown by the new guard in a violent coup. Rather of generating fruit, the indigenous culture serves as the soil for future cultivation. While native completeness has departed, the following generation has cultural memory that must be integrated with the forces currently operating in the nation. It is up to the various Nigerias that remain to define the country's future trajectory

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