

GENDER – BASED VIOLENCE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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Résumé

Parmi les fléaux qui rongent le monde aujourd’hui, le plus imminent c’est la violence faite au genre. Les femmes et les filles subissent des atrocités sur le plan physique, moral et psychologique. Le corps des femmes est devenu une arme dans le champ de bataille.

Les femmes sont violées sauvagement par toutes les couches de la société des hommes, entre autre : les soldats, les hommes d’affaires, les hommes d’Etat, etc. Des filles mineures sont violées et parfois elles portent des grossesses non désirables ; en conséquence certaines attrapent des fistules pendant leur accouchement précoce et d’autres meurent pendant l’accouchement.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, l’auteur de « *Purple Hibiscus* » (= Plante Pâle) s’insurge contre la violence domestique où la plupart de soit disant pères de familles maltraitent leurs enfants et leurs compagnes.

Abstract

Among the plagues surrounding the world today, the most crucial is Gender – based violence. Women and girls are subject of many atrocities, physically, morally and psychologically. Women’s body has become a weapon in battlefield.

Women are wildly violated by all kinds of categories of men in society: soldiers, Statesmen, businessmen, etc... Teenagers are savagely violated and sometimes bear undesirable pregnancies which lead either to fistula or death during the birthday.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the author of “*Purple Hibiscus*” is against the so – called fathers or chiefs of families who still practice domestic violence in maltreating their children and partners (wives).

I. INTRODUCTION

It is supposed that all human beings are equally dependent upon what the Maker provided them; seeing that all live on this plant, breathe its air, drink its water and eat the food that grows out of its land. Curiously, throughout the world, women and girls are subject to many forms of violence including physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse.

Violence affects women and girls from all backgrounds and happens across all stages of life and is perpetrated by partners and family members as well as strangers.

Woman’s actions are limited because she is female. Therefore, she is not permitted to construct her gender and sex willy – nilly; this because gender is politically and therefore socially controlled.

As far as violence is concerned, war is the most dangerous form of armed violence in the world. Woman’s body has become as weapon in the battlefield. In the same occasion, Buchi Emecheta begs the involvement of men and boys for the search of the solution. In her opinion, the involvement furthering gender equality and ending violence cannot take place in a female – only vacuum. Men and boys should be seen as allies with women and girls not enemies.

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Ending with this exposé, the governments all over the world should also be working to ensure women and girls are able to enjoy full and equal human rights; creating an environment that enables gender equality; ensuring women's participation in leadership; and monitoring progress of all of this involvement.

II. DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Summary of the Plot

Purple Hibiscus is set in post colonial Nigeria, a country beset by political instability and economic difficulties. The central character is Kambili Achike, and also the narrator of the story. She is fifteen years old for much of the period covered by the book.

Eugene Achike is Kambili's father, often called "papa". He is a wealthy and ostentatious businessman who is also a very strict catholic who dominates his family for much of the novel by imposing a harsh religious regime in the family home.

Eugene Achike is a tyrant, a dictator and a violent figure of the novel. He controls every aspect of his family's life, including imposing a schedule upon the lives of Kambili and her brother Jaja so that every minute of the day is mapped out for them. If it happens that his children break their father's instructions, they will be beaten pitifully.

Being subjected to such beatings and psychological cruelty, Kambili and Jaja desert from their father's home and go to live with Auntie Ifeona, Eugene's only sibling sister, who works as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria. She is highly capable in many aspects of her life, displaying determination and resourcefulness in bringing up her three children without a husband. This household offers a marked contrast to what Kambili and Jaja are used to. Though Catholic, it practices a completely different form of Catholicism, making for a happy, liberal place that encourages its members to speak freely their minds.

In this nurturing environment both Kambili and Jaja become more open, more able to voice their own opinions and to grow to maturity. The evidence is that, while at Auntie Ifeona's, Kambili falls in love with a young Nigerian priest, Father Amadi. He is in the circle of Auntie Ifeona and her family. Being youthful, indigenous and well-versed in contemporary life, Father Amadi could be described as a "new generation" priest, as opposed to white European in the country such as Eugene's priest, Father Benedict.

Kambili's love with Father Amadi awakens her sense of her own sexuality. He loves her because of his profession. As might be expected, Father Amadi also took Kambili to plait her hair which led the hairdresser to tell her that no man takes a young lady to plait her hair unless he likes her.

After Kambili and Jaja's escape from the hands of their tyrannical father Eugene Achike, it is Beatrice's turn. She is mother and wife in Achike family, often called "mama", is a quiet, maternal figure for much of the work, presenting a softer, warmer presence in the home in contrast to the often tyrannical presence of Eugene Achike. Passive in another term applicable to her at least for a great deal of the book.

During the course of the novel, Beatrice suffers two miscarriages after severe beatings from her husband. This inhuman act caused by Eugene continues to trouble her. According to her, if she was not often beaten, she would have given birth to two more children. So, she decides that she will polish the figurines on the étagère after every beating to show how unhappy she was. In addition, it is insinuated that Beatrice stays with Eugene partially out of gratitude for his unwillingness to marry another wife after she could only have two children, Kambili and Jaja.

Beatrice sees in Eugene's attitude to marry a second wife as an act of sabotage toward her. Ultimately, however, thinking of the two miscarriages and marrying another wife, Beatrice cannot cope with Eugene's behaviour. The story ends tragically; Beatrice poisons her husband and stays keeping her two children

2.2. Characters

2.2.1. Kambili Achike

Kambili Achike is the central character in *Purple Hibiscus* and also the narrator of the story. She is shy and inhibited, at least until she has spent an extended amount of time away from her family home at the home of Auntie Ife - Oma and her family.

Kambili is the younger of Eugene Achike and Beatrice. She does not like the living environment under father after she gets used to the freedom of Nsukka. She was a very quiet girl at the beginning of the novel but after staying with her Auntie Ifeona, she builds up her courage and opens up much more towards other people.

The story is told through Kambili's eyes when she is fifteen years old and is essentially about the disintegration of her family unit. She lives under the catholic rule of her father, who expects his children to succeed at all cost.

Kambili falls in love with a young priest, Father Amadi. She is opened to him during the holiday to their Auntie Ifeona. She is asking him many questions related to his vocation as priest as it is shown below:

“Why did you become a ‘priest’? I blurted out, then wished I had not asked, that the bubbles in my throat had not let that through. Of course he had gotten the call, the same call that all the reverend ‘sisters’ in school talked about when they asked us to always listen for the call when they pray. Sometimes I imagined He would not say my name right; like Father Benedict, he would place the emphasis on the second syllable rather than the first. “I wanted to be a doctor at first. Then I went to church once I heard this priest speak and I was changed forever” Father Amadi said. “Oh” “I was joking,” Father Amadi glanced at me. He looked surprised I did not realize that it was a joke.” Its lot more complicated than that, Kambili had many questions, growing up. The priest would come closest to answering them.” (PH: 170, 180)

Anyway, love between Kambili and Father Amadi seems to be hypothetical in the sense that, it is shown how Fathers (Priests) in Catholic Church are not allowed to get married.

2.2.2. Beatrice

Beatrice is Eugene Achike's wife and the mother of Kambili and Jaja. She is often called “Mama”. She is a quiet and religious woman accustomed to attitude toward her. Passive is another term applicable to her, at least for a great deal of the book.

But one day evil got into her mind after excessive and intense threats from her husband Eugene. She remembered she had been hospitalised at every beating by her husband though her passivity and submission to her husband's rules. She remembered how she suffered two miscarriages after severe beatings from Eugene. She remembered how her two children were beaten and one of them, Kambili, was also hospitalised. She wondered: until when my husband's inhuman activities would take an end?

Therefore, Hamlet's soliloquy got in Beatrice's mind: “To be or not to be, that is the question” (Gijssels, 1961: 65). In her indignation with her husband, Beatrice opted to protect her children and poison her tyrant husband. When investigation was made of Eugene Achike's death by Kambili, Beatrice openly told her daughter to be responsible in poisoning him. Kambili was puzzled and tried to blame her mother, but she remained quiet and answered her daughter in few words as it is evidenced in the following passages:

“When she spoke her voice was just as calm and slow. ‘I started putting poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me from her uncle who is a powerful witch doctor...’ “Why did you put it in his tea?” I asked mama rising. My voice was loud. I was almost screaming “Why in his tea?” (PH: 290)

2.2.3. Aunty Ifeoma

Aunty Ifeoma is Eugene Achike's sister. She is mother of three children without a husband. She is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria. She is highly capable in many aspects of her life, displaying determination and resourcefulness in bringing up her children. Though financially struggling, Aunty Ifeoma creates a much happier environment for her children than does her brother Eugene for his family.

She was married to Ifediora, who was a professor with her, until his unfortunate death. She is also a proud supporter of the Nigerian Pro – democracy movement which gets her into trouble at her job.

It is Aunty Ifeoma who welcomed Kambili and Jaja at her home when they got into difficulties with their father Eugene, beating them every time. From Nsukka, Kambili and Jaja's lives changed, they lived happily under the guidance of their aunt to the maturity.

Eugene's sister is liberal and outspoken but also devout catholic unlike her brother, she respects the religion and the traditions of their father. It is clearly that, there is a contrast of ideas or thoughts between Ifeoma and her brother Eugene. This can be explained in the death of their father who is animist and traditionalist believer. As to how bury their father, the opposition occurs between these two characters as it can be seen in the following conversation:

"Ifeoma did you call a priest?" Papa asked.

"Is that all you can say, eh, Eugene? How you nothing else to say gbo? Our father has died!

Has your head turned upside down? Will you not help me to bury our father?

"I cannot participate in pagan funeral, but we can discuss with the priest and arrange a catholic funeral."

Aunty Ifeoma got up and started to shout. Her voice was unsteady. "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 catholic? I ask you Eugene, was he a catholic? Uchugbagi" aunty Ifeoma snapped her finger at Papa. (PH: 188-189)

On the other hand, Aunty Ifeoma as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria was a proud supporter of the Nigerian Pro – Democracy movement which was against Nigerian dictatorial system full of corruption. Pro – Democracy movement in Nigeria aimed at criticising the leaders of their government, resting on public opinion.

As a loyal lecturer, Aunty Ifeoma challenged with what happening in Nigerian leaders concerning dishonesty and corruption. A typical example of challenge is about what was happening to the Nigerian University leaders. Here is a challenge between Ifeoma and his colleague's lecturer:

"They said there is a list circulating, Ifeoma, of lecturers who are disloyal to the University. They said they might be fired. They said your name is on it". "I am not paid to be loyal. When I speak the truth it becomes disloyalty." "Ifeoma, do you think you are the only one who knows the truth? Do you think we do not all know the truth, eh? But, Gwakenem, will the truth feed your children? Pay their school fees and buy their clothes?" "When do we speak out, eh? When soldiers are appointed lectures and students attend lectures with guns to their heads?" (PH: 222, 223)

2.3. Violence as seen in Purple Hibiscus

2.3.1. Domestic Violence

On the violence hand, domestic violence can involve violence against children. This kind of violence is called "Children abuse". It can take the form of physical i.e., any-accidental act or behavior causing physical suffering or bodily harm. Abusive acts toward children can often result from present' attempt at child discipline through excessive corporal punishment. Domestic violence can occur into two ways: children abuse and Intimate partner violence.

2.3.1.1. Child Maltreatment

It is also called “child abuse”. Abusive acts toward children can often result from parents’ attempts at child discipline through excessive corporal punishment. The views on child punishment vary around the world. In most countries parental corporal punishment is not considered as a form of domestic Violence, but some countries, mostly in Europe and Latin America, have made any form of child corporal punishment illegal. There is a strong link between domestic violence and child abuse. Since domestic violence is a pattern of behavior, these, these incidences may increase in severity and frequency, resulting in an increased probably the children themselves will become victims.

A number of causes of physical abuse against children have identified of which being:

- Many abuse and neglectful parents have had little exposure to positive parental models and supports.
- There is often a greater degree of stress in the family environment.
- Information-processing disturbances may cause maltreating parents to misperceive or mislabel their child’s behavior, which leads to inappropriate responses.
- There is often a lack of awareness or understanding of developmentally appropriate expectations. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/violence_types. Accessed January 14th, 2020 at 11.25)

As far as purple Hibiscus is concerned, Chimamanda Adichie shown Papa Eugene’s mistreatment toward his two children, Jaja and Kambili. It is known through the novel that Papa Eugene is a tyrannical parent who is used to beat almost all the members of his family in spite of his religion status as Father Benedict’s helper in “distributing ash every year.” (PH:1)

The first child victim of Eugene’s misbehavior is his son Jaja. He is accused of bringing home the painting he brought from his grandfather NUNKUKWU considered as heathen. As Papa Eugene has become a Christian he was against things or practices from tradition. Therefore he became very angry with Jaja and reacted energetically as it can be seen below:

“ Who brought that painting into this house?”

“ Me,” I said.

“Me,” Jaja I said.

“What has gotten into you?” Papa asked. What is wrong with you?”

I lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus in my Integrated science for secondary school.

“Get up!” Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. (PH: 210)

The second child to face the same maltreatment from her was Kambili. The main cause for her was that she participated in bring home the forbidden painting. This time Kambili was widely beaten by Eugene up to collapse back. She was in unconscious state when they brought her in St Agnes hospital as it is shown in the following extract:

“Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased... the metal buckle landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. Because I would hear a swoosh in the air. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet.” (PH: 211)

At her arrival to hospital, it was noticed by the Doctor that Kambili was extremely affected with her father’s beatings. The evidence is that

“When I opened my eyes I knew at once that I was not in my bed. I made to get up, but pain shot through my whole body in exquisite little packets. I collapse back... now it was my entire body that burned. Each movement was too painful to even think about “My whole body is on fire,” I said.” (PH: 211).

The doctor’s report proved that Kambili was seriously affected: “ Broken rib. Heal nicely. Internal bleeding.” (PH: 212). It was just after the doctor’s report that Eugene knew his culpability, of what he has papa Eugene knew his culpability, of what he has done to his daughter.

“My precious daughter. Nothing will happen to you precious daughter. I was not sure if it was a dream.” (PH: 212)

One can notice that the effects of domestic violence children are enormous. A child who is exposed to domestic abuse during their upbringing will suffer development and psychological damage. Because of the awareness of domestic violence that some children have to face, also impacts how the child develops emotionally, behaviorally as well as cognitively. Some emotional and behavioural problems that can result due to domestic violence include increased aggressiveness anxiety, and changes in how a child socializes with friends and families. Depression, emotional insecurity, and mental disorders can follow due to traumatic experiences.

Through Kambili’s father has recognized his culpability, Kambili had already been traumatized to what his father behaved badly towards her. Therefore she refuse to go home after recovery as it shown in the extrat that follows:

“I told the doctor it was as bad as before and I screamed when he tried to feel my side. I did not want to leave the hospital. I did not want to go home. A would be going to Nsukka. Nsukka air would be good for me, for my recuperation.” (PH: 214, 215).

2.3.1.2. Interpersonal Violence

Interpersonal violence is divided into two subcategories: family animate partner violence that is, violence largely between family members and intimate partners, usually taking place in the home. The former group includes forms of violence such as child abuse intimate partner violence and abuse of the elderly. When interpersonal violence occurs in families, its psychological consequences can affect parents, children, and their relationship in the short-and long-term.

As far as Purple Hibiscus is concerned, Chimamanda Adichie present an intimate relationship between Papa Eugene and his wife Mama Beatrice that causes physical aggression and psychological harm. It is to be noticed that misunderstanding often existed in their home due to Eugene’s bad behavior toward her life. Beatrice had never been happily in Eugene’s home. She was beaten every time. Her husband forgot that victims who were pregnant a domestic violence relationship experienced greater risk of miscarriage. And this is what happened to Beatrice with two miscarriages to the risk of death.

In addition, these is broad consensus that women are more often subjected to severe forms of abuse and are more likely to be injured by an abusive partner, like Papa Eugene toward her wife Mama Beatrice by beating her every time. There is a large body of cross-cultural evidence that women are subjected to domestic violence significantly more often than men. This can be evidenced due to a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/interpersonal_violence.accessed October 14th, 2019 at 4.25 p.m)

2.3.2. Police Violence

Police brutality is another form of political violence. It is most commonly described in juxtaposition with the term excessive force. Police brutality can be defined as “civil rights’ violence that occurs when a police officer acts with excessive force by using an amount of force with regards to a civilian that is more than necessary.” Police brutality and the use of excessive force are present throughout the world. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/violence>. Accessed Septembre 20th, 2020 at 2.40 p.m.)

As far as Purple Hibiscus is concerned, Chimamanda Adichie shows the brutality of a dictatorial regime in Nigeria. One can notice the disproportional force used between the population especially women and the agents’ order in the following passage by the narrator:

“As we left market with our sandals and some fabric Mama had brought, we saw a small crowd gathered around the vegetable stalls we had passed earlier, the ones living the road soldiers were milling around. Market women were shouting, and many had both hands placed out their heads, in the way that people do not show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short afro. Her wrapper had come undone and her white underwear showed. “Hurry up” Mama said. I felt that she wanted to shield us from seeing the soldiers and the women. As we

hurried past, I saw a woman spit at a soldier, I saw soldier raise a whip in the hair. The whip was long. It curled in the air before it landed on the woman's shoulder. Another soldier was kicking "Down trays of fruit, squishing papayas with his boots and laughing... I thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I wished I could have gone over and helped her up, cleaned the red mud from her wrapper." (PH: 44)

2.3.3. Victims of Tradition

Tradition can be defined as a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people, a set of these belief or customs. That has not changed for a long time (Horby 2010:1585)

There is no doubt that till now, African tradition spreads in treating women disrespectfully and rudely. Even those who leave their village to work in the Whiteman's world take traditions with them.

A typical case is that Chimamanda Adichie describes in his work purple Hibiscus which occurred in Ezi Icheke smalltown near Lagos in Nigeria. Customarily a ritual pagan masquerades had to be performed every year, followed by Devilish Folklore. At every year's "mnuo" festival, with its carved wooden face pretty face pretty features, and rouged lips, only men and boys had to stand along the road cheering and throwing money at it. Only women and girl were forbidden by tradition as it related bellow:

"They had hardly passed us when Papa Nrukwu shouted," Look away!" women cannot look at this one. The crowds near the road moved back quickly, fearfully. A few women turned and dashed into nearly compounds." (PH: 86)

From the above illustration one can conclude that woman's freedom is restricted by men and merits to be supported in order to find equilibrium capable to make them aliens not enemies.

III. CONCLUSION

In the light of what has been said through this work, women and girls are subject to many forms of violence including physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse. Violence affects women and girls across all stages of life and is perpetrated by partners and family members as well as strangers.

The inequality struggle between men and women is still far to be won and will not be as long as men's new look society toward women will not change and as long as certain sexist stereotypes will not disappear. So, it time to cast a new look to women. Although the woman's profound sensible, human and humanist qualities she is victim of all sorts of wrong so that, she is even judged before making provocative statements. Some activities committed by men are to created even accepted whereas those committed by women become a scandal.

According, men bear great part of responsibilities in the fate that awaits women. They ought to get involved in sensibilising the young for mentality change. If men bear great part of responsibility women are not also less responsible. They must understand that there is no longer Manna on this planet. They must clean their right at all costs. Furthering gender equality and ending violence against women and girls cannot take place in a female-only vacuum, and that the men and boys should be seen as allies not enemies.

Finally, the government all over the world should also be working to ensure women and girls are able to enjoy full and equal human right; creating an environment that enables gender equality; ensuring women's participation in leadership; and monitoring progress of all of this involvement. If this equilibrium would be respected, the universe world join Doctor Kwama N'Krumah's philosophy when he says we can create a glorious future, not in terms of war and military pomp, but in terms of social progress and of peace. For we repudiate war and violence." (Dr Kwame N'Krumah's speech of July 1959)

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