

Resilience in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

During the period of independence, Nigeria saw ethnic conflicts that resulted in a civil war and a turbulent history. In Nigeria, there were three prominent ethnic groups: the Igbo in the Southeast, the Hausa-Fulani of the Sokoto Caliphate in the Northern part, and the Yoruba in the Southwest. The amalgamation of these ethnic groups occurred in 1914, resulting in the formation of the Lagos colony, Northern protectorate, and Southern Nigeria protectorate. After the process of independence in 1960, these individuals scattered across Nigeria. The Biafran War, alternatively referred to as the Nigerian Civil War, commenced as a result of the Igbo people's insurrection against the central governing body of Nigeria throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The Igbo people, who held the belief that their ethnic group was incompatible with the Federal government, opted for the name Biafra to symbolize their goals. The conflict arose due to pre-decolonization economic, political, religious, and social conflicts.

Purple Hibiscus (2006), authored by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is set in postcolonial Nigeria amidst ethnic strife, civil war, governmental uncertainty, and economic volatility. The objective of the study is to examine *Purple Hibiscus* and its investigation of the issue of "Speaking the Unspeakable: Trauma and Representation." We will engage in a discussion and examine the experiences of Kambili and Jaja as they assert themselves against their father, Eugene, who has strong religious beliefs, in the midst of a zone of war. The article will also analyze the protagonists' endeavors to ascertain their identities inside the war-ravaged neocolonial Nigeria. The results will endeavor to offer insightful analysis of the characters' suppressed traumas and life experiences. The research will focus mostly on the text itself, and will utilize several theories, such as trauma theory, to analyze and interpret the text.

Keywords: Exile, identity crisis, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, resistance, trauma,

As the title suggests, hibiscus is a tenacious flower that frequently blossoms in the face of overwhelming adversity. Planters believe they have died when they lose their leaves, yet the blossoms patiently wait until the end of summer to completely open. A bildungsroman, *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, shows readers the main character's gradual growth. The book's purpose was to illustrate religious persecution, personal development that deviates from that oppression, and challenges encountered along the way. In fiction books, the characters' decisions and agency make the plot move. Kambili and Jaja, the siblings, display their characters' agency. Kambili resembles the hibiscus flower by being motivated by her love interest, experiencing a religious awakening, and strengthening her resolve to rebel against her father.

Purple Hibiscus opens with an extensive quote from *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, which is an inspiration. The story occurs in a socially, politically, and economically chaotic post-Biafra Nigeria. The protagonist, Kambili, sees the story develop through his or her eyes. The plot centers on Kambili's development into a fully realized woman. There is political upheaval and economic distress in the postcolonial Nigeria of *Purple Hibiscus*. The main character, Kambili Achike, comes from a prosperous Enugu State family headed by her devoutly Catholic father, Eugene. She was fifteen years old during the majority of the period covered by the book. In the Achike household, Eugene, a devout follower of religion and a cruel figure, often beats his wife Beatrice, his daughter Kambili, and his son Jaja. Due to the abuse, she endured, Beatrice suffered miscarriages twice. The narrative focuses on Kambili's perspective and centers around the disintegration of her family and her struggle to mature. Kambili and her brother Jaja spend time with Ifeoma, her father's sister, and her three kids at Nsukka. Compared to the homes Kambili and Jaja are used to, this one is very different. It adheres to a modern form of Catholicism, creating a friendly, liberal atmosphere where participants are encouraged to be inquisitive, form their own beliefs, and express their opinions. In this encouraging environment, Kambili and Jaja become more honest and can establish and express their own opinions. While staying at Auntie Ifeoma's house, Kambili falls in love with a young priest named Father Amadi, who arouses her sexually.

Through Kambili's eyes, the reader discovers that Kambili's father, Eugene is a staunch, multifaceted, paradoxical figure. On one side, he is a devout Catholic businessman who donates generously to the community and church. On the other hand, he turns a blind eye to his father because he believes in and follows the traditional Igbo religion. Eugene repeatedly refers to his father as "Heathen." He even punishes his children, Kambili and Jaja, for visiting and staying with their grandfather. He speaks against the dictatorship and even publishes a newspaper, secretly putting his life in danger. He brutally beats his wife, Beatrice, and children and imposes fundamentalist religious views on them. The two siblings temporarily escape the torture of their father when they are invited by their aunt, Ifeoma, to spend their vacation in Nsukka.

Even though it takes place during a military coup, the narrative is structured around the liturgical periods of Palm Sunday, the week leading up to Palm Sunday, and the week following Palm Sunday. Biblically speaking, Palm Sunday is a Christian holiday that falls within Holy Week or the Easter season. It honored Jesus' victorious entry into Jerusalem on a colt when he was welcomed as the Son of David and given palm fronds by the throng.

The arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem marks the end of colonial power. It starts with the Babylonian exile in the Roman Empire. Jews had grown to believe that God would send them a Messiah to save them from colonial slavery. Adichie wonderfully draws a parallel between the opening segment and this biblical incident. She uses the opening to set the narrative—the arrival of the king—to fight colonization and religious fundamentalism. This fight would lead to redemption. She begins the section by drawing inspiration from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

"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 etagere" (Adichie 3). She justifies the title *Palm Sunday and Breaking Gods*. Jaja becomes the rebellion. Eugene believes that only sin can keep a person away from Sunday communion. Kambili continues to narrate how Jaja becomes a symbol of revolt by refusing to accompany Communion.

So when Papa did not see Jaja go to the altar on Palm Sunday, he banged his missal. Jaja did not give up and kept arguing, explaining how going to the altar and eating wafers nauseated him. Nausea itself is a symbol of revolt. When the body wants to vomit what it has eaten, it experiences nausea. It is an act of rejection. To find a priest's touch nauseating is Jaja's way of rebelling against religious practices that his father imposes on him and the family.

Through the voice of Kambili, the narrator tells us that Jaja refers to the bread of the Last Supper as a wafer, which is not acceptable to his father. It turns out to be a sign of significant resistance. This incident angered Papa Eugene. Papa Eugene insists and hastens to correct Jaja. He forces the family to call it 'host' because calling it to host will bring sacredness. He asserts, "It is the body of our Lord." You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. "It is death; you know that" (Adichie 7). However, Jaja has emerged as a symbol of rebellion. He challenges Eugene's ways of being overly religious. He finds this religiousness torturous. He outright rejects what his father finds sacred—the touch of the priest and the body of Jesus. He responds, "Then I will die, Papa" (Adichie 7). Jaja registers his rebellion in many ways, such as his refusal to compliment factory drinks and breaking the stringent rules set by his father for eating by leaving lunch early and not coming back for dinner. At this kind of striking rebellion and given their father's obsession with control and fundamentalism, Kambili, the narrator, thought their world would crumble. With courage and stubbornness, Jaja broke the silence and moved towards a free world. In horror, Kambili lies down trembling with high fever, stating that:

May be Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realizing it, only just letting myself think it. (Adichie 15–16)

After Mama had left, she lay down and let her thoughts reflect on the times when she, Jaja, and Mama communicated with their hearts rather than their tongues. Prior to Nsukka. Auntie Ifeoma shattered the stillness in the room as she walked out into her Nsukka apartment's porch area, where she had a little garden. The defiance of Jaja brought to mind an experiment conducted by Auntie Ifeoma using purple hibiscus. The experiment had a sweet aroma with hints of freedom, but it was a different kind of freedom—liberty to be and to do. However, her memories did not begin at Nsukka. They first appeared when the hibiscuses in their front yard were an eye-catching shade of red.

Thus, Jaja emerges as a rebel, going against his father's and the church's oppressive practices. According to Aunt Ifeoma, Jaja was given his name in honor of a rebellious king who ruled during the colonial era.

"I told your mother that it was an appropriate nickname that you would take after Jaja of Opobo.

"Jaja or Opobo?" "The stubborn king?" Obiora asked

"Defiant," Aunt Ifeoma said. "He was a defiant king." (Adichie 145)

He governed the Opobo people. He refused to give the British control over all trade when they arrived. The British deported him to the West Indies because, unlike the other kings, he did not sell his soul for a small quantity of gunpowder. He did not go back to Opobo again. Being stubborn might occasionally be a good thing, according to Auntie Ifeoma.

Jaja, ultimately, becomes the savior king by taking the blame for their father's death and freeing his mother and sister from the cruelties they were subjected to.

In the narrative, silencing is the weapon of patriarchal control and domestic servitude. Kambili, Jaja, and their mother find ways to survive the torture done by Eugene. One of the strategies they followed is the internalization of silence, through which there is a filial bond between the mother and the children.

Kambili matures as the narrative develops; she transforms from an introverted and submissive child into a fully-fledged independent, self-assured young adult. Initially, she is captivated by her father, and his services to church and community services, despite his brutal treatment towards his own family. She constantly yearns for her father's approval. She dreams of being a source of pride for him. As she grows up, she starts realizing and accepting the brutalities of her father. She explains to Amaka, her cousin, how she and her brother get punished.

The most crucial agency in Kambili's development is Father Amadi. He shows her a better way to be a devout Catholic while teaching her to value herself and live free of the restrictions she had been constrained by. He continues to violate the religious decorum Kambili had grown accustomed to by being courteous and accepting Papa-Nnukwu. As he offers Kambili perspectives on the world and herself that she had not previously seen, Father Amadi turns out to be the agency for Kambili's growth into full fathomed woman. He catalyzes Kambili's introduction of new Catholicism and her sexuality and starts her defiance of her father's patriarchy and religious bigotry. As their narrative develops, Kambili also evolves as a woman and introspects more. Slowly, she begins to acknowledge her feelings toward the priest. In introspection, she compares Father Amadi's voice's impact to that of Pear's baby oil on her ears when she was a baby. Slowly, her awakens to her sexuality, and she gets attracted to the priest. It deviates from her father's control. Next, she is delighted and amused when Papa-Nnukwu comes to stay with them at Auntie Ifeoma's place to witness his pagan religious practices and the freedom in them. While growing up, she was accustomed to the restrictive and oppressive Catholicism enforced by her father. However, now that she is staying with her grandfather, she has started to look beyond Christianity. Early in the morning, she saw him adoring his gods and ancestors, and she was puzzled to see him beaming widely, whereas, at home, they never smiled after the rosary.

She learned that hers had kept her confined and silent, whereas his religion had set him free. Papa-Nnukwu is Eugene's counterfeit agency, and it liberates Kambili. It is also crucial to her resistance to her father's repressive religion.

...the term "trauma" is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event... It imposes itself again and again in the nightmares and the repetitive actions of the survivor. (Caruth 5)

The climax of her character development happens when her father walks in while she is showing Papa-Nnukwu's picture. He gets infuriated that his children are seeing a pagan's picture. Instead of allowing her brother to take it, she takes it on herself and claims that the painting is

hers. She not only defies him but also stands up against him by holding the picture. She has finally overcome the silence. She is unaffected by the punishment.

As the kicking picked up speed, she was reminiscent of Amaka's culturally aware music, which sometimes started with a mellow saxophone and quickly evolved into lusty singing. She encircled the delicate, feathery painting bits more tightly, enveloping herself in them. Amaka's paintbrush was still emitting a metallic stench.

The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, and my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. because I could hear a swoosh in the air. A low voice was saying, "Please, biko, please." More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (Adichie 211).

She resolutely continues to consider what he forbade even while being condemned by the man whose approval she had craved all her life. This turning point symbolised her development and the last use of her character's agency. With the help of Father Amadi and Papa Nnukwu, she blossoms as a purple hibiscus against all odds.

After roughly three years have passed since these events, the novel concludes with a tone that can be interpreted as cautiously optimistic. Kambili, who is now eighteen years old and more self-assured than she ever was, has matured into a young lady, while her brother Jaja, who has been through a lot during his time in jail, is almost set to be released. Jaja's struggle has made him more challenging but has not broken him. Their mother, Beatrice, has been hospitalized after experiencing a severe mental breakdown.

A tipping point is reached toward a new beginning in terms of Kambili and Jaja's lives and the continued existence of their family in the same form as it had been in the past. Beatrice kills Eugene with poison because she can no longer put up with Eugene's relentlessly cruel behavior. Jaja admits that he is responsible for the crime and is given a prison sentence as a result. In the meantime, Auntie Ifeoma and her family uprooted their lives. They moved to the United States after she was dishonestly terminated from her work as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Jaja and Kambili bloom despite the challenges they are forced to overcome, like hibiscus flowers.

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