

Postcolonial Threads in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

Colonialism is a European expression on rest of the world from the last four hundred years. It is an acquisition through brutal force and religion. Colonialism has created world into many parts like the first, second and the third world. This segregation is based on conquests of European powers, all the colonies are now called as the third world. The third world is an identity for colonies. Postcolonial studies are fields of literary studies concerned with the analysis of the literature of former colonies. Postcolonial studies particularly stress on the question of power and knowledge, cultural and intellectual domination. This paper presents postcolonial threads in African novel 'Purple Hibiscus' written by Chinmama Adichie.

"Our histories cling to us. We are shaped by where we come from"

Adichie asserts this quote to assure that no one is able to separate her from his history and culture. Adichie uses her novels to give voice to African experience that is not presented by the western media. Adichie wants to show the glorious indigenous culture and history of Africa through her novels. This paper in the beginning depicts the idea of Adichie as a modern writer and later describes Africa's most prominent postcolonial writer Nguigi Wa Thiong and his theories of colonial alienation, and cultural bomb. This paper is a depiction these theories and of Africa in Adichie's novel 'Purple Hibiscus'.

Keywords: Postcolonial Theory, Colonial Alienation, Cultural Bomb, Third Space, African ideology

Literature works as a mirror of society and naturally reflects its culture, history, Socio-cultural, Socio-political background and values. Africa has a glorious history. Many African writers like Achebe, Soyinka has depicted Africa as a golden bird which later caged by the colonial powers. This paper describes that in modern world a new generation of African writers has come out and their vision on indigenous African history and culture that can be found in books only. Colonialism is about the dominance of a strong nation over another weaker one. Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya a renowned philosopher of India describes the types of colonization in his lecture delivered in October 1931 under Sir Austosh memorial lecture series that "man's domination over man is felt in the most tangible form in the political sphere. There is however, a subtler domination exercised in the sphere of ideas by

one culture on another, domination all the more serious in the consequences because it is not ordinary felt” (Swaraj in Ideas1). Colonialism is a practice to conquer other worlds, It is considered as exercise of power by colonisers.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria in 1977. She is the author of three novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of The Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americana*. She has received numerous awards and distinctions including the orange broadband prize for fiction and a Macarthur foundation fellowship. Adichie belongs to a middle class Nigerian Igbo family. Her father was a professor and her mother was an administrator. Chimamanda is a part of new generation of Nigerian authors swiftly growing in reputation. Her first two novels deal with the political atmosphere of her native country through the prism of personal and familial relationship. Adichie says that she feels different from other writers in at least one way: many of them were able to draw dramatic tales from their difficult early family lives, but her upbringing had been happy. She said “I feel a little bit guilty for not having massive trauma in my childhood”. Her books have some parallels to her own experience. Although she uses same themes of racism, cultural crisis and oppression of poor but the way she deals with psychological trauma with natural objects, silence as violence and characters that are not belong to poor and uneducated class makes her different.

Chinmamanda wrote purple hibiscus in 2003 set in postcolonial Nigeria during the civil war in the late 1960’s. It is a bildungsroma that focuses greatly on family relationship as well as religion and cultural ideas. In this novel Adichie intertwines the political climate of Nigeria and the internal trauma of achike family. The story is narrated by 15 year old Kambili. She and her brother Jaja are the children of Eugene, a wealthy industrial living in the town Enugu. The tale begins after there has been a coup in Nigeria. Throughout the story we find that Enugu’s character is used by Adichie to describe the colonial impact on African people. Adichie echoes real political activism and events in her novel.

The novel purple hibiscus begins with a nod to Chinua Achebe:

“Things began to fall apart at home when my brother Jaja didn’t go to communion and papa flung his heavy missal across and the room and broke the figurines on the étagère”(purple Hibiscus 1-3)

Adichie read Achebe and is influenced by him. Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* chronicles the decline of an Igbo clan leader in the shadow of British colonial rule and Christian missionaries. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe wrote about the starting point of colonial rule in Nigeria, its time of introduction of Christianity in Africa. Adichie writes about the further generations of African people who are living under cultural imperialism. *Purple Hibiscus* is a novel about a culturally Igbo family living under strict catholic rules. We can say that Achebe shows us how Christianity was introduced and Adichie shows the impacts of Christianity and reaction of African people.

Every character of *Purple Hibiscus* represents Africa, papa Nnukwu represents ancient Africa and follows the path of his ancestors, papa represents Africa who is devoted catholic and also wants perfection in his family according to Christianity. Father Amadi represents a universal way of faith in which you can see god in any form, you can see god in anyone’s smile. Ade Coker represents corruption in Africa. Narrator kambili represents modern Africa, at a crossroads between colonial faith and traditional views there is constant tension between the Igbo rituals and the rigid western mores of Catholicism. The characterisation of aunty

Ifeoma shows us two things, first Adichie's autobiographical note that her mother was an administrator in university like aunty ifeoma and Adichie is more like Amaka, daughter of aunty Ifeoma and the second aunty ifeoma is liberal to follow the path of religion. Aunty Ifeoma is converted into Christianity but she follows the norms of Igbo religion. It shows the assimilation of British and native African culture. Aunty Ifeoma seems like an example of hybridity that is a new race emerged from mixing of two races. Aunty Ifeoma's home seems like 'third space' for Kambili and Jaja. Homi Bhabha describe in his space theory that third space is more liberal, we can say that kambili found her first space at home where she have to speak what papa want to listen, for kambili second space is her school where she found herself as a 'backyard snob' and third space at aunty ifeoma's home where she found her voice and identity. Bhabha explains hybridity that it is kind of intermixing of two cultures and races. In postcolonial era every colony is the example of hybridity, the Colonised people merge their own cultures with British culture and their identity belongs to nowhere. Bhabha explains the theory of mimicry that colonized mimic colonizers to found a space among them. In *Purple Hibiscus* we found papa who steeping in the shoes of western world. He directly borrows the Christian norms, English accent and follows them strictly.

Purple Hibiscus analysis on Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O' s Postcolonial Theory

Ngugi Wa Thiong 'o' is a Kenyan writer formerly working in English and now working in Gikuyu. He is novelist and theorist of postcolonial literature. In 1986 Ngugi wrote his best known and most cited nonfiction *Decolonising The Mind: the politics of language in African literature*. It is a collection of four essays about language and its constructive role in national culture, history and identity. It advocates linguistic decolonisation. Decolonising the mind is split into four essays: 'the language of African literature', the language of African theatre', the language of African fiction and the quest for relevance. In decolonising the mind Ngugi points about language and how it functions in any country. In this paper I am taking Ngugi's language theory to describe the function of language in eradicating other language.

He said- "language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture and culture carries particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world"(Decolonising The Mind Intro.part 4)

Ngugi argues that communication between human beings propels the evolution of culture, but language also carries the history, values and aesthetics of a culture along with it. Through the oral and written literature we can carry culture from one generation to next. In the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie asserts descriptions of Nigerian food, flowers plant and names, these descriptions carries Nigerian culture along with the text. We found that Adichie uses food as an aspect of the Igbo culture that features in kambili's discovery of her socio-cultural identity. Food is used as a means of control by papa who is responsible for feeding not just his family but also the whole village during the Christmas festival. So culture is almost indistuinagle from the language. Colonizers overpower through these cultural instincts like food, festival and name as we can say that Achebe's description of food is more African than Adichie. Achebe's festivals were new yam festivals that were related to African native culture and Adichie describes festivals related to Christmas.

Ngugi's understanding of imperialism as he articulates in his work more based on cultural imperialism as he said-"imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of world today" (*Decolonising The Mind* intro.part 5) Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* gives a real account of imperialism in total. This novel begins with such instance of military rule that led to civil war and later Adichie took characters to describe bloody unrest of this war outside and inside. Adichie elucidate impact of war in this novel as democracy is hindered by the wide spread corruption in the government. She gives examples of papa and his paper 'the standard' are the critical of the corruption that is ushered by a leader who is not elected by people, but it ends with death of an editor. We found that when Jaja and Kambili went to their aunt they witness protests, deadly roadblocks and harassment from the safety of their car. In *Nsukka* we also found that protest by students in university and Adichie's character says that "university is microcosm of Nigeria- ruled by one man with all the power". Adichie gives a real account of political unrest and military violence. There are threads of economical imperialism in this novel as economic position of people make status of people among the society.

Imperialism and the 'cultural bomb'

Ngugi associates language with two mutually opposed forces in Africa. The first is an imperialist tool and the second is a weapon of resistance for colonized people. Ngugi considers English in Africa as a 'cultural bomb' that continues a process of wiping out pre-colonial histories and identities: he defines cultural bomb as "the effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environments, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves." (*Decolonising The Mind* P.16) He determines that English language separated African people from their self and their heritage. Ngugi asserts that linguistic oppression is greatest thread of imperialism. Explaining linguistic oppression Ngugi defines 'Colonial Alienation' which means deliberate dissociation of the language, of thing, of formal education and of mental development from the language of their daily interaction in the home and in the community. Ngugi says that English language is totally different from their native language, so this is the problem for African people that they speak native at home and community and they read and write English at school and other official work.

Ngugi defines colonial alienation -"Colonial Alienation is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies" (*Decolonising The Mind* P.28)

Purple Hibiscus is a suitable example of colonial alienation. English is the official language of Nigeria in 1960. The effects of this cultural imperialism is that the middle and elite class who were mainly beneficiaries of western education assumes themselves superior to others, although they are black by body but western education separate them from other blacks. It seems like they are having black body and white mind. Like Eugene who never speak native language, because he belongs to the first generation that come into contacts with white missionaries. Kambili reveals his hypocrisy in his use of language when he went to her school. She says "papa changed his accent when he spoke: sounding British just as he did when he spoke to father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager to please way that he always assumed with the religious especially with the western religious".

Adichie shows the attitude of elite class that how they assume themselves as western followers of British language and culture while forgetting their own. It is like when an indigenous culture passes there must be another culture to fill the vacuum. English culture and language fill African vacuum making them elite from tribal. Ngugi asserts that Africa has never been properly buried slavery or colonialism. It is committing psychic suicide by producing African bourgeoisie who view their own culture shameful. The clash between the languages of Igbo and English is also seen in the religious setting. The old order represented by father Benedict who is described by Kambili as looking new despite “the fierce heat of seven Nigerian harmattans” father Benedict deems the Igbo language unacceptable for religious purpose except for offertory which he calls native. Adichie also give solution of this clash introducing father Amadi who is an Igbo priest converted into catholic but still carrying Igbo heritage. He has universal appeal to follow the path of god, we can say that he differentiate language and religion. According to him language is not necessary to follow the path of god.

Ngugi elucidates about the methods of colonial phase of imperialism which changes from physical violence to psychological violence. Ngugi describes it by saying that “the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the psychological violence of classroom. But where the former was physically brutal, that later was visibility gentle” Adichie in purple hibiscus gives an account of both physical and psychological violence. In civil war there was the military rule all over Nigeria and British people treated African people sub humanly. Adichie gives descriptions of psychological violence that English taught in schools and colleges and when Kambili comes as second in class her father beats him badly. Adichie shows both method of imperialism. In the very first page we encounter that Kambili is reading the Bible and they have to read it because papa imposed it on them. At papa’s home we encounter that English language and culture is necessary part of their life and when they refused to do that they had to repay it. Violence is a theme in the novel used by Adichie to show the condition of Nigerian elite and native people. We found that Adichie describes language subjugation as spiritual subjugation.

Ngugi says that economic and political control can never be completed and become effective without mental control. Adichie gives account of that era when political economical and mental control was in its peak and people were resisting from their identity against colonialism. Her novel is on conscious revolution, when Jaja and Kambili return to their native land and women are fighting for their rights. Adichie returns to native Nigeria in the end of her novel with the grace of glorious culture and language both in communication and writing. Ngugi is influenced by Frantz Fanon and also takes his idea to describe in rejection of colonial language and culture. We found that Adichie works on fanon’s idea in purple hibiscus as Fanon said that a rejection of the colonizers ‘s linguistic and cultural forms is a precondition for achieving ‘true’ freedom. In the ending of purple hibiscus Jaja and Kambili both refused to Christianity and move to their indigenous culture. Ngugi’s instance on using his mother tongue as the principle medium of his writing is not simply a reaction against anglication. It is more about resurrection the African soul from centuries of slavery and colonialism that left it spiritually empty, economically fragmented and politically marginalised. Adichie carries same soul in her work *Purple Hibiscus*, but she fails to do the translation of Igbo words that prove Ngugi that writing in other language lost its original essence.

Adichie wrote in English and Ngugi Wa Thiong gives priority to writing in native language. This is the basic difference between both these writers, but their purpose of writing unites them. They both want to show the glorious side of Africa to the world and want to remove presumptions that Africa is a poor country in wealth and tribe in culture. They both want to take African people towards their roots.

Conclusion

Purple Hibiscus as a novel is dressed with all the constitutive elements inherent in the novel genre, namely plot, characterization, theme and style, all of which are relevant in understanding its literary essence. The book's namesake flower is representation of freedom and hope, as purple hibiscus blooms in garden Jaja and Kambali's confidence also bloom towards their own identity and culture. Adichie ends 'Purple Hibiscus' with a happy note of Kambali's laughter and Mama's smile signal that they fully come in to their own, they able to support themselves. This hope is not for Kambali's her mother but also for all the African people who want to free themselves from British colonization. Adichie ends with a hopeful note both for Africa and achike family. This novel contains all the postcolonial threads to show the rest of the world that time flies but colonialism left its instincts in a colony that is now called neo-colonialism.

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