



2 | THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION IN CHIMAMANDA'S PURPLE HIBISCUS

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Abstract

Critical discourses in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* have generally engaged this important postcolonial work from the perspectives of colonial history, gender dynamism, deconstruction of its narratives, and the literary/linguistic agenda of its characters, plots, and dialogues. Departing from these dominant approaches, the present study appropriates the discourses, worldviews, and values of *Purple Hibiscus* through the prism of liberation theology. It examines the theological motifs in *Purple Hibiscus* in critical conversation to patriarchy, colonialism, and sexism. Grounded in liberation methodology of African women theologians, the study offers new perspectives in Adichie's representation of radical female characters, and their traumatic quest for liberation in patriarchal and post-patriarchal spaces. Through these feminine encounters, *Purple Hibiscus* provides a theological guide for the task and practice of African liberation theology.

Keywords: Chimamanda Adichie, Patriarchy, liberation theologies, Christianity, Religion, *Purple Hibiscus*, postcolonialism, violence, patriarchal resistance, Gender.

Introduction

Purple Hibiscus has generated a lot of controversies and debates on the diverse forms of exploitations of women by the intimidating forces of institutionalized patriarchy and the cultural machineries of religious belief systems, which collectively impoverished the human flourishing of the

female gender in Africa.¹ Since its publication in 2003, *Purple Hibiscus* has elicited diverse interpretative engagements and multifaceted conversations within the intellectual area of postcolonial discourses. We discern four major scholarly trajectories.

The first method approaches the literature from the perspective of its philosophical-postcolonial template. Scholars who use this method examine the philosophical ideologies postulated in the characterization, background, and the general metanarrative world which impacted the creation of Adichie's novel. Taylor, for instance, takes up the philosophical and ideological mappings of *Purple Hibiscus* as they 'arise and evolve in contradistinction to other opposing ideologies' (1991:48). For Udu-mukwu and others (2011:192; Ogwude, 2011; Raja, 2019) the narrative universe of *Purple Hibiscus* exposes the symbolic and actual reality of the post African colonial society.

The second approach explores the methodology of deconstruction. Based on the modern impact of Jacques Derrida, the application of this method on *Purple Hibiscus* seeks to unpack the cultural binaries and tensions in the world of *Purple Hibiscus* in direct conversation to Adichie or other social constructs. Fwangyil (2011:264, 273) feminist's reading of *Purple Hibiscus* attempts to deconstruct the author's perceptions about patriarchy and how the author's description of patriarchy in *Purple Hibiscus* mirrors the radical feminist's position which is closely associated with the extreme expression of western feminism. Oha (2007) approached the deconstruction of *Purple Hibiscus* from the perspective of

¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award respectively. The author is one of the contemporary African female writers to have won an international recognition for her prowess in translating her world of experiences into fascinating and thought-provoking works that challenge our conceptions about the impacts of colonialism and cultural imperialism on the state of women in Africa. Additionally, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has made its landmark as one of the best African novels that has been translated into over thirty languages. The novel has four narrative sections that are further subdivided in sixteen chapters. The four sections are entitled, (1) "Breaking Gods: Palm Sunday" (1-24); (2) "Speaking with our spirits: Before Palm Sunday (25-258); (3) "The pieces of God: After Palm Sunday " (259-295); and (4) "A different silence: The present (297-330).

its political agenda, while Ogaga (2009; Beilke, 2006) deconstructed the use of silence as a patriarchal weapon to subdue women and awakened the consciousness about the historical absence of women in many sectors of African society.

The third approach engages *Purple Hibiscus* in its linguistic and literary methodologies. Here, scholars are interested in *Purple Hibiscus* as a beautiful fictional work of art that uses language, narrative methods, literary and linguistic devices to intensely capture, create, or critique the themes and ideas raised in the novel. Using Fowler's theory of "mind-style", Tunca (2009) explains the way Kambili's use of language and style charted the trajectories of oppression and freedom woven into the novel. Al Fajri (2017) studies the specific uses of narrative styles and linguistic devices in *Purple Hibiscus* as they help shape characters' personalities and reader's perception of them. And few others (Hewett, 2005; Bryce, 2008) identify *Purple Hibiscus* as part of the rising wave of African female writers who are on the mission of rewriting the Nigerian literary history.

The fourth method deploys a liberative approach. A significant number of studies on *Purple Hibiscus* observes the many ways religio-cultural ideas of patriarchy and other dominant ideologies greatly shaped and perpetuated the objectification, oppression, and marginalization of women. They then underline ways that *Purple Hibiscus* resists these oppressive metanarratives with liberating paradigms that can help women upturn the oppressive systems and redefine their identities. Ifechelobi (2014), for instance, observes with interest Adichie's radical option of killing the patriarch as a way of emancipating women from the victimhood of androcentric values and other cultural oppressive worldviews. Stobie (2010; Ordu, 2021) focusses on Adichie's endorsement of "values such as respect, tolerance, forgiveness and hybridity in terms of religion, spirituality, culture and gender roles" as solution to the use of religion to govern and dominate people.

Despite these significant assessments, it is worth noting that there have not been studies on *Purple Hibiscus* from the centrality of liberation theology. Departing from the earlier methodological agenda, this present work engages the narrative world of *Purple Hibiscus* through the formidable lenses of its theological motifs, and the liberative theology that ap-

appropriates the characterization, plot and narrative world of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* from the perspective of Christian theology. Grounded on liberative theological methods by African women theologians such as Mercy Oduyoye, B. Mbuy-Beya, Theresa Okure and Musa Dube, this work evaluates Adichie's liberating visions and counter-theology in its confrontation with dominant theological traditions and their attending religious assumptions which subtly empowered patriarchy and other cultural oppressions of women in postcolonial African society.

1. Patriarchy, Liberation Theology & *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie's representation of patriarchy in *Purple Hibiscus* draws largely from the gender stereotypes that has its historical roots in both the practices of African Christianity and African cultures.² In the narrative world of *Purple Hibiscus*, there are two important systemic institutions that reinforce patriarchy, (a) the church, and (b) the society. The character of Eugene Achike (the husband of Beatrice, and the father of Jaja and Kambili) is projected as an embodiment of these structures since his religious beliefs and traditional upbringing were his continual points of referents for his oppressive behavior and intimidating sense of identity in and outside of his household.

Motivated by his religious ideologies, Eugene's household served like a mini-sacred space and a mini-Christian community to ensure the spread, continuity, and realization of the Christian message. In contrast, what one encounters were thrilling visual horrors of violence, oppression and intimidation perpetuated by the patriarchal figure Eugene (Adichie, 2003:5, 11-25, 30, 33-36, 105, 158-162, 249-250). Eugene was very brutal, and majority of the violence inflicted on his family stem from his religious convictions which were not a reflection of true Christianity. Difficult as it might seemed to picture the gruesome scenes of violence in *Purple Hibiscus*, it becomes even more heartbreaking to see that Eugene

² According to Oduyoye (1986), patriarchy is not foreign to Africans. Most, if not all, African societies are patriarchal. The problem, however, is that the conventional patriarchy of postcolonial times was marred by oppressive power relationship, social structures and ideologies that changed the gender relational dynamisms and generated much conflict than originally was.

never considered his violent attitude a problem. He did not want his authentic Christian beliefs to challenge his predisposition to gender violence, intimidation, and harassment.

Eugene was an embodiment of patriarchy *par excellence*. Eugene had complete control over his wife and children's emotions, thoughts, and actions. He decides the organization of the household and forces them to participate. Paradoxically, his Christian beliefs pervasively emboldened and reinforced his oppressive attitudes. Eugene's socio-cultural and religious beliefs operated seamlessly in the world of *Purple Hibiscus* to the extent Eugene was by way of his Christian religious conviction, the perfect example of the Christian believer who enjoyed the goodwill, cordial relationship, and sacerdotal approval of the church. Given the above background, Adichie uses the images of the two female characters, Auntie Ifeoma and Beatrice to deconstruct patriarchy.

The resistance paradigm projected in Auntie Ifeoma's depicts the African womanist's approach that protests patriarchy and its roots in religion and culture by uplifting and empowering the woman to make changes from within. The nature of Mercy Oduyoye's solution to patriarchy can be likened to Adichie's proposition in *Purple Hibiscus*. As Oduyoye (1988:50) emphasizes, education creates the grassroot resource and power every female needs to resist patriarchal influence. Auntie Ifeoma's educational exposure was the first element that will shape her future because it offered her the opportunity for self-development, gender flourishing and identity building. Because of her background, Auntie Ifeoma's house became a liberative space where patriarchy is apparently neutralized, and its androcentric demonic control on the female gender is duly exorcised.

Like Oduyoye, Adichie critiqued patriarchy by encouraging the paradigm of women empowerment of other women. Auntie Ifeoma exemplifying this model, identifies with the victim of patriarchy in building structures of solidarity and resistance where she can bond with Beatrice and the other women to empower them in bold and assertive resistance of the gender *status quo* in the world of *Purple Hibiscus*. According to Oduyoye (1990:48), "the power of African women is in the solidarity" against patriarchy which is "achieved through the formation of sisterhoods". For Auntie Ifeoma, a caution on religion is a caution on patriarchy. The ability

to accept the differences inherent in every religion and culture, and the openness to accept its rich values and virtues will greatly facilitate the transformation of the stereotypical representations of the female gender in *Purple Hibiscus*.

In the character of Beatrice, Adichie resisted patriarchy by eliminating Eugene, thereby unleashing chaos on her world. This type of cruelty executed to Eugene is untypical of the African woman. It means that Beatrice's dynamics of resistance can be located within Adichie's diasporic exposure. In the setting of Global North, the path of cultural de-masculinization of the male gender or a social campaign for its cultural execution is often pursued in the quest to address the problem of patriarchy. This cultural program is largely witnessed in the "suicidal politics," one that is driven by the impulses of 'no future', 'no survival' for the patriarch (see also Sullivan, 2016:274-278).

Both the liberative choices of Auntie Ifeoma and Beatrice were feasible and liberating for the moment but were not sustainable and forceful to the end. Auntie Ifeoma seems to have launched social religious ideas to deconstruct the hegemony of patriarchy, but she could not stay to enforce the erasure of the abuse of power and the wrong conceptions and treatment of gender. She absconded the dominant patriarchy of African society to the relatively liberal worlds of the West by traveling abroad. On the part of Beatrice, the death of patriarchy symbolized by her killing of Eugene paralyzed the entire household and drove the system dependent upon it into chaos. Thus, patriarchy was a problem, but the destruction of patriarchy was not the solution. Patriarchy could not stay, neither can the matriarch hold the system.

Weighing the strengths and weakness of each of the liberating paradigms, one can say that Beatrice's failure is measured by Auntie Ifeoma's trained capacity to confront patriarchy. The merged personalities or characters of these two women in *Purple Hibiscus* appeared to enforce and romanticize Adichie's utopia which is seen in the brutal killing of the patriarchy symbolized by Eugene on one hand, and the escape from the chaos of the post-patriarchal world through liberative movement of Ifeoma abroad.

2. Colonialism, Liberation Theology & *Purple Hibiscus*

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene embraced colonialism *en toto*. He was a micro reflection of what colonial ideologies were detested for – male dominance, hierarchical power relationships, exploitation, imposition of western culture and belief, demonization of African culture and tradition, the notion of superiority, discrimination, including the use of violence to pursue and sustain authority and domination. Eugene domesticated his family upon the standards deployed by the colonizers who themselves came to domesticate Africa and to exercise their patriarchal hold and institutions on African society. Eugene lacked the critical mind capable of appreciating the rich traditional heritage of his people. On the contrary, he was brainwashed to belief that speaking in the tongue of his master, dressing in his clothes, eating his food, drinking his wine, and adopting his master's religion would translate into self-worth and dignity for himself (Adichie, 2003:86-87; Wa Thiong O', 1986:3).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie critiques the impact of colonialism on Africa. She admits the harrowing effect of colonialism on Africans, especially the marginalization of African culture and the inferiority complex mentality that causes Africans to denigrate their cultural identity and religion. She initiates a discussion about decolonization of the mind. It comes in the form of decentralization of our perceptions about oppressive colonial realities and the recentralization of the African religious systems and values. This was very evident in certain narrative conversations that took place in Auntie Ifeoma's household, such as, picking a confirmation name, singing Igbo songs at mass/family prayers, and encouraging the children to appreciate the richness of Nigerian culture and heritage (Adichie, 2003:139, 273). In addition, she insists on the beauty and worth of a vast amount of Igbo festivals, practices, and beliefs.

Auntie Ifeoma's household served as mini-revolutionary space where the characters sit together to interrogate the problems associated with colonial enterprise, and seek ways to protest against it. Using the principles of dialogue, interrogation, and negotiation, Auntie Ifeoma was able to deconstruct Eugene's discriminatory and oppressive mentality in relation to religion and culture. She used the space of her home to unwrite contested claims about colonial ideals, especially in the areas of power and

patriarchy, oppressive construction of family values and relationships, and domestic responsibilities. Although Auntie Ifeoma's home lacks the luxuries and wealth of Eugene's home, it possesses the wealth of freedom, peace and openness that help build a social cultural identity founded on dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect.

Adichie's challenge of colonialism is certainly interesting, however, her liberating solutions were not forceful enough to impact lasting changes. For economic reasons and disappointments over unfulfilled hope for a working Nigeria, Auntie Ifeoma migrated to America, thereby recolonizing herself in the land of her former colonizers. By abandoning the victimized system and running into the system of the oppressor, Adichie is indirectly reaffirming what it criticizes. Such a move could be criticized since it reaffirms the indispensability of colonial system for survival. In context, the voice of Auntie Ifeoma gradually became a faded voice in the fight against colonial impacts. Her letters to Kambili and Jaja no longer speaks about the patterns of colonial exploitation, but of her progress in her new location.

As with other post-colonial literature, *Purple Hibiscus* tries to wage the war against colonialism, but still caught up in an attitude of attachment to colonial exigencies and system they criticize. Adichie, writes her literature from the Western world and even uses Western feminist thoughts to criticize the postcolonial society. This position bespeaks of the complex nature of every attempt to resist postcolonial control. Perhaps, Adichie's principles of dialogue, interrogation, and negotiation may work to destabilize certain colonial narratives that have destroyed traditional institutions, values, and systems, but must be forceful to the end.

3. Sexism, Liberation Theology & *Purple Hibiscus*

There are three sexist discussions projected in *Purple Hibiscus*. The first is the sexist discussion of a woman as a mother. Motherhood in African is defined in terms of giving birth, protecting, and nurturing the life of the child (children). As Chodorow (1978:22) points out, biologically women are assumed to be mothers because they have "a natural mothering instinct, or maternal instinct, and that therefore it is 'natural' that

they mother, or even that they therefore ought to mother". Eugene expected Beatrice to be a perfect mother, but the patriarchal ordering of her home turned Beatrice from a mother to a murderer.

In Beatrice, we discern femaleness in terms of failed motherhood and murderhood. Beatrice experienced the brokenness of motherhood because of the treatments she received from Eugene. Beatrice could not protect the lives of her born and unborn children (Adichie, 2003:103, 194-196). She lost nine pregnancies (Adichie, 2003:36, 249).³ Under intense and perverse situations, she could not keep up the patriarchal nicety and impositions. Where she could not protect or prevent her miscarriages, she also decides to miscarry the marriage. By murdering Eugene, Beatrice shows how some women under severe pressure in their marriages can resort to terminating the lives of their children or husband. Here, the line between a mother and a murderer is so thin, and Beatrice crossed it.⁴

The other sexist presentation of the African woman is that of a housewife. The sense of being a housewife implied that Beatrice had no work outside of the home. Beatrice did not have any higher formal education, at least, when compared to Aunty Ifeoma. She was not an office holder or a group leader in any organization in her social or religious settings. Within her home, her major function was cooking (including instructing Sisi the house-help on how to improve the taste of the food), plaiting Kambili's hair, savoring the drinks from Eugene's factory, and polishing

³ Nine times, Beatrice missed the feeling of having a child because Eugene will constantly beat her to induce miscarriages. Kambili recounts the many times she saw her mother's blood dripping the staircase, "the blood was watery, flowing from Mama, flowing from my eyes". Even in the absence of the children, the blood kept flowing from Mama. When Beatrice arrived Nsukka, she narrates to Kambili, "You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly [...] My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes".

⁴ One of the societal expectations for a woman is to be a perfect mother, as part of its patriarchal influence, the society does not put into perspective the abuse and molestations that trigger most women into taking laws into their own hands and committing murder (or other related actions of resistance). Mothers are encouraged to remain in their marriages even at the expense of their own life. Beatrice was trapped in miscarriages of life and death – of the death of her unborn children, husband, and marriage.

the glass (Adichie, 2003:8, 11, 13). To be precise, the role of Beatrice was an embodiment of the state of the African woman – one who is locked up in a housewife role, with clearly mapped out duties assigned to her. She is submissive to the husband, obedient, lacked initiatives, and the oppressive system ensured that she is continually depended on the husband (Adichie, 2003:251).

The third sexist representation of the African woman is that of a wife. From *Purple Hibiscus* we note that marriage in African culture is seen as an achievement. “A woman with children and no husband, what is that?”, Beatrice retorts (Adichie, 2003:236). It is the belief of a typical African man that marrying a woman gives the woman an identity and a social face, and women have been brainwashed to belief such idea. With this belief, when a woman faces marital crises, she is encouraged to stay in the marriage to avoid societal shame, attacks, or displeasure.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie resists the oppressive paradigms about femininity. In the voice of Auntie Ifeoma, Adichie attempts to re-situate and recentralize the position of women in the African society. The strategy lies in deconstructing the stereotypes about femaleness in relations to motherhood, housewife and wife. Adichie’s projection of motherhood in Auntie Ifeoma can be compared to the pattern of motherhood suggested by Oduyoye – a shift from biological motherhood to an encompassing social motherhood. For Oduyoye, motherhood goes beyond biological productivity to social productivity, for the “woman is the glue that holds society together” (Oduyoye, 1986:72). Auntie Ifeoma’s state of widowhood could be regarded as a breaking away from the ‘motherhood-childbearing’ paradigm since she refused to remarry, and yet she was a phenomenal mother.

But Adichie’s representation of motherhood in Beatrice is questionable, as already presented. In the ‘kill the patriarch’ paradigm, one wonders whether Adichie’s emancipation from the traditional notion of motherhood resonates with African women writer’s matrix of motherhood. Mbuy-Beya would insist that African women’s struggle for freedom must be separated from the struggles of their Western feminist counterparts because the African traditional society still values the richness and virtues of motherhood and needs to be incorporated in the discussion. In her view, “[African woman] is the mother of the children, the

mother of everyone. By her motherhood, she establishes her status in society and ensures the demographic growth of the group. And she is mightily proud of it" (Mbuy-Beya, 1989:264).

Given that Adichie is writing under the influence of modernity and western feminism, it is not clear whether she is embracing the African women writer's position or promoting the 'world without men paradigm.' One thing is certain, that by upholding Auntie Ifeoma's state of widowhood Adichie is rejecting the patriarchal cultural conceptions and prejudiced notions woven around the neck of the African mother which often suffocates rather than frees her (Adichie, 2003:76). Contrary to Beatrice, Auntie Ifeoma is the "bold, hardworking, strong, assertive, and economically independent" woman (Astrick, 2018:49). She was economically stable, even in the absence of her husband. She was educated like Eugene, as such was empowered from the beginning for a future sustained life. Auntie Ifeoma's educational background prescribes the right of every girl or woman.

Adichie also challenged the notion of the African woman as a wife. The view that marriage is a license to happiness or certificate of identity for an African woman comes under attack in *Purple Hibiscus*. The state of Auntie Ifeoma's widowhood and her ability to protect and care for her family gives a different notion of women as wives. Auntie Ifeoma refuses to remarry, because for her the loss of the husband is not a loss of identity and responsibilities. The experience of Beatrice was an embodiment of marriage without love, marriage full of sacrifices and pain. Beatrice's experiences can be used to further debate on the state of women in several marriages, with special reference to love, sacrifice and pain.

Adichie advocates for women to seek for freedom from abusive marriages. Staying in abusive marriages can attract violent repercussions, oppressive consequences, and loss of life. For Adichie, Auntie Ifeoma's role idealizes a somewhat balanced approach to femininity and sexism in African context. In the absence of the husband, Auntie Ifeoma was able to support and train her family. The question is, how resilient can the woman be in the absence of the husband? Does Auntie Ifeoma's liberating strategy annihilates the male gender? If the answer is yes, what will be alternative strategy where both the man and woman can be very relevant, while oppressive cultures are overcome?

4. Ecclesiology of Pain, Liberation Theology & *Purple Hibiscus*

One of the fundamental assumptions in *Purple Hibiscus* is that the practicing of religion brings pain and sufferings. At the institutional level, the Church displays a certain level of religious rigidity and formalism that is seen as part of the formative strategy that seek to protect the teachings of the Church. However, these religious rigidity and legalism in essence shows Christianity (and other similar religions) as a structure that lacks compassion and charity towards other human beings.

From the actions of Eugene, it is believed that Christianity is best practiced when it is rigidly interpreted, and its instructions mindlessly followed. There were levels of intolerance, even for the slightest mistake. For instance, there were set of rules that were meant to be obeyed during the rite of Holy Communion, and the Church demanded full obedience of these traditionally laid down religious rites. One of these religious instructions was not eating 10 minutes before mass. According to Eugene, the breach of this requirement is considered sinful and attracts divine punishment (Adichie, 2003:7-8, 102-103). There was certain level of cultural intolerance witnessed in the various church's activities, prayers, songs, and spirituality. For instance, Fr Benedict resented the use of Igbo songs at mass.

In the Church, Eugene is praised as one who speaks out for freedom, charity, and love. He was generous to the Church and would even pay for the cartons of communion wine. But Eugene mocks his charity works by failing to exemplify these virtues at home, placing a hypocritical wedge between the spirituality at the church and the one at home. Eugene's religious rigidity were detrimental to the life and existence of his family members as community of believers. His implacable stance on religion vis a vis culture and morals led to his uncontrollable anger, anxiety, obsession with sin, and other behavioral anomalies. Eugene talks about sin, but the abuse in his home, the anger in his heart, the injury he inflicts on his children, the murdering of his unborn children, are nothing less than sin.

At the level of the family unit, religion is pain and a kind of mockery for the rich and the strong. Religion also subtle scorns the faith of the

poor and the weak. In Eugene's household, religion is butchered, ridiculed, and mocked. In the merciless beatings and the number of stigmas left on the children and wife, Eugene's representation of religion was murderous, insensitive to suffering, dehumanizing, abusive, and oppressive. The Christian statues, and other relics found in Eugene's home were supposed to be a constant reminder of their spirituality and dedication to the life of faith, hope and love, but in *Purple Hibiscus* their presence made no difference to the patriarchal and abusive character of Eugene.

For Beatrice and her children, religion could not defend or rescue them from the oppressive hands of Eugene. Rather it left them in a state of helpless and defenseless. It is ironical that Beatrice was experiencing the most horrendous and appalling manifestations of what could be described as the failure of religion, yet she wore on her neck, the image that reads "GOD is love" (Adichie, 2003:35).⁵ The idea of remaining in and endorsing a religion that is traumatizing and oppressive explains the situation of most African women. There are many internal and external problems that have catalyzed the experiences of women because of their religious convictions. Instead of speaking up and negotiating their freedom, they will rather remain passive because they have been brain-washed into believing that living with their broken dreams and realities are symbols of one's true commitment to religion (Manning, 1997:382).

The pains of religion can also be perceived in the religious spats between Eugene and his father (Papa Nnukwu). Eugene's religious claims and intolerant attitude toward his father promoted religious antagonism, hatred, rejection, and resentment. Papa Nnukwu suffered so much in the hands of his son, for despite his son's wealth, he lived the life of a pauper (Adichie, 2003:84). Papa Nnukwu resentments and pains highlight the indubitable, violent, and perhaps, the many untold stories of individuals suffering because of their religious identity.

For Adichie, Eugene's religiosity negates the essence of true religion. In the character of Auntie Ifeoma, Adichie resiliently asserted religion as

⁵ What Beatrice was wearing the day she returned from the hospital ought to bear some resemblance or relationship with what Eugene's religion professes, namely, compassion, mercy, and love. But such was not the case.

kindness, love, and compassion. Adichie argues for certain level of flexibility with religious rules as they sometimes inflict pains on the lives of those who seek to live by them. In addition, some of these rules have played a role in the promotion of religious and gender violence.⁶ Adichie does not suggest the overcoming of religion but challenges the use of religion to promote patriarchal perspectives and ideologies, especially the ones that promote oppression. As Mbuy-Beya (2001:197) would defend, our religious reflections must be based on wisdom and feeling, such that is to be found not only in the head, but also in the heart and the gut.

Adichie also promotes openness to understanding the ways of other people's tradition and culture. Certain rituals or rites which Eugene condemned were accepted by Auntie Ifeoma not as an alternative to Christian faith, but traditions that are rich in value and has its way of supporting the cultural values of the people and their society. Both Auntie Ifeoma's household and Fr Amadi use Igbo words and traditional songs as worship songs and would clap their hands during worship. This is a deliberate effort by the writer to affirm the validity and importance of African traditional religious and cultural systems against the Western assumptions of their faith superiority (see also Strayer, 1976:1-15). In addition, such a move shows that African Christianity must be shaped by the content of her cultures, which plays a significant role in identifying her roots and for the adoption of the new religious beliefs. According to Éla (2009:15), such a Christianity will have within its veins all that is authentically African without exception.

The love relationship between Fr Amadi and Kambili was an experience that helped Kambili come to terms with her femininity and sexuality. But it also projects the quibbling attitude of Fr Amadi with his priestly celibacy. On the theological front, Fr Amadi's actions can be seen as a breach of his vocation of 'no marriage' for the sake of the Kingdom of God. But from a human point of view, his love relationship with Kambili

⁶ Here reference could also be made of institutional or religious laws that deny women of the right and freedom to participate actively in their institutional or religious settings, and of moral laws that represses the freedom of people to deal genuinely or meaningful with their moral choices, or in relation to their lives and relationships.

is natural and expressive of his human sexuality. It is paradoxical, however, because priestly celibacy goes against laws of human nature. The problem is that the failure to balance this religious teaching with human experiences results in numerous cases of women and girls being entangled in love relationships with clergy men, with cases of pregnancies and abortions at worst (see also Mbuy-Beya, 2001:196). Adichie uses Fr Amadi's case to re-awaken the debate on sexuality and the church for the future.

5. The Theological Legacy of *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie's discussions on patriarchy, colonialism, religion, and gender chart new trajectories for theological legacies of *Purple Hibiscus*. The book critically wrestled with the repressive history of patriarchy and Christian religion in Africa and projected subversive agenda that can enrich contemporary gender and religious discourses. Most of her contributions are contextually relevant to the hermeneutical task of addressing issues, such as the religious and cultural problems associated with patriarchy, colonial effects on the history of Africa, how religion and culture doubly oppress and exploit women, economic and social justice for women and children, dialogue between the faiths, and the dangers of religious rigidity or close-mindedness.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is a liberation theology. Adichie's liberation theologies lies in the power of women empowering women, which is one of the liberating templates of "Theologies of African Women". Adichie introduced the character of Aunty Ifeoma, and she appeared in all the resisting strategies mentioned in the book as a role model to empower women in every aspect of their experiences of oppression. With many other works, Adichie has contributed immensely in featuring the stories of African women as such that need to be addressed in many fronts to confront all the factors that contribute to the oppression of women at all levels. She has remained a strong voice in the circle of African women whose social, religious, and political thoughts about the liberation of women have continued to enforce changes and encourage the empowerment of women in all sectors.

Through *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie has killed patriarchy, and theologically allowed women to live fulfilled lives in a post patriarchal space. While this post patriarchal universe is apparently characterized by many challenges of psychotic breakdown, and new immigrant identity, Adichie allowed her female characters to brace the contours of this new world. The emancipation of these women comes with great cost, and thus plunged both genders down. Christian theology in its liberational and feminist circles must continually resonate or engage not only the destruction of patriarchy, but the disorder, or the *dis-othering* that comes with this gender dismantling project. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie provides a theological guide through gender disorientation that characterized this creative enterprise, and the liberation theology that should forever reside in this particular dis-genderized space.

CONCLUSION

The present study departs from past scholarship in the interpretation of *Purple Hibiscus* by underscoring its subversive and liberational theologies in conversation with patriarchy, colonization, sexism, and religion. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, African Christianity and its Catholic branch is philosophically engaged through the radical lenses of western feminism. Adichie's female characters are apparently offered liberation through murder of patriarchy in the image of Eugene, escapism by the movement of Auntie Ifeoma from Africa to America, and the psychotic breakdown of Beatrice. However, Adichie offers redemption to these female characters in the bi-character merger of Auntie Ifeoma and Beatrice who representatively confronted patriarchy, androcentric values, and oppressive structures of religion and cultures. Through this device, Beatrice and Auntie Ifeoma are the flipsides of the same characters, and together both confronted patriarchies, and charted a new horizon for themselves.

The new horizon clearly placed them in the character zones of widows, immigrant, open-minded individuals, and female rebels who challenged the biblical injunction, "thou shall not kill" in terms of Beatrice's killing her husband, or the Auntie Ifeoma's refusal of the cultural communal norm to stay forever in the land of one's ancestral birth. Together these two women experienced a liberation through their refusal to stay

happy in the hegemonic and systemic institutions of patriarchy, communal values, sexism, and colonization. Significantly, a theology of liberation, according to Adichie, would be to empower women to take the center stage in the negotiations of their own liberations and freedom by speaking up of their experiences, rejecting all gender constructs that impinge on their human rights, not submitting to any form of abuse or violence, and taking actions where necessary to resist all systems of oppressions.

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