Diasporic Writings and Chimamanda Adichie's Introspections in *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract
The decision of some African literary writers to relocate to Europe, America and other countries of the world might be due to unconducive environment of their homeland. While they reside in the foreign land, they continuously reflect nostalgically on events and issues taking place in society. This study examines how African Diasporic writers particularly Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie introspectively portrays her homeland experience in her debut novel, Purple Hibiscus. This literary text is purposively chosen based on its relevance to the subject of discourse and qualitatively analyzed, using both the analytical and descriptive methods. The paper finds that Africans especially Nigerians are still battling with challenges that appear insurmountable even after decades of their political independence. Some of these problems are intra-family conflicts that result in disintegration and death of members while many others are traceable to economic and political turmoil in the country. The experience of the diasporic writer is thematically examined in the study.

Keywords: Homeland, challenges, reflections, diaspora, responses.

Introduction

African writers in foreign countries have been expressing their dissatisfactions over the socio-economic and political downturns in their homeland post-independence. They interrogate the moral decadence in society and the postcolonial disillusionment that engulfed their nations for decades after the exit of the colonizer. The writers have been continually engaging in the literary cleansing of these former colonies from the diaspora. They are abreast of the trends of political debacles of their homeland and so they become instrumental in the struggle to sanitize the corruption-infested system and enthrone new country of their dream. This affirms that literature is life and the experience man goes through in life has always been the subject matter (Owolabi & Owoeye, 27).

Apart from the earlier generation of Nigerian authors who launched their literary missiles from abroad in the past, the new breeds of writers especially the likes of Chris Abani, Ike Oguine,

Helon Habila, Okey Ndibe, Chika Unigwe, Helon Habila, Sefi Atta, Chimamnda Adichie, and a host of others have dominated the literary scene with their writings in an attempt to improve the turbulent economy marred with sharp corrupt practices. These diasporic writers are also preoccupied with thematic preoccupations that border on corruption, bad leadership, human rights violation, militarism and dictatorship, to mention a few. Iheka finds that Adichie is one of Nigeria's most talented young writers in the literary world. She is acknowledged for her well-crafted stories and novels that explore the political and personal repercussions of recent Nigerian history, particularly the strife of the Nigerian Civil War and military in politics. Critics praise her thoughtful treatment of history and honest depiction of the effects of war and brutality on the individual. Adichie's nostalgic reflection on the Nigeria-Biafran War has been acknowledged by scholars who state that one historical event in Nigeria which has generated and continues to produce a considerable amount of creative works is the Nigerian Civil War (Owolabi & Owoeye, 27).

Like their literary counterparts across the world, Nigerian writers of fiction who reside in the diaspora bring the horrors of their homeland to the fore in their narratives and also question the rapid deteriorating post-independence society. Kehinde and Mbipom (62) acknowledge Aderounmu who seems to be the mouthpiece of Nigerians in the diaspora. Aderounmu observes that the happenings in Nigeria are "based on our new (or old) experiences and encounters out here, we are quick to draw comparisons with what we see. We make jokes of most of these things but in reality, we are disappointed and hurt by the system in Nigeria" (3). The scholar clearly expresses his nostalgic reflections towards his homeland which he could compare to his resident overseas. According to him, "Sometimes though, we wished we were back in Nigeria, but the decision to return is one of the hardest to make. Despite some shortcomings here abroad and some humiliating moments, one is not quick to make a U-turn" (Aderounmu, 3).

Findings have revealed that diasporic writers employ their writings as vital instruments for redeeming, repositioning and portraying their cultural values to the outside world. Though they have secured permanent homes in the diaspora, they are still psychologically unstable as the writers are nostalgic and apprehensive of occurrences in their homeland. In a related viewpoint Olaniyan (4) states that the physical distance from "home" loses its status as a privileged marker of exile and becomes simply one other feature, perhaps more obvious than others, of that condition. As he further asserted, physical distance from "home" and its commonly associated feelings of being

victimized, of bitterness, sorrow, loneliness, dejection not to say depression, nostalgia, and the likes, may be painful and distressing, but being at "home" is often not any less so.

Aijaz reveals that diasporic African fictions have taken three principal directions in recent times. As he pointed out, there is the influence of the visionary style and picaresque narrative of Latin America magical realist, those that are preoccupied with social and political themes well established in African writings and those who view their work as an unproblematic synthesis of the Western and the African mode of fiction writing. From Aijaz's viewpoint above, one can therefore posit that while Ben Okri and Helen Oyeyemi belong to the group of Magical Realist, Helon Habila, Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Atta, and so on, toll the line of diasporic writers that are preoccupied with social and political themes in Nigeria. The unfavorable conditions of the homeland ranging from insecurity, political imbalance, economic turbulence and so on led to the movement of the Africans, specifically Nigerian writers to foreign countries. They perceived their society as unsettled, retrogressive and suffocating people who have great potentials for socio-economic transformation. Their settlement overseas, however, cannot be misconstrued to be inconsequential to the economic growth and development of their nations because most of the writers have resolved to address the challenges facing every institution (political, religion, educational, legal, and so on) in their respective nations.

This study, therefore, examines how Chimamanda Adichie introspectively and artistically portrays experience of the homeland, Nigeria in *Purple Hibiscus*. Her narrative activate the mental consciousness of readers about intra-family and societal issues that trigger traumatic conditions in society. All these are thematically interrogated in this paper.

Methodology

This study is library based research since it involves the analysis of a literary text that was carefully chosen based on its thematic relevance with sourcing for materials in the field. The literary text is qualitatively analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods. The internet was also consulted for relevant scholarly materials that add values to the research and helps in achieving the objectives. The critical works were used to substantiate ideas in the theoretical framework and also to foreground the review of related literatures.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Post-colonial theoretical approach that focuses on the literatures that are produced by writers from formerly colonized countries of the world such as India, Nigeria,

Ghana, South Africa, Cameroun, Australia and so on. This theory is "concerned with the worlds which colonialism in its multiple manifestations, confused, disfigured and distorted, reconfigured and finally transformed. The effects of colonialization are felt from the moment of the first impact" (Chennells, 110). Postcolonial writers interrogate the socio-economic and political flaws, struggles and disillusionment that characterize the African societies even after political independence. Initially the focus of African writers was on fighting back, deconstructing the effects of colonization on the colonized nations, the negative perceptions and thoughts that the West had about the people they subjugated, dehumanized and exploited before their eventual liberation.

National Open University of Nigeria reveals that "postcolonial African writers also foreground the political tensions in their emergent independent states. With the failure of political independence to usher in the dividends of democratization in many African countries, disillusionment has set in" (275). The research further reveals that due to the foregoing, "writers in their works reflect these social dissonances manifested in political instability, ethnic identity, inequality, corruption, abuse of power and leadership failure. The effects and aftermaths of colonization become a fascinating theme of these writers, including the wide socio-economic inequality in society which often results in conflict" (275). In corroborating the above submission, Chennells states that "African literature has frequently drawn attention to the way in which colonial authorities constructed an African reality and then acted as if that reality existed in the perception of everyone concerned" (112). This attests to the fact that in the past decades, many African writers, researchers and critics have channelled their searchlights on the internal conflicts, ineptitude and corrupt practices of leaders which have impoverished numerous Africans and caused underdevelopment in society. Kehinde and Mbipom find that "African literature constantly reflects an attempt at narrating the African experience, the struggles associated with imperialism and its relics of denigration and opposition which seem to remain visible features of post-independence African society" (62).

The above submissions are evident in the literary works of writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Festus Iyayi, Ayi Kwei Armah, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Ahmed Yerima, Sefi Atta, Femi Osofisan, Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El-Saadawi, Zulu Sofola, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, and Ola Rotimi, to mention a few. Ako notes that postcolonial critics deal with problems of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, caste, class, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe" (cited in

National Open University of Nigeria, 275). While commenting on the influence of literary productions on postcolonial societies, Jeyifo states that "literature has been an extraordinarily influential institution in postcolonial Africa, and African writers have been prominent in the struggles to build modern democratic societies on the ruins of the colonial state and against the brutalities of the many dictatorial post-independence regimes of the continent" (353). In this study, therefore, experiences in African countries, particularly Nigeria after the exit of the colonizers and the reactions of the people towards addressing them form the main thrust of the authors in the text chosen for analysis.

Analysis of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* introspectively presents intra-family conflict, the clash between African and Christian religions, and political turmoil. Through the eye of Kambili who is the heroine and narrator of the story, the events of the novel are unfolded. The fifteen-year-old girl, her mother and her younger brother, Jaja are being maltreated by Eugene, their industrialist father who is famous, generous and courageous in the community. In the text, Eugene is a religious extremist, dogmatic and political activist that stands against the military junta that overthrew a democratically elected government. As a tyrant, he controls his family and forces every member to adhere strictly to the doctrines of Catholicism and rejects the traditional African faith which his own father upholds:

Eugene's decision to send his children, Jaja and Kambili to Nsukka to stay with their Aunty Ifeoma exposes them to social and independent life. Consequently, Kambili returns home with Jaja to find that the dehumanizing character of their father continues. Since their mother could no longer tolerate the brutality of her husband, she poisons his tea. In order to save his mother from a looming death penalty, Jaja becomes the sacrificial lamb as he takes responsibility for the crime. The novel features several thematic preoccupations which will be critically examined under different sub-headings as follows.

Religious Extremism

In Nigeria, the practice of Christianity and African traditional religion is noticeable between Eugene and his father, Papa Nnukwu. The decision of the latter to adhere to his religion triggers the conflict between both parties in the narrative. According to Kambili, Eugene is so deep in Catholic faith that he makes "the biggest donations to Peter's Pence and St. Vincent de Paul" (13). The novelist captures Eugene as a dedicated Catholic member who cheerfully provides moral,

material and financial support towards the growth of God's works even though the poor, specifically his own father languish in perpetual wants and penury. Apart from this, he pays "for the cartons of communion wine, for the new ovens at the convent where the Reverend Sisters baked the host, for the new wing to St. Agnes Hospital where Father Benedict gave extreme unction." Besides the fact that Eugene remains committed to the growth of Christianity, he never skips communion service. Kambili reports one of such events thus; "After Papa took the communion, he sat back and watched the congregation walk to the altar and, after Mass, reported to Father Benedict, with concern, when a person missed communion on two successive Sundays" (14).

Adichie uses the character of Eugene to portray how some Nigerian Christians, especially the Catholics attach so much importance to the service of God. They appear to be spiritual minded and attempt to live a righteous life because, "heaven is their home." This is evident in the narrative where Eugene lays more emphasis on the spiritual implication of communion on Sundays. According to the narrator, "he always encouraged Father Benedict to call and win that person back into the fold; nothing but mortal sin would keep a person away from communion two Sundays in a row" (14). In the novel, Eugene sees anything belonging to his father as fetish. This is the case of the painting of Papa Nnukwu which he saw with Jaja and his reactions towards it. After several cases of religious extremism, Eugene's family resolved to resist him. As a matter of fact, no one can be more Catholic than the Pope. In the novel, Kambili remains resolute as she recounts an unpleasant experience involving her own father: "I sank to the floor, lay on the pieces of paper. I lay on the floor, I curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus in my *Integrated Science for Junior Secondary Schools…*I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes" (216). Even though his father's cruel kicks increase in force and cause more damage to her skin, she remains unyielding. This continues until she remembers cousin's music when she travelled to visit her Aunty Ifeoma in Nsukka: "The kicking increased in tempo, and I thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with a calm saxophone and then whirled into lusty singing." Kambili at this juncture decides to put up a resistance, preferring death to obeying her father's orders. The experience of the heroine is dramatically presented in her statements:

> I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery. They still had the metallic smell of Amaka's paint palette. The

> stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy (216-217).

The torture meted on Kmabili was so severe that her mother intervenes to stop further beating. Though she suffers the same experience like her children, Kambili and Jaja, she pleads with her husband to have mercy on Kambili. Despite her plea, Eugene still continues to lynch his daughter until she fainted: "I could hear a swoosh in the air. A low voice was saying, please, biko, please. More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warned my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet" (217). Kambili has experienced several cases of maltreatment from their father and at a point in time, Eugene punishes her by using a belt; she has also witnessed her father in many occasions swinging the belt at Mama, Jaja, and me, muttering that the devil would not win (110). On another occasion, Kambili is tortured by her father for spending time with her grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu whom Eugene saw as a pagan. This is different from the occasion where Eugene pours boiling water on her feet in order to teach her that she should not "walk into sin" (201). Kambili further recounts the agony she went through in the hands of her father;

> the burning on my feet was climbing up, in swift courses of excruciating pain, to my head and lips and eyes. Papa was holding me with one wide hand, pouring the water carefully with the other. I did not know that the sobbing voice—"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" was mine until the water stopped and I realized my mouth was moving and the words were still coming out (201).

In the moment of torture, Kambili is barely conscious. She began to change. When she visited Aunty Ifeoma and her cousins in Nsukka, she was given a portrait of Papa-Nnukwu as a special gift by her cousin Amaka. Back at home, her father tears up the painting and attacks her. Iheka asserts that Eugene is a devout and tyrannical Catholic patriarch, who has managed to abuse emotionally and physically his middle-class family in his attempt to wrestle with his own cultural, emotional, and ideological demons. His Catholicism amounts to a devotion to a Western colonial order that he has concluded to be far superior to the traditional belief system of his family. He is determined that his wife and children will adhere to Catholic ideas and teachings, even as he uses his notable wealth and power to repress those in his family who hold onto traditional beliefs system and values. Eugene never plays with Catholic doctrines not even when he has visitors. This is affirmed by Kambili who reports that: "Papa read from the psalms before saying the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, and the Apostles' Creed" (68). She further reveals that every member

of the family actively partake in the family prayers, thus; "Mama started with a prayer for peace and for the rulers of our country. Jaja prayed for priests and for the religious. I prayed for the Pope. Finally, for twenty minutes, papa prayed for our protection from ungodly people and forces, for Nigeria and the Godless men ruling it, and for us to continue to grow in righteousness" (68). The issue of Papa Nnukwu's repentance appears to trigger anxieties and fears in the mind of Eugene. The heroine reveals that their family prayer is often concluded by prayer "for the conversion of our Papa-Nnukwu, so that Papa-Nnukwu would be saved from hell. Papa spent some time describing hell, as if God did not know that the flames were eternal and raging and fierce. At the end we raised our voices and said, "Amen!" (68-69).

Despite the efforts made by Eugene to ensure his father's conversion to Christianity and make Heaven after his death, the traditional religion adherent remained unyielding. When Aunty Ifeoma told Eugene that their "father has fallen asleep" and that "they took him to the mortuary just hours ago," Kambili reports the mood and responses of her father; "Papa sat down and slowly lowered his head into his hands, and I wondered if he was crying, if it would be acceptable for me to cry, too. But when he looked up, I did not see traces of tears in his eyes (195)." Eugene refused to compromise his Catholic faith as regards the funeral of Papa Nnukwu; "I cannot participate in a pagan funeral, but we can discuss with the parish priest and arrange a Catholic funeral." With this statement, Aunty Ifeoma could not control her anger and so she reacts aggressively at Eugene's action: "I will put my dead husband's grave up for sale, Eugene, before I give our father a Catholic funeral. Do you hear me? I said I will sell Ifediora's grave first! Was our father a Catholic? I ask you, Eugene, was he a Catholic? *Uchu gba gi*!" (195). Eugene is portrayed as a character that is insensitive, cruel and dogmatic. He is sanctimonious and alienates his family from non-Christians like his own father who he regards as outcast, infidel and heathen.

Eugene felt disappointed in his father who refused to embrace Christianity before his death and so he concludes that, "He has gone to face judgement." However, his position on Papa Nnukwu's conversion before his death did not go down well with Jaja who comments, "Maybe he didn't want to convert." Eugene became amazed at Jaja's statement. According to Kambili, "Papa looked at Jaja." "What did you say? Is that what you have learned from living in the same house as a heathen?" Papa stared at Jaja, then at me, shaking his head slowly as if we had somehow changed colour. "Go and bathe and come down for dinner," (197-198). Though Eugene is described as a dogmatic, religious and dictatorial man, he strongly believes in Heaven hence his

prayer before dinner was longer than usual: he asked God to cleanse his children; to remove whatever spirit it was that made them lie to him about being in the same house as a heathen (198). It is obvious that Eugene decries traditional religion, its adherents and anything that is associated with it. In order to uphold Christianity, he punishes his own children claiming to be compassionate. He believes that he is hurting them in order to save them from the fires of hell. Eugene sees his daughter as a rebellious unbeliever who has no other place than hell hence he states that, "Godlessness. Heathen worshipper. Hellfire" while kicking Kambili in the novel. Eugene resolves not to release his children to visit Aunty Ifeoma in Nsukka because he does not want their fate contaminated by Papa-Nnukwu. Kambili also recalls the reaction of their father when he saw the painting of Papa Nnukwu which she brought from Nsukka. Their father sees Papa-Nnukwu as an enemy since he refused to abandon traditional religion and embrace Christianity.

Militarism and Dictatorship

Diasporic writings like postcolonial literature can portray factual or imaginative experience and ideas that are geared towards reshaping a retrogressive society. For postcolonial Nigerian writers, as Nwagbara (4) posits writing does not exist in a vacuum; every piece of fiction refracts truthfully the situations, atmosphere and realities in Nigeria. The truth of the tragic, cataclysmic military experience in Nigeria has been a cardinal leitmotif of postcolonial Nigerian literature. Military dictatorship is still believed and upheld by many as the worst thing that has ever happened to the politics of our nation as well as many African nations once held under the claws, brutalities and tyranny of these 'khaki' leaders (Asika, 278). Adichie distinctively re-visited some of the notorious acts perpetuated by the military governments of IBB and Sani Abacha during the military era. She symbolically recounts the gruesome murder of Ade Coker, a famous editor of *Standard* who was murdered in cold blood. This is a metaphorical representation of the famous journalist that was assassinated by the military junta of Gen Ibrahim Babangida. According to the heroine:

> Ade Coker was at breakfast with his family when a courier delivered a package to him. His daughter, in her primary school uniform, was sitting across the table from him. The baby was nearby, in a high chair. His wife was spooning Cerelac into the baby's mouth. Ade Coker was blown up when he opened the package- a package everybody would have known was from the Head of State even if his wife Yewande had not said that Ade Coker looked at the envelope and said, "It has the State House seal" before he opened it (212).

The writer captures the gruesome assassinations that characterized military regimes in the evil days of Generals Babangida and Abacha. This death of Ade Coker depicts the horrible murder of the "*Newswatch* Editor-in-Chief, Dele Giwa through a letter bomb in his Opebi, Lagos home. The bomb was delivered to his home October 19th, 1986 on a Sunday morning, during breakfast, snuffing life out of a promising career, and leaving media practitioners in an everlasting shock, worsened by fact that the killers have never, and may never ever be found" (Adeniyi, 18). This was the dark era the military junta's clampdown on the press, human rights activists and other political opponents across Nigeria was at its peak. Another traumatic experience which Adichie chronicled in the novel is that of the murder of Ken Saro Wiwa, a human rights crusader and environmentalist by the military government of General Sani Abacha. This is symbolized by the killing of Ogechi in the novel. According to Kambili, "Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh of his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead" (207). The narrator further recounts consequences of the indiscriminate killings by the military; "we heard on radio that Nigeria had been suspended from Commonwealth because of the murder, that Canada and Holland were recalling their ambassadors in protest." The Canadian government acted this way because they felt Nwankiti Ogechi was "a man of honour." Akingbe notes that "the military is the obvious symbol of death as the prophecy came to pass following a coup broadcast on the television, when soldiers deployed to the streets to enforce the obligatory curfew, overzealously kill the unnamed character." Indiscriminate killings, torture and incarcerations were common features of military dictatorship in post-independent Nigeria. Adichie presents the nature of dictatorship that exists continually in both aspects of human life. She portrays the tyrannical system of Nigeria under the Military regimes of Generals Sani Abacha and Ibrahim Babangida. Through the character of Eugene, one can picture a prototype of tyrants in an African family.

The narrator herself recognizes the political allegory that manifests in her personal struggle though she also alludes to differences between the duo. She vividly recounts: "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do" (24). While commenting on military experience in Nigeria, Nwagbara describes the excesses of the military government to include; "command-and-obey system, violence, power drunkenness, bestiality, brutality and above

all militarism" (5). Adichie has psychologically reflected on the military governments who created a theatre of horror and failures of men in uniform to drive positive change after they had preached messianic, redemptive mission for entering politics. The military juntas also introduced death sentence by firing squad which was the pathetic scenario captured also in the narrative to activate the consciousness of readers who experienced this cruel method of extermination during the military days. Capital punishment has been widely condemned globally. Kambili clearly reports one of the incidents, "It had been on television. The men were tied to poles, and their bodies kept shuddering even after the bullets were no longer being pumped into them" (41).

The military era was characterized by unlawful arrests, detention of political opponents, activists and men of the press. The diasporic writer uses this novel to reflect on the death of Dele Giwa using the famous editor of the *Standard,* Ade Coker who was arrested "as he drove out of the editorial offices of the Standard. His car was abandoned on the roadside, the front door left open." This is because of the publication made by Coker that, "the Head of State and his wife had paid people to transport heroin abroad, a story that questioned the recent execution of three men and who the real drug barons were" (46). The writer utilized this artistic medium to reiterate that members of the ruling class are involved in drug trafficking and other related offences during the period under discourse and any attempt to punish any of these acts led to illegal arrest and detention and sometimes outright assassination of the publisher or journalist as the case may be.

The political turmoil that led to the unlawful arrest and detention of political activists and journalists gave birth to mass exodus to overseas where their fundamental human rights are guaranteed. Adichie, through the eye of the heroine reveals that the struggle for freedom continues with newspaper proprietors re-strategizing, hence in the narrative, Eugene says; "We are going to publish underground now…it is no longer safe for my staff" (50). Apart from human rights activists and journalists, proprietors of newspaper companies were also scared of the unknown during military era hence, as Kambili observes; when Papa prayed, he added longer passages urging God to bring about the downfall of the Godless men ruling our country, and he intoned over and over," Our Lady Shield of the Nigerian People, pray for us" (51). In addition to the liberation prayer said by Eugene, the narrator reveals that, "for twenty minutes", he prayed for our protection from ungodly people and forces, for Nigeria and the Godless men ruling it and for us to continue to grow in righteousness (69).

The novelist employed the character of Eugene to depict a handful of Nigerians who are pious and generous that courageously stand against the rebel forces who overthrew the democratic regime. At the family level, it is however reported that he is an abusive tyrant who terrorizes Kambili, her mother, and her brother, Jaja. Moreover, he forces his family to live by the strictures of a fundamentalist strain of Catholicism and rejects the traditional African faith of his own father. Like the military, he rules his family dictatorially and maltreats whoever goes contrary to his laid down principles. He brutalizes his children, Jaja and Kambili and often times, beats up his wife. From the foregoing, it is obvious that dictatorship is not only prevalent in our society but also practicable in most families in Africa. While government rule with absolute power with little or no regards for human rights, most parents exhibit their treacherous intentions under the guise of discipline.

Domestic Disintegration

In the narrative, Adichie thoughtfully presents intra-family conflict situation that leads to disintegration and eventually the untimely death of Eugene. The theme of domestic disintegration revolves round Eugene's family and this writer used this novel to interrogate the African patriarchy that characterized many families in Africa. As one can see in the beginning of the novel, the heroine reports that; ''things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère." The entire family could no longer cope with the rigid Catholicism of the father and this eventually resulted in Jaja's rebellion against his father's tyranny. Jaja's defiance in the novel goes beyond the political struggle for democratic freedoms as it symbolizes the agitation for the right to exist as a human being likewise Kambili's. The struggle for the actualization of this fundamental human right is evident in the novel as narrator recounts that, "the first week after the coup, Kevin plucked green tree branches every morning and stuck them to the car, lodged above the number plate, so that the demonstrators at Government Square would let us drive past. The green branches meant Solidarity" (27). This is freedom from all forms of oppression and dictatorship whether at the family level or in the society.

In the novel, Kambili falls in love with a young Priest which symbolizes her period of maturation and independence. She always longs to see him and feel his warmth even though he is a Catholic Priest. She decries the dehumanizing act of her father which includes the brutal beating of his wife, the tortures his children received, and so on. These barbaric acts are supposed to correct

the family members, however, the reverse is the case as Jaja completely alienates himself from his own father and skips communion service. Finally, it is crystal clear that Eugene's family starts to disintegrate as soon as his children returned from Nsukka. Jaja for instance became rebellious against their father's dictatorship while Kambili found her voice and falls in love with a Catholic Priest.

African Patriarchalism

Closely related to the subject of family disintegration is the thematic preoccupation of African Patriarchalism. This entails the cultural practice where men dominate and control their families. The issue of male dominance runs across the entire novel. Eugene as one of the central characters is a devout and tyrannical Catholic patriarch who has abused his middle-class family emotionally and physically in his attempt to inculcate the Christian beliefs, values and ideologies in every member of his family. He subjects everyone to fears and anxieties, and so has succeeded in elevating his position in his family to that of a demi-god. Eugene strongly believes in the superiority of Catholicism to the traditional beliefs system therefore he wants his family to uphold all things related to Catholic doctrines with high esteem. He rules his household dictatorially and dogmatically and strives for his wife and children to adhere strictly to Catholic teachings and doctrines.

Adichie imaginatively portrays African patriarchalism in her narrative to show how it adversely affects an entire family like that of Eugene. Through the character of Kambili, we see the physical and psychological destruction caused by the patriarchal traits displayed by Eugene over his wife and children, Kambili and Jaja. In the novel, we are intimated of the daily events of their troubled lives. Prominent among these are, Jaja's deformed little finger which remains unspoken secrets shared between Kambili and her brother through stolen glances and their mother's multiple miscarriages caused by Eugene's endless battery of his wife. Beatrice Achike's condition informs Bungaro's view that "family relationships in African post-colonial societies manifest a growing level of tension, conflict and stress as a result of new opportunities, new interests and new dilemmas created by increasing gender and class stratification across Africa, but especially across generations of Africa" (67). The patriarchal system has created both tension and interpersonal conflicts with the family unit and the society in general as presented in this narrative. The family of Eugene now experiences strained relationships that affect the extended members such as Papa Nnukwu and Aunty Ifeoma.

The diasporic novelist also reveals Eugene's strange and rigid order in his children's lives. He dominates the dinner table with his religious pronouncements while his violent expressions of rage erupt unpredictably and volcanically. He dictates to every member of his family and by extension to his aged father and his sister, Aunty Ifeoma who lives in Nsukka. To avoid a clash with him, his family fearfully and constantly seek his approval and express their love for him. In order to please Eugene, everybody must embrace and participate actively in church activities and programmes especially the communion service. According to the narrator, during his sermons, Father Benedict usually referred to Pope, papa, and Jesus in that order. He used to illustrate the gospels: "When we let our light shine before men, we are reflecting Christ's Triumphant Entry." He states further, "Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other big men in this country, he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup…Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom. How many of us have stood up for the truth? How many of us have reflected the Triumphant Entry?" (12-13) Eugene ensures that his family religiously partakes in the communion on Sundays. Kambili reports the bitter reaction of his father when Jaja fails to go to communion one Sunday: "Jaja, you did not go to the communion. It is the body of our Lord. You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that" (14-15). At this juncture, Jaja becomes tired of his father's religious dominance, he retorts, "then I will die. The narrator reports that, "fear had darkened Jaja's eyes to the colour of the coal tar, but he looked Papa in the face now. Then I will die" (15). Eugene's uncontrollable anger manifests once again in the novel.

Africans especially the womenfolk and children are educated customarily to be respectful and obedience to elders and their husbands who are heads of every family. In this novel, the writer portrays Kambili as a character who suffers a great deal owing to her inability to take a firm stand and express her feelings and thoughts. Her physical and psychological suppression emanates from her father's patriarchal rule which has entirely subsumed her personal will and identity. She suffers severe beatings from her father to the extent that she was admitted to the hospital and wished never to live. Though the physical and psychological tortures that she received initially made her appear mute and timid, her personality changes as she struggles to speak especially after she returns from Nsukka where she went to visit Aunty Ifeoma, a university Professor. The prolonged tortures and threats she gets from her father prevent her from speaking the truth.

Take for instance, apart from the agony of torture, the family also suffers silence as everyone appears timid and lives in fear as Kambili vividly stated; "We went upstairs to change,

Jaja, Mama and I, our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection of time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on" (39). There is absolute silence in the house throughout the week and even on Sundays when they are supposed to have some leisure, "chess games or newspaper discussions" are not permitted. Obbo reveals that "Even though the world is changing all about them, it seems that women's own attempt to cope with the new situation they find themselves in are regarded as a 'problem' by men, and a betrayal of traditions which are often confused with women's roles" (143). African tradition appears to be repressive to women in various ways. However, in this novel the female characters have found their voices to express themselves and challenge oppressive authorities.

Political Instability and Agitations

Adichie has also reflected on the historical experience of military government that emerged through coups and counter-coups in Nigeria shortly after our political independence and continued for more than two decades. In this narrative, the change of government occurs suddenly which the heroine reports, thus: "It was during family time the next day, a Saturday, that the coup happened. Papa had just checkmated Jaja when we heard the martial music on the radio, the solemn strains making us stop to listen. A General with a strong Hausa accent came on and announced that there had been a coup and that we had a new government. We would be told shortly who our new head of state was" (32). The military have no cogent reason to overthrow any administration being it military or civil. Eugene notes that "Coups begat coups. A coup always began a vicious cycle…Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk." He further states one of the reasons why the military came to power: "the politicians were corrupt, and the *Standard* had written many stories about cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads." However, Eugene decries military rule and clamours for democratically elected government; "what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. *Renewed Democracy*" (33). Adichie captures the above scenario which started in 1966 when the first military coup was staged in Nigeria. In retrospect, the military juntas overthrow and stick to power while the entire citizenry languish in abject poverty and want. Adichie through the

character of Eugene condemns this system of government which has no regards for human rights and instead calls for "Renewed Democracy."

The clamour for good condition of living by the Nigerian citizens during the military era was marred with series of demonstrations. Nigerians were tired of the prolonged dire economic strangulation that held them captive for over two decades and this resulted in mass protests. As Eugene pointed out in *Purple Hibiscus:* "Only the *Standard* had a critical editorial, calling on the new military government to quickly implement a return to democracy plan." Eugene also identifies the inhumanity of the military towards opponents in the period under re-creation. In the case of Ade Coker, Eugene reports how he was maltreated; "They put on so many cigarettes on his back. They will receive their due, but not on this earth, *mba*" (50). Also presented in the novel is the indiscriminate demolition of illegal structures that characterized military administrations.

In a civilized society, security agents would not destroy goods of women especially as they often serve as breadwinners. The omniscient narrator further describes the uncivil attitude of soldiers towards the traders, thus; "Market women were shouting, and many had both hands placed on their heads, in the way that people do to show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short afro. Her wrapper had come undone and her white underwear showed" (52). The violation of fundamental human rights is often a major feature of military governments as evident in the narrative. The novelist nostalgically reflects on some draconian incidents perpetuated by military personnel as recounted by the protagonist, Kambili. According to her: "As we hurried past, I saw a woman spit at a soldier, I saw the soldier raise a whip in the air. The whip was long. It curled in the air before it landed on the woman's shoulder. Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing" (52). Soldiers are often trained to obey instructions from their superiors which the protagonist affirms in the narrative that, "When we got into the car, Kelvin told Mama that the soldiers had been ordered to demolish the vegetable stalls because they were illegal structures." The novelist retrospectively captures picturesque scenes of the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) that probably led to the destruction of unlawfully erected structures across the country. She also expresses the mixed feelings and reactions of the public when the military intervened in politics. The period is often marred with protests, killings, illegal detention and repressive control of the media and oppositions.

Adichie also introspectively presents the reactions of the Nigerian citizenry during protests against military dictatorship in the past; "The first week after the coup, Kelvin plucked green tree

branches every morning and stuck them to the car, lodged above the number plate, so that the demonstrators at Government Square would let us drive past. The green branches meant solidarity" (35). In subsequent weeks, "there were soldiers at the roadblock," "walking around", "caressing their long guns. They stopped some cars and searched them." Soldiers had no regards for civilians as they maltreat them. As the narrator made us realize, "I saw a man kneeling on the road beside his Peugeot 504, with his hands raised high in the air" (36). Aunty Ifeoma, a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka also expressed her discontentment with military rule. The human psyche is certainly the reservoir of repressed experiences, events, and images that can be thrown-up by triggers. She complains bitterly thus: "Look what this military tyrant is doing to our country. We have not had fuel for three months in Nsukka. I spent the night in the petrol station last week, waiting for fuel. And at the end, the fuel did not come. Some people left their cars in the station because they did not have enough fuel to drive back home" (84).

Nigeria is one of the highest producers of crude oil in the world. Ironically, the nation sometimes faces a problem of fuel scarcity. Even the task force on petroleum products that was established to tackle this problem did not help matters as the officials seemed to be ineffective in their operations. In addition to the foregoing, Aunty Ifeoma continues, "We just called off yet another strike, even though no lecturer has been paid for the last two months. They tell us the Federal Government has no money." The insensitivity of the military towards the welfare of lecturers as chronicled by Adichie resulted in brain drain. As Ifeoma revealed in the novel, "*Ifukwa,* people are leaving the country. Phillipa left two months ago." "She shares a cramped office with another Adjunct Professor, but she says at least teachers are paid there" (84).

Akingbe states that "Nigeria under Abacha is a country under dictatorship. In order to maintain himself in power, he suppresses his opponents by imprisoning and killing some. During his rule, corruption and nepotism are heightened. Rather than improving the living conditions of Nigerians, Abacha uses national resources for his family and to take care of his terminal illness." Adebayo concurs with Kehinde who posits that, "while the dictator seeks a total domination of men and society, literature often seeks their total liberation. It is thus inevitable that the two must come into potentially fatal collision." In some of post-independence Nigerian works of art, what one observes are rather obvious attacks on politicians, ironic stories and whimsical cartoons of the contemporary social scenes, poking sophisticated fun at a variety of political foibles and dissecting

the Nigerian socio-political society. The writers' attacks on the problem of misrule in the nation are brutal and direct, indeed verging on naturalism.

Celibacy and Catholicism

Adichie captures and interrogates the issue of sexual drives among some members towards Catholic priests in society. First, she skilfully portrays the role of Catholic Priests-Reverend Father Benedict and Sisters in Christianity, especially among the Catholic. Eugene expresses his fear over the new priest posted to their parish to assist Father Benedict. After worshipping one Sunday he says; "that young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him" (37). Eugene has no confidence in the new priest because of his method of preaching sermon. According to the Kambili who attended the church service with her father, "The visiting priest said Mass in a red robe that seemed too short for him He was newly ordained, waiting to be assigned a parish" (36). The visiting priest belongs to the new generation of Servants of God who look forward to revolutionizing the Catholic beliefs and mode of worship to suit modern trend of serving God. This is why, "he broke into an Igbo song," and as the narrator recounts in the novel, "the congregation drew in a collective breath, some sighed, some had their mouths in a big O. They were used to Father Benedict's sparse sermons, to Father Benedict's pinch-you-nose monotone. Slowly they joined in" (37). Catholic priests enjoy some rights and privileges in most society. Like the Reverend Sisters, the Fathers are voluntarily unmarried and abstain from sexual intercourse usually for religious reasons. They could be invited for family Mass, dinner and so on. They usually enjoy maximum support from members like Eugene, Aunty Ifeoma and other Catholic faithful. This interaction may also create an avenue for emotions to be developed towards the priests as evident in the novel.

It is reported that Kambili meets Father Amadi for the second time but this time around she falls in love with him. Though Reverend Fathers are not supposed to marry nor indulge in sexual act, the handsomeness of Father Amadi carried Kambili away. She examined him thoroughly and observes some striking qualities that appeal to her; "He had a singer's voice, a voice that had the same effect on my ears that Mama working Pears baby oil into my hair had on my scalp" (143). She became happy when Father Amadi included Jaja and her in the conversation between him and Kambili's cousins. Her love for the Father develops as she heard that he knows her own father. At this point, she longs for a warm romance and not just to have intimate relationship with him; "I

wanted some of the cloudlike warmth in Father Amadi's eyes to rub off on me, settle on me." She needs nothing else than a romantic relationship with Father Amadi, a dream that cannot materialize since priests are expected to remain unmarried or abstain from sexual intercourse.

Kambili's romantic consciousness caused her embarrassment and discomfort in the presence of Father Amadi. As she recounts; "I looked up to find Father Amadi's eyes on me, and suddenly I could not move my tongue, could not swallow. I was too aware of his eyes, too aware that he was looking at me" (146). Kambili seems to be overwhelmed by the presence of Father Amadi in Aunty Ifeoma's house and resolved to speak less and remain as composed as possible. The narrator further recounts the instinctual sexual desire of the heroine who is overwhelmed and fallen deeply in love with the young priest. This is noticeable on the day Father Amadi decided to take Kambili out, she dressed charmingly to create the impression that she is fully grown. According to her: "I took Amaka's lipstick from the top of the dresser and ran it over my lips. It looked strange, not as glamourous as it did on Amaka; it did not even have the bronze shimmer. I wiped it off. My lips looked pale, a dour brown. I ran the lipstick over my lips again, and my hands shook" (181). During their outing to the stadium, she became sexually attracted to Father Amadi's body especially the car that "smelled like him, a clean scent that made her think of a clear azure sky" and his shorts that "climbed up to expose a muscular thigh sprinkled with dark hair." Sometimes she "looked at him and then away" instead of playing.

Kambili wonders why Father Amadi became a Priest. She however answered that question within her; "of course he had got the call, the same call that all the Reverend Sisters in school talked about when they asked us to always listen for the call when we pray" (186). She also thought of becoming a Sister if called, "sometimes I imagined God calling me, his rumbling voice British-accented." In a nutshell, Kambili initially wanted to live a life of celibacy. She admires Father Amadi who looks young, handsome and fluent in speech. She wished they could have a romantic affair together even though the Father is not expected to have a family.

Conclusion

This study examined how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie retrospectively captures happenings in her homeland and also interrogates the postcolonial disillusionment that characterized existence in Nigeria. She presents unpleasant experience in the family of Eugene Achike, the Catholic church and of course Nigeria as a whole. Though the writer resides in foreign land, she is able to reflect nostalgically on happenings in her homeland, especially intra-family

conflicts and other problems that affect the psychological wellbeing of citizens in postcolonial Nigeria. Thematically, the study explored the celibacy of Catholicism, religious extremism, agitations, political instability, African patriarchalism, domestic disintegration and militarism, among others.

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