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## Table of contents

	Pages
L'expérience de l'esthétique du baroque chez Patrick Deville, SYLLA Daouda <i>Université Alassane Ouattara - Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire)</i> .....	p.1
Le jeu théâtral et son ancrage sociologique dans l'espace virtuel des réseaux sociaux ivoiriens, Soupé Lou Touboué Jacqueline, Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny de Cocody-Abidjan.....	p.18
Revisiting the Strengths of Precolonial Africa in the Selected works of Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Elechi Amadi, Coulibaly Aboubacar Sidiki, Samaké Adama (University of Letters and Human Sciences of Bamako) et Alassane Sidibé (Université des Sciences Sociales et de Gestion de Bamako (USSGB)),.....	p.34
L'endogénéité dans l'anthropologie gabonaise, GeorGIN MBENG NDEMEZOGO Université Omar Bongo, Laboratoire d'Anthropologie (LABAN) .....	p.49
Le département de Lettres modernes de l'Université de Libreville en posture classique déclassée : Critique, Théorie et Herméneutique comme destin, Max-Médard EYI, Département de Lettres modernes, Université de Libreville (Gabon) .....	p.60
Characters and Resistance to Patriarchy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's <i>Purple Hibiscus</i> KOUAKOU N'guessan, Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) d'Abidjan.....	p.73
L'insécurité alimentaire dans un monde d'abondance, un symptôme de notre société postmoderne consumériste et égoïste : <i>La Faim blanche</i> d'Aki Ollikainen et <i>Des fourmis dans la bouche</i> de Khadi Hane, Dacharly MAPANGOU, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches littéraires sur les Imaginaires et la Mémoire, Université Omar Bongo.....	p.90
L'homme au travail, l'environnement et la société : quel intérêt pour la responsabilité Sociétale de l'entreprise (RSE) et le développement personnel ? Amadou TRAORE, Université de Ségou (Mali) et Amadou Zan TRAORÉ, Doctorant à Institut de Pédagogie Universitaire.....	p.111
L'impact de la Perestroïka sur l'enseignement de la langue russe : cas du Mali, Dr. Ibrahim BAGNA Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako.....	p.124
Impacts du conflit socio-politique et sécuritaire sur la performance scolaire des élèves du Nord et du centre déplacés à Bamako : cas des résidents des camps de Faladie et de Niamana Mama KONTA, Seydou LOUA, Abdoulaye DIABATE.....	p. 139
La Nomaditude chez Daniel Tongning et Fernando d'Almeida, Seka, Carlos Université Félix Houphouët Boigny de Cocody-Abidjan .....	p.152
Les configurations passionnelles dans <i>L'enfant qui disparaît est une lettre d'alphabet</i> de Josué Guébo, Konan Kouakou Gildas. Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny.....	p.164
The Center-Periphery Encounter in African Fiction: A White Child's Construction of a 'Third Space' in Ifeoma Chinwuba's <i>Fearless</i> (2004), Siaka FOFANA, Félix Houphouët-Boigny University of Cocody-Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire).....	p.176
Le capitalisme comme moyen de domination dans le roman sud-africain : une analyse de <i>The Conservationist</i> de Nadine Gordimer, SORO Donissongoh et BOLI Bi Tah Philipps, Université Jean Lorougnon Guédé de Daloa (Côte d'Ivoire).....	p.189
Impact of Crosscultural Identity in Buchi Emecheta's <i>the New Tribe</i> , Diarrassouba Youssouf, Université Félix Houphouët Boigny.....	p.201

## **Characters and Resistance to Patriarchy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus***

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### **Abstract**

This article aims at studying the key characters that Adichie sets at the firing squad of the anti-patriarchal struggle in *Purple Hibiscus*, her first novel that won her international fame. This study is based on feminist theory. It develops the idea that Aunty Ifeoma, Beatrice and her children Jaja and his sister Kambili are the main characters summoned in the frame of the anti-patriarchal struggle. It concludes that even though the struggle against patriarchy seems an individual and veiled one, it appeals to the forces and intelligence of all the people fallen in the traps of this pernicious evil.

**Key-words:** countering, resistance, freedom, subversion, patriarchy, feminism.

### **Résumé**

Cet article vise à étudier les personnages clés qu'Adichie met au peloton d'exécution de la lutte contre le patriarcat dans *Purple Hibiscus*, son premier roman qui lui a valu une renommée internationale. Cette étude se base sur le féminisme. Elle développe l'idée selon laquelle Aunty Ifeoma, Beatrice et ses enfants Jaja and et sa sœur Kambili sont les principaux personnages convoqués dans le cadre de la lutte anti-patriarcale. L'étude conclue que même si la lutte contre le patriarcat semble être une lutte individuelle et voilée, elle en appelle aux forces et intelligence de toutes les personnes prises au piège de ce mal pernicieux.

**Mots-clés :** contrattaque, résistance, liberté, subversion, patriarcat, féminisme.

## **Introduction**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie can rightfully be considered as one of the firebrand leaders of African female feminists of her generation. While pondering over Nigerian social or historical issues, her works underscore the predicament of women who are disadvantaged, marginalized, and utterly silenced in modern Africa. In addition to feminist concerns clearly noticeable in her work as a whole, she concerns herself with family and societal issues. She thus instills in her novel and characters life ambivalence in such a way that evil and good characters operate in the same or opposed spaces.

*Purple Hibiscus*, her novel that has won her The Commonwealth Writers' Prize, interlaces the story of two nuclear families respectively headed by Eugene a male and Ifeoma a female. In this outstanding novel that interweaves oppression and resistance, evil is epitomized by patriarchy and subsequent autocracy that Adichie tries to curb through some characters. These characters range from Aunty Ifeoma to Mama Beatrice who are full grown-ups and parents to their offspring, namely Jaja and his sister Kambili who all suffer from the dictatorship of Eugene Achike who typifies patriarchy. How do these characters counterattack patriarchy? Differently put, what is the mission that Adichie assigns to each character in the fight against patriarchy and subsequent autocracy? An exhaustive rendition of characters' fight against patriarchy in the frame of a mere article is impossible. The study however pinpoints some salient facts and acts that curb or brake the expansion of patriarchy. Feminist struggle can hardly be hidden wherever patriarchy is deep seated. This is tantamount to saying that this study will be conducted through Feminist lenses, Feminism being considered as a literary movement that aims at triggering a change in society in favor of women.

### **1. Ifeoma, the counter-patriarchal power**

Aunt Ifeoma operates as a counter-patriarchal power in Adichie's fictional world. As a matter of fact, even when she does not willfully engage in activities countering patriarchy, she benefits from a reinforcement that turns her into a counter-patriarchal power. This idea can be elucidated by emphasizing on her actions as the advocate for religious realism and tolerance on the one hand and on roles that turn her into a female-male on the other hand.

#### **1.1 The advocate for religious realism and tolerance**

Religion and its practices can be apprehended in the frame of class struggle. Indeed, *Purple Hibiscus* pins down a veiled struggle opposing African religions and borrowed ones which are the legacy of colonial powers. Religion as conceived by the tenets of Christianity, bears the hallmarks of colonialism and is basically characterized by bigotry that expels the existence and practices of other religions outside the blinkers of western believes. Adichie deconstructs this worldview through Ifeoma who is so realist and tolerant that one can speak of religion syncretism.

The realism and tolerance that characterize Aunty Ifeoma can better be captured in a contrastive study of Ifeoma and her brother Eugene for whom anything out of Christianity is ungodly. This is the root reason why he has rejected his father that he views as a pagan. To this view Ifeoma replies that their father is a traditionalist who must freely worship his gods. Even Kambili realizes that Eugene ill-treats and humiliates his father just because he is not Catholic: “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: 89). All the efforts and blackmails made by Eugene to tame and convert their father into Catholicism have proven ineffective. The old man sternly remains stuck to his gods and even the lures of Eugene do not move him as exemplified here: “Papa had offered to build him a house, buy him a car, and hire him a driver, as long as he converted and throw away the *chi* in the thatch shrine in his yard” (Adichie, 2006: 61). The relationships between father and son degenerates to such a pitch that “Papa himself never greeted Papa-Nnukwu, never visited him, but he sent slim wads of naira through Kevin or through one of our *umunna* members, slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as a Christmas bonus” (Adichie, 2006: 61). Eugene here behaves like colonial masters who denied any religion to African people and accordingly imposed them Christianity.

Ifeoma operates like a redeeming force and intelligence where Eugene who is short-sighted regarding religion has failed to take care of their father. Contrary to Eugene who suffers from the colonial brainwash coupled with narrow-mindedness, Ifeoma loves her father and gives him the opportunity to worship his gods in her home. She even goes further to let her children look at their grandfather from the beginning to the end of his prayers. This is a way for the author to consolidate the traditional, cultural and religious legacy that Eugene is crushing because of the colonial blinders. It is also a plea for religious tolerance instead of fanaticism that utterly overshadows Eugene’s parental love. It is for the sake of this tolerance that Ifeoma goes on pilgrimage with her children and nephew and niece at Aokpe and attends the *mmuo* festival with them.

By turning his back to his father that he has banished from setting his foot in his mansion, Eugene has somehow betrayed patriarchy and by the same token Africa for the interests of the western world. He is “too much of a colonial product” (Adichie, 2006, 21) who epitomizes the colonial figure with a colonized mind and colonial practices. Colonial imprints trigger patriarchy and male superiority. This idea is shared by Clémence Capo et al. who state that “Eugene is a stark reminder of the patriarchy and male chauvinism” (Clémence Capo et al. 2018; 68). As such, the particular violence lorded on his nuclear family to whom he has forbidden to speak their mother tongue in public just to appear civilized and not primitive is an offshoot of colonization and its so-called civilizing mission. Kalu Wosu is therefore right to opine that “Not only are imperialism and patriarchy genetically related, they are also both extremist by nature” (Kalu Wosu, 2017; 56).

In patriarchal societies, it is rather Eugene who must care for their father and de facto become heir when the latter passes away. Yet, because of colonial imprints in his mind, he becomes alien to his tradition and when their father dies he dares to suggest catholic funerals. This is an insult Ifeoma cannot stand. She pressurizes Eugene till he gives the necessary means for decent funerals. Eugene would never organize such ungodly

funerals. These funerals are taken as an avenue to deconstruct the patriarchal belief that only boys are good children because they will perpetuate patriarchy.

Contrary to Eugene who is deeply uprooted and alien to his mother tongue that he has rejected for the sake of British English, Ifeoma expresses her cultural heritage by teaching her children how to speak Igbo and allowing them to speak it freely. This helps them to understand some aspects of life when they are alluded only in Igbo. The interplay between English and Igbo equals that between African religions and western ones that can be practiced without rejecting one another. Here, Aunt Ifeoma “represents the women who act within the dictates of cultural values to permeate their belief about love, relationships and the essence of human values” (Anthony C. Oha 2007, 206). From the above, it can be inferred that Adichie’s brain-child is so open-minded that she departs from the religious fundamentalism that characterizes her brother and which is the root cause of Jihadist movements today. With her, one can be Catholic and go along with those who are not Catholic. One can also be western-educated and remain rooted in African traditions. Ifeoma also stands as an intellectual who does not value material things over her convictions. She is so proud of the mean she happens to have that she can by means bow and scrape before Eugene as exemplified here:

Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But first he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, nwunye m, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima’s trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things (Adichie, 2006: 103).

Aunt Ifeoma has inherited the defiant features of her father who defends African religion till the end by a stern refusal of Eugene’s conditions to build him a descent house and enjoy the wealth of his son. What Adichie is advocating is the search for religious freedom that characterizes Ifeoma. Touting her freedom in the face of Eugene is a way of debunking this social organization represented by the almighty Eugene. Thanks to her worldview, Ifeoma can be considered as the spring where people can satisfy their thirst for religious freedom stemming from conscience awareness.

## **1.2 The female male and conscience arouser**

There is a counterclockwise trend in the way Adichie builds her fictional society. As a female character in a patriarchal society, Ifeoma should normally be shoehorned in some subservient positions regarding decision-making and implementation. Yet, in her goodwill to reconstruct society, Adichie behooves on her responsibilities normally resting with men. This is clearly underscored in her nuclear family where she plays the role of the father and with Eugene and their father. Following her husband’s death, Ifeoma becomes the head of a mono-parental family and as such she is entrusted with the education of her children. This role alone turns her into a female with male responsibilities at the heart of a patriarchal society. Ifeoma is so trustworthy that she succeeds in guaranteeing her offspring an education that is by far better than what Eugene has instilled to his children under the dictation of colonial values that verge on dehumanization. As a

matter of fact, Ifeoma is so outspoken that she has sown the seeds of freedom, brotherhood and socialization as regards her children. Her children are culturally conscious and they enjoy a real freedom that Eugene cannot grant his family that he keeps under his yoke.

When her nephew and niece pay her visit for the first time, she realizes that their education is a nose-diving one. Ifeoma catches up the somehow bankrupt education of Jaja and Kambili by initiating them to true brotherhood, African culture and religion, household tasks and family management. It is in Ifeoma's home that both teenagers bloom and fully experiment freedom and belonging to a family coupled with freedom of speech and self-assertiveness. Though they have everything at home, they could not blossom out because of rigid rules that undermine their freedom and happiness. Does Kambili not say that despite the fact that the air conditioner was on, she was hot (Adichie, 2006: 105) in their mansion? Have they once tasted smiling in their huge house? Answer to such questions are obviously negative ones. Despite all the luxury of their home, they have frozen minds that can by no means illuminate their faces as does Ifeoma's modest house. By resorting to Ifeoma to catch up the broken education of Eugene's children, the author symbolically castrates Eugene and turns Ifeoma into the head of both families. This is clearly spotlighted in the reversal of gender roles in their relationships with their father.

In patriarchal societies, females are so underestimated that they have no status. This often borders on non-existence and marginalization. Even when they exist they have no value, except when they are viewed as commodities that can be bartered at any time. This is clearly expressed by Papa-Nnukwu to his offspring when he tells her: "but you are a woman. You do not count" (Adichie, 2006: 91). It is only in patriarchal societies that a father can tell his progeny that she does not count because she is but a girl. This is a testimony to the belief that "patriarchy is the bedrock of male dominance" (Kalu Wosu, 2017, 57). This dominance covers all sectors of activities:

The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political, and social power, in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power (Tyson, 2006, 86)

Tyson means that everything is structured so to keep women under the tutelage of men. No wonder Beatrice lives in poverty despite her husband's wealth. In spite of the unprecedented wickedness of his son Eugene, Papa-Nnukwu can never nurture such a demeaning idea that turns women into subaltern and insignificant persons always inferior to men regarding him. To break off such prejudices, Adichie manages in such a way that the offspring that counts, namely Eugene, is a fanatical catholic who has forbidden access to his house to his own father. The reason put forward for such a decision is that their father is an ungodly man who worships gods of wood and stones. As a consequence of this banishment, it is Ifeoma who takes care of the old man by paying him visits and taking him to hospital when he is sick despites her meagre means. Papa-Nnukwu unfortunately dies in his daughter's house sequel to a strike of public hospitals. He would probably not die if Eugene played his role as a son by taking him to a private hospital. When for the funerals, Eugene suggests catholic ones, Ifeoma sternly opposes herself and



ends up with Eugene's spiteful blackmails. Her confrontational reaction is underlined in the following:

Aunty Ifeoma got up and started to shout. Her voice was unsteady. "I will put my dead husband's grave 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? *Uchugbagi!*" Aunty Ifeoma snapped her fingers at Papa; she was throwing a curse at him. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She made choking sounds as she turned and walked into her bedroom. (Adichie 2006: 186-187)

What is interesting here is that Ifeoma is the only person on earth who can voice a stern no to the autocratic Eugene without carrying the can. Thanks to her opposition to Eugene, African funerals are organized for their father. Adichie also takes advantage of Ifeoma's rebellious nature to tackle authorities who are but rogue militaries who rule by terrorizing the population. Such a rebellion is observable at the climax of the upheavals at the University of Nsukka. Indeed, she is so refractory to the system that she asks the security men to get out of her home unless they come with a search warrant duly signed by authorities. For her progressive ideas that cannot turn her into a yes-woman that can easily be manipulated, she is obliged to leave Nigeria for the USA, a country of democracy. This trip must not be construed as a way of abandoning her ideals. It must rather be seen as an avenue to live and experiment other forms of happiness and struggles as posited by Bourneuf et Ouellet:

Le voyage qui ouvre l'espace aux homes apparaît comme une promesse de bonheur. Les voyages...satisfont un désir de merveilleux mais traduisent aussi le sentiment d'échapper à la pesanteur, donc à la condition humaine (Bourneuf et Ouellet, 1972 :122)

What is advocated here is that travelling sometimes becomes the solution to a living which is so oppressive that it impedes any freedom. Ifeoma can be rightfully considered as an ideologue whose worldview and manners positively impact her neighborhood. "Her boldness outshines even the most authoritative figure Eugene. It is she who takes initiative to develop self-awareness in Jaja and Kambili. She escapes and helps others escape sorrows in life" (Davis 2020: 229). Among such people is Beatrice who has fallen in the fetters of the dictatorial Eugene.

## **2. Beatrice Akiche, from submission to covert subversion**

Compared with a character such as Mara in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Beatrice Akiche has no real predicament. Yet, she too suffers from ailments which are byproducts of patriarchy. From her silent woe, she moves to a covert revolt that frees her from her husband's yoke.

### **2.1 the passive sufferer**

Generally speaking, marriage in patriarchal societies leads to the enslavement of women, above all when they are jobless and depend on their husbands' whims for survival. This seems untrue of Beatrice who lives like a member of the upper class. But actually she is a silent slave in the hands of Eugene. As a tenet of patriarchy, Eugene is so apprehensive of autonomy that he has established a true master-slave relation with his spouse Beatrice. A master is someone who owns and decides on behalf of his slaves.

Through the property rights granted to the master, he can bully, tame or domesticate his subjects who must not develop any emancipatory idea. This perfectly applies to Beatrice who is battered by the tyrannical Eugene. Eugene misses no occasion to mete out violence on Beatrice to demonstrate his “phallic symbols of male strength and dominance” (Kalu Wosu, 2017, 59). Beatrice cultivates an unmatched gratitude towards Eugene who has remained death-dumb to his community members demanding him to take another woman so as to have more children. This gratitude so dictates Beatrice’s demeanor that she makes efforts to hide her sufferings in order to avoid murdering Eugene’s reputation or spoiling his name. For instance, she is obliged to follow Eugene to the priest’s house despite incapacitating pains linked to a pregnancy. Adou construes this as an unprecedented form of subjugation by writing: “we witness her (Beatrice’s) alienation and subordination in a suffocated environment dominated by her husband who exemplifies the patriarchal ideology. She is neglected and deprived of the basic amenities of her life in the private sphere of the family” (Adou, 2018, 296). What is inferred here is that the respect of conventions has annihilated any idea of self-confidence that triggers independence quest. With Eugene, Christianity actively participates in the reification of women.

Eugene is a raw and rowdy man so murder-oriented that each time his wife is pregnant he bullies her and provokes miscarriages. Eugene has voluntarily destroyed many pregnancies and Beatrice has kept everything secret. Even when she dares to mention the numberless miscarriages she does not make people hint at the mean responsibility of her husband. Yet, even though she hides the reasons of the miscarriages, everybody is abreast of the truth. Instead of really bemoaning her fate and let people discover Eugene’s cannibal-like attitude she says: “There was an accident, the baby is gone”. Willfully bringing about miscarriages is a way of sucking the fetus by Eugene, which tallies with the blood shedding Africa suffered during colonization. Miscarriages are a way for Adichie to end up with patriarchy. Indeed, they grant no male heir to Eugene and Jaja who was supposed to inherit his father claims a murder he has not committed, which turns his sister into heir.

Beatrice passively accepts her fate because she wants to respect patriarchal conventions that view a good wife as an obedient and voiceless one who cannot live without her husband, even when the latter proves to be despotic and inhuman. Eugene’s wealth has secured them a lifestyle envied by many other women of Enugu and its neighborhood. But the reality proves that she is as poor as the other women. Despite her husband’s wealth, she has no money and cannot afford any trip by herself. Eugene controls her movement through a chauffeured car. The only time she goes to Auntie Ifeoma’s home alone, she is obliged to steal her husband’s money. This destituteness daily lived by Beatrice echoes that of masses of Nigerians fallen in the pitfall of starvation within the petrodollar. Beatrice is left in poverty because she has no job. Yet, she has a clogged mind that maintains her in the visceral world built by Eugene. To her, a woman cannot imagine nor live a descent life without a husband.

This worldview actually stems from patriarchal pacts that tout marriage as the panacea to women's predicament. Beatrice's ailment turns out to be marriage. The novel as a whole uncovers her psychological traits which are coterminous with Mara's in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. In this moving novel, Mara is turned into a slave in the hands of the heartless Akobi who is supposed to be her husband. Yet, she clings to her marriage whatever the consequence. This is what M'bra infers when he states that "Mara is so clung to this marriage that she finally becomes a 'beast of sum rather than a married woman'" (M'bra, 2016: 250). In a few words, Beatrice really suffers in the asphyxiating hands of "Eugene who is a stark reminder of the patriarchy and male chauvinism" (Gbaguidi, 2018: 68). As time wears on, she moves from the frozen-minded woman to a character whose subversive attitude is revealed by the murder of her totalitarian husband.

## **2.2 Poisoning Eugene as a form of subversion**

In the wake of the inhumanity lored on her by Eugene, Beatrice is so pissed off that she gradually develops a hidden subversion targeting him. This subversion is climaxed with the murder of Eugene, which is a form of assertiveness.

The violence inflicted to Beatrice ranges from physical violence to psychological and religious violence. Furthermore, their home is a prison where decision making is a sort of private hunting ground for Eugene who typifies viciousness. Bourneuf et Ouellet state that an oppressing space broods hate and revolt : *L'espace oppressant fait parfois couvrir la haine ou la révolte au cœur d'un personnage* (Bourneuf et Ouellet, 1972 :121). The same is true of Eugene's house which is a miniature colony with a strong grip over its inhabitants. To Ifeoma who endlessly tells her that "sometimes life begins when marriage ends" (Adichie, 2006: 83), Beatrice would reply by advocating the impossibility to imagine life without Eugene: "Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go?" (Adichie, 2006: 255). Notwithstanding, the last straw that breaks the camel's back is the last miscarriage willfully provoked by Eugene. This, coupled with the strong grip of Eugene provokes an anti-violence violence which is observed with Beatrice whose only response to Eugene's barbarity is his poisoning.

To avoid further miscarriages and also avoid jeopardizing her own life, she resorts to poison to break the yoke of Eugene who has gone too far in inhumanity: "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: 290). As can be seen, "as events unfolds, she was forced by situations beyond her control to respond and go radical in order to crush anything that stands in her way to happiness" (Ibeku Ijeoma Ann, 2015, 426). Considering this radicalization, one agrees with Sandra Nwokocha who pens that "Beatrice's supposedly construed passivity can be read as disguised resistance precisely because neither Eugene, before his murder, nor the neighbors ever believe that she is capable of committing the crime she ultimately claims (Sandra Nwokocha 2019, 372). Frantz Fanon once penned that violence targeting the oppressor is positive violence. In the same seam, one can say that the tragic death of Eugene is a response to the unprecedented violence he has cultivated in his nuclear family. His death respects the saying that "He that sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind".

The death of Eugene who typifies neo-colonial leaders whose social projects and ruling strategies are hallmarked by immoderate violence is the symbolic death of patriarchy. It is peered with that of the “big oga atop a prostitute, foaming at the mouth and jerking-...” (Adichie 2006, 297). The Big Oga, refers to General Sani Abacha, whose death following that of his challenger Moshood Abiola in 1998, puts a temporary ending to Nigeria’s military rule, which is synonymous with burgeoning democracy. It is an attempt at debunking the patriarchal society and it consequently announces the possibility of a new society with new ideals excluding the iron hand that characterizes despotism. If one contends that abortion is a crime, then Eugene is guilty of many crimes. No wonder the author sentences him to death. By poisoning him, Beatrice just rids the society of a man who has turned into a bloodsucker symbolically eating his offspring. This cannibal-like attitude justifies the metamorphosis of his spouse as pinpointed by Davis: “Beatrice suddenly explodes in the end of the narrative in return to all that she had to suffer. An unexpected change happens in her outlook towards life which destroys her enemy completely” (Davis, 2020: 229). Hadn’t Eugene been a bloodsucker, she wouldn’t have poisoned him and wouldn’t have been an adept of radical feminism.

Fortunately, enough, this tendency to radical feminism is blurred with the engagement of Jaja in the fight against patriarchy. This is in line with Ogundipe-Leslie Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWA) which does not claim a radical dismantling of patriarchy but rather advocates for a collaboration between men and women for the strengthening of women. In the same seam, Ifecholobi states that “Feminism works hand in hand with egalitarianism (human equality) towards achieving the equality of the sexes in a perfect utopian state” (Ifecholobi 2014, 17). To show that she has matured into a rebel, Beatrice refuses to mourn her late husband. She also gives orders to the gateman so as not to open the gate to visitors who have never dared to criticize Eugene’s religious fundamentalism.

*Purple Hibiscus* is a breakthrough in the deconstruction of patriarchy and is geared towards the assertion and reinforcement of women. No wonder Davis pens that Adichie “uses her novels as instruments of self-awareness and healing for the abused women who may have undergone many sorrowful situations in their marital life (Davis, 2020: 230). This self-awareness is also observable with Jaja and Kambili.

### **3. Jaja and Kambili, the ‘blooming hibiscuses’**

Jaja and his sister Kambi slowly but surely move from subjects of history to actors of their history throughout the novel. Indeed, from the too obedient children taken in the whirlwind of the ‘Tsunami Eugene’, they free themselves by challenging their father’s authority. Their movement from the margins to the center testifies to the author’s willingness to weaken and bring to naught the existing society.

#### **3.1 Jaja, the reincarnated subversive king**

Chukwuka, nicknamed Jaja for the sounds he emitted during his firsts attempts to speak, typifies heroes who proceed to self-sacrifice for the benefice of others. As a hero,

he undergoes initiations whereby he acquires specific skills to take up life and societal challenges that set him at the service of the community.

Jaja's initiation actually starts the day people nickname him and his aunt Ifeoma tells Beatrice that Jaja sounds good. By this name the rebellious nature of King Jaja is transferred to Jaja in his early boyhood. Differently put, when people nicknamed Chukwuka Jaja, they have inculcated him the defiant mood of a former king named Jaja. Like a phoenix, King Jaja was reborn from his ashes with all his untamable features. Yet, from early boyhood to his adolescence, his father has succeeded in dominating him. The dormant rebellion that was brooding in his veins blooms after his sojourn in Nsukka, the secessionist Igbo land in the history of Nigeria. In the aftermath of this stay, he starts rejecting the western world and its nauseating practices. Like the Igbo land, Jaja initiates secessionist activities targeting his father. Adichie here resuscitates King Jaja for his bravery and honesty and asks him to resume the struggle where it has stopped following his exile to the West Indies by colonial invaders. Referring to this king, she writes:

He was the king of the Opobo people and when the British came, he refused to let them control all the trade. He did not sell his soul for a bit of gunpowder like the other kings did, the British exiled him to the West Indies (Adichie, 2006: 153).

King Jaja was exiled to the West Indies because of his will to protect his community and his land. Adichie resorts to historical facts to show that resistance to evil is an ongoing process that will cease only when everybody, regardless of their race will enjoy freedom. The historical protective attitude is transferred to young Jaja who concerns himself with the welfare of others, whatever the outcome. Such protective attitudes are observable on many occasions. When to assuage her menstrual cramps Kambili is advised by her mother to quickly eat and take a drug and she is caught on the spot by Eugene, Jaja claims guilt. As a consequence, he is flogged, together with Kambili and Beatrice. Later on, when Kambili is caught with the picture of their grandfather, Jaja tells Eugene that he is the one who has brought the picture. This results in their being lashed by Eugene. Once told by Kambili that their mother is pregnant, he says that he will protect the baby from their father whose downpour of violence tallies with the bestiality he has received as imperial legacy. The last protective deed by Jaja occurs on the occasion of their father's death when Jaja tells manifest lies to save Beatrice who has poisoned him from going to prison. All in all, Jaja always sacrifices his interests to protect weaker ones from the fury of Eugene.

The western world, namely Britain, is represented in *Purple Hibiscus* by Eugene who is challenged by his own son that he has till now controlled. Defying the highhanded Eugene is therefore a way of rejecting the western world and its practices that verge on inhumanity. Jaja's defiance recalls the struggles for independence. It also suggests new forms of struggles for the effective independence of Africa.

Jaja begins defying his father's authority after a sojourn in Ifeoma's house where he realizes that compared with their tyrannical father, Ifeoma has a conception of education that places everybody before his responsibility. The way she discusses with her children, the freedom of speech granted to her progenies who share household tasks, their

premature conscience arising and their assertive behavior that makes them listen to culturally conscious Nigerian artists positively impact on Jaja's mind. He thus understands that apart from being excellent at school, his life and that of his sister are but social wastelands. A wasteland is so barren that it smashes any emancipatory idea and behavior. The personified version of this wasteland is Eugene whose only real success is his businesslike acumen. The only solution to counterattack the wasteland cultivated by Eugene is to challenge his authority, which is tantamount to turning the Sahara into a fertile land.

The first challenge is a religious one: Jaja clearly identifies the wafer as a nauseating thing that he must definitely get rid of. To his father who states that rejecting the wafer is death, he replies "then I will die Papa" (Adichie 2006: 15). Earlier in the same conversation, Jaja says the wafer gives him bad breath. "and the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me" (Adichie, 2006: 14). Defying Papa's authority is a way of defying patriarchy. I accordingly go along with Peters Audrey who opines: "Jaja's defiance of his father, therefore, is an assault not merely on the power of his father but also on the power of the ruling class. Given that this ruling class is patriarchal, then Jaja is questioning patriarchy" (Audrey Peters 2012, 31). The main cause of women's woes is patriarchy that operates as the secular arm of colonization. Indeed, despite independence, tycoons like Eugene still have a colonized mind that dictates their behavior. This colonial mind manifests itself through the stern refusal of any African religion or culture at the profit of bigotry and fanaticism, thus contributing to the uprooting of indigenous people

In African religion which is demonized by Eugene, there is no wafer. The wafer is a western invention aiming at tying Christian adepts to Jesus, the lord according to western belief. Refusal of the wafer is a way of vomiting Christianity which has served as the key blinding ideology in the subjugation of Africa. Beyond Christianity, it is all the western ways of life instilled in them by the system that oppresses and kills any humanity and culture that Adichie summons before the literary court. Considering this literary subpoena, *Purple Hibiscus* can be considered as a pamphlet aiming at decolonizing the minds of all the African people whose minds are imprisoned in the colonial *ergastulum*. These Africans represented here by Eugene have so swallowed western ideologies that they are now people with a black skin, and a white mind that forbids any African identity or practice.

Jaja represents a new and idealized generation of African leaders who demand that the umbilical cord be effectively cut from imperial forces. Peters Audrey posits in the same vein that "Kambili and Jaja are allegories for burgeoning post-colonial Nigeria, which must also face an adolescent-like emergence into an identity separate from its colonial roots" (Audrey Peters, 2012, 29). Their mission is a Christ-like one and imposes sacrifices to save others. This is how must be construed Jaja's claiming of the murder of his father even when there are evidences that Beatrice is the murderer. In addition to being sacrificial lamb, this generation should be strong enough to shoulder the fight for the true African decolonization. Adichie broadens Jaja's shoulders only within a week to turn him into the ideal struggler everybody is expecting. Referring to him, Kambili says: "His shoulders seemed broader, and I wondered if it was possible for a teenager's shoulders to

broaden in a week” (Adichie, 2006: 162). From these lines, it can be inferred that Jaja’s shoulders are so developed that he can shoulder subversion against their tyrannical father and by extension the fight for freedom. He thus represents progressive movements for the independence of Nigeria taken hostage by rogue militaries. Jaja’s defiance of Eugene is like a natural phenomenon that cannot be stopped, just like the blooming of flowers. A parallel can here be established between Jaja and Auntie Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscuses:

Jaja’s defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, flagrant 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, 24).

Like these flowers, Jaja is ready enough to experiment a new kind of freedom, a borderless one that does not shy in the face of patriarchy and its tenets. It is helpful to note that the opening pages of the novel are entitled *Breaking Gods*, with *Palm Sunday* as sub-title. These titles are not chosen randomly. They are an open window on religion, namely Christianity and hint at the turmoil brought about by Jesus on the occasion of his entry in the holy city of Jerusalem. The challenge of the Roman Empire by Jesus equates that of Eugene by his son Jaja who is back from a stay in his aunt’s home. Musa Dube highlights this as follows:

The tradition of Palm Sunday thus reeks with liberation undertones--suggesting freedom from enslavement and colonizing structural powers and insisting on liberation”. For *Purple Hibiscus* to evoke Palm Sunday, by utilizing it as the opening setting of the narrative is to underline the arrival of another king, who will challenge the colonial and oppressive powers and religious leaders (Dube, 2018, 225).

What Dube is assuming is that time has come for another chief for the reign of Eugene has come to its end. Differently put, challenging the feudal king sounds the death knell of colonization for the blooming of true Africans. Defying Eugene also occurs on the occasion of the presentation of a new type of juice made by one of Eugene’s factories. Eugene is a businesslike businessman who requests the viewpoint of his nuclear family each time a new good has to be commercialized. Instead of giving his opinion, Jaja says nothing and goes straight to his bedroom. Later on he demands his key be given him, which is a way of claiming his own space and intimacy.

Jaja operates as a king at two levels: historical figure as seen in the novel but also religiously speaking, he epitomizes Jesus who has redeemed all the humanity of their sins. This is how one must construe his claiming the death of Eugene to rescue his mother who symbolizes Africa, just like Kambili who is a mother-to-be.

### **3.2 Kambili and assertiveness**

Apart from Beatrice, Kambili is the female character who suffers from the despotic practices of Eugene. More than submissive till the sojourn in Nsukka, she turns into a defiant girl and challenges her father’s authority. This challenge is by no means adolescence crisis; it is the rebuttal of long-imposed inhuman practices and a form of assertiveness.

It is instructive to mention that before Palm Sunday, Kambili has never thought by herself. All her thought is modelled so as to contend her tyrannical father who has imposed a canvas of thinking and speaking. Such practices are expected to model obedient women as is the case with Beatrice who cannot challenge her husband's decisions even when they are harmful ones. This lack of freedom of thinking and behaving by no means favors Kambili's socialization: at school, she has no friend, she speaks to nobody, she plays with nobody and even when she is chosen to sing a song she is utterly tongue-tied. Moreover, Eugene has so conditioned her that she is like a snail hiding in its shell to avoid contact. And yet, adolescence is the period of time when one experiences facts that favor the easy integration to society.

Another damage of Eugene's suffocating claws on Kambili is total absence of basic household tasks that any prospective spouse must master. On the occasion of their first visit to their aunt, her cousin even wonders how come that she does not know elementary things such as peeling yams. The rigidity that victimizes Kambili and her brother tallies with that displayed by rogue militaries under the reign of the despotic Sani Abacha who had an iron grip on the country. Abacha and his alike have turned Nigeria into a Sahara. The smash of any emancipatory idea and its bloodshed by militaries is symbolized by the blood-colored juice that Kambili poured on the white tablecloth on the occasion of Christmas dinner.

Contrary to her brother Jaja who dares to voice his refusal of their father's autocracy by a stern no, Kambili remains voiceless. This voicelessness results from patriarchal practices that shoehorn girls into marginal roles in society. Kambili is one of the characters of the triangle of silence created by the despotic Eugene. "Silence is therefore another medium of disempowerment" (Clémence Capo et al. 2018; 68). The members of this triangle, namely Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili were so silenced that they have developed their own language to communicate: speaking with their spirits. Thus, before Palm Sunday that marks the beginning of Eugene's downfall, the triangle only communicates with their spirits. In Nsukka, her cousin Amaka tutors her as regards culturally conscience music and attitudes and habits of a female teenager. After Amaka's tutorship, a mood of awakening starts brooding in Kambili's vein. This is what Daria Tunca emphasizes by writing that the "relaxed environment provides Kambili and Jaja with an alternative model to the climate of fear that pervades the paternal home" (Tunca, 2009; 122). This is materialized by the acceptance of a picture of her grandfather that she brings and secretly keeps at home until it is randomly discovered by Eugene.

The discovery of Papa Nnukwu's picture marks the starting point of Kambi's defiance of their father. As a matter of fact, Eugene has taken and torn the painting, which Kambili has seen as the loss of a cherished property. The affection of this painting testifies to a consciousness of Africa and its values represented by Papa Nnukwu who was the bridge between the past and the present. Eugene who is ostracized by the colonial brain wash gets infuriated by Kambili's attitude. His wrath worsens when for the first time, the daughter is motionless following an order that triggered a total physical response in the past as evidenced here after:



“Get up. Get away from that painting”

I lay there, did nothing.

Get up. Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me (Adichie, 2006, 216).

Kambili has hitherto shown an unquestionable admiration for Eugene. Yet, realizing that Eugene has gone too far in his extremism, she decides to silently rebel against him. Despite the violence of the kicking, Kambili does not give in. This scene reveals aspects of her name which according to Kalu Wosu literally means “let me live”. Let me live the way I want to live or let me alone implies freedom, independence. One thus understands why despite all sort of violence, Eugene has not really succeeded in dousing Kambili’s burning rebellion. Freedom can sometimes be expressed through inaction as is seen here: she “lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus in her integrated Science for Junior Secondary Schools” (Adichie, 2006, 216). The imagery of the child in the uterus clearly refers to a pregnancy. This imagery is powerful enough to indicate that a new Kambili is being born. This new Kambili who is being born from the ashes of the voiceless and non-assertive one who has till now lived in the shadow of an idealized father is entrusted with the mission of toppling patriarchy. Like Eugene, patriarchy proves to be but a deceitful system that favors male dominance whose features are violence and dictatorship.

Beyond Kambili, it is the Igbo society, even Nigeria as a whole which is pregnant with change. One can rightfully state that Adichie takes this image to announce the birth of a new world full of hope because extremism will be overcome. A link can thus rightfully be established between the adolescent and the blooming hibiscus in the novel. Quoting from Heather (2003) C. Oha writes:

The purple hibiscus becomes a metaphor for freedom and independence. While a flower may seem delicate in constitution, purple is historically associated with royalty and the divine. The purple flower then comes to signify Kambili's urge to bloom, her natural instinct to look for the light. (as quoted by Oha, 2007, 204)

What is being underscored is the fact that something new is getting impetus in the fight against patriarchy. Better, the hope that patriarchy is being crippled is visible in Kambili’s metamorphosis that sounds like a knockout blow to Eugene and beyond Eugene all social norms that impede liberating motion. This unexpected but efficient sword thrust is a symbolic one given to patriarchy and its dehumanizing conventions and practices. Here, gone are Eugene’s tight grips that impede any movement and reflection outside his long process of stupidity and introversion dictated by the western decadent world.

Adichie goes further to show that a change has occurred when Kambili insists that Auntie Ifeoma be called before her release from hospital, which was impossible in a recent past when Eugene’s shadow was looming over his children. Kambili insists so because she suffocates when she is home: “although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated (Adichie, 2006; 15). Following her release, she

goes to Nsukka. This trip must not only be construed as the flight of an oppressive space. It is also a form of refusal, a way of saying no. A trip is an avenue to see other spaces and broaden one's mind. This in return favors capacity building which is of paramount importance in the process of self-accomplishment as penned by Bourneuf and Ouellet : "par le voyage se révèlent ou s'accomplissent les personnages et, par-delà ces aventures grotesques ou épiques, l'auteur songe à un autre voyage, celui de l'homme pendant son existence (Bourneuf et Ouellet, 1972, 97).

This too implies that Kambili is moving from the periphery to the center where she listens to indigenous musicians like Fela and Osadebe who are "culturally conscious, and have something real to say (Adichie, 2006: 118). Moving from the margins to the center is tantamount to being responsible for one's deeds and destiny. In other words, it equates with leaving the state of object to that of subject. A subject writes his/her part of history and his/her own history according to his/her will and on the behalf of humanity. One is strengthened in this idea when in the aftermath of Eugene's death, Kambili becomes the heir of the familial economic empire and the family is not given the opportunity to swoop on Eugene's property. In an Igbo society such as the one depicted in *Purple Hibiscus*, there is a strong discrimination between men and women and heritage is the natural right of men only. Accordingly, the expected heir of Eugene is Jaja, given that he is male and the elder brother of Kambili. Yet, in her willpower to break the backbone of patriarchy, Adichie manages so as Jaja claims a murder he has not committed. Ergo, he is sent to prison and Kambili de facto becomes the decision maker.

Here, the deconstructive account of the patriarchal society which, like any society, collapses after its heyday, is clear enough. The economic power granted to Kambili must be construed as that symbolically granted to all the women trapped in the fetters of patriarchy. In a word, the author symbolically frees all the women from the wolf jaws of patriarchy and turns them into decision-makers who can turn fatality inherent to male chauvinism into collective achievement. This achievement is paired with the sharing and assistance brought to needy people by Kambili in lieu of sheer individualism that tallies with wickedness. Kambili's assertiveness is an offshoot of their visit to Nsukka that really impacts their worldview and triggers other lifestyles.

## **Conclusion**

Adichie does not claim overt struggle against male chauvinism as is the case for many feminist writers. Yet, she is a finely honed feminist who infuses in her novel rebellious figures who challenge, counterpoise and overcome patriarchy under the tutorship of characters operating as ideologues awakening the conscience of suffering people. No wonder Ifeoma is bestowed with roles behooving on men. One can portend that beyond the apparently fragile characters, be it teenagers or women, hides a strong and powerful female activist. Like her brain-children, Adichie deems it her responsibility to plea for a new social order whereby women won't be mere objects in the sinful hands of fanatical and totalitarians who value foreign interests over domestic ones. *Purple*

*Hibiscus* is therefore a showdown between patriarchy and emancipative ideas for a fairer society.

The revolt targeting Eugene is by the same token a rebellion against a social organization that impedes freedom. By later killing Eugene who operates as a powerful neo-colonial authority, Beatrice thows off the yoke of patriarchy and new imperialism. This symbolically frees all the people still under oppression in order to give them responsibilities in the construction of a new Nigeria rid of the evils that hinder its development. Adichie's novel is consequently a showcase of hope for a true decolonization of African minds. If we agree that Eugene is an imperialist ill-treating indigenous populations, then one can aver that his death announces the end of external forces that rule Africa through their local henchmen. Adichie's novel is consequently an exorcism aiming at riding Nigeria of the evil of patriarchy rooted in colonialism. The necessity to reshuffle society and hope for a better society rid of the exogenous or endogenous grips of patriarchy is expressed by the imagery of the rain at the end of the novel: "The new rains will come soon" (Adichie, 2006, 307) to cleanse the sins of current Nigeria for a new germination.

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