

Purple Hibiscus: An Intersectional Reading

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Abstract

This article explores Chimamanda Adichie's debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) through the lens of intersectionality to reveal the suffering of African women under patriarchy and their exposure to oppression by the interlocking systems of race, gender, and class. The novel, through its protagonist Kambili and other female characters, sheds light on the plight of African women who find themselves at the intersection of various oppressive factors. Kambili's father Papa Eugene, is a conventional patriarch, who victimizes and silences his family. A religious fanatic and extremely violent person, he abuses his family when he feels they have deviated from his version of religious piety. While Kambili's mother embodies the image of a doubly oppressed woman who finds herself at the intersection of gender and religion, Auntie Ifeoma, on the other hand, is a representative of gender and class intersection. Further, through these characters, Adichie shows how women of different statuses respond differently in order to resist patriarchy and violence. This study, therefore, claims that the female characters of this novel experience issues that cannot be attributed to a single analysis of gender, race, class, religion or location but to a complex interrelation between these identity factors.

Keywords: intersectionality, violence, gender, religion, patriarchy, oppression

Introduction

The experiences of oppression for white middle-class women are different from those experienced by black, poor, and disabled women. These women face both the 'double oppression' of colonialism and patriarchy but are also oppressed on the grounds of race, class, age, religion, sexual orientation and so on. African women, in particular, are regarded as 'second class' citizens whose lives revolve around procreation and motherhood, and are "brainwashed into accepting their slavish status."¹ To ensure her subjugation, a woman in such patriarchal societies "grows from childhood to womanhood to motherhood, [and] is controlled and owned by her father, her husband, then her sons."² Chimamanda Adichie portrays this deplorable condition of Black women who suffer from sexual and racial exploitation in a patriarchal society fortified by religious fanaticism. This article focuses on *Purple Hibiscus* and examines it through the lens of intersectionality, to argue that the female characters of this novel experience issues that cannot be attributed to a single analysis of gender, race, class, religion, or location but to a complex interrelation between these identity factors. The novel also portrays how women of different statuses respond differently to resist patriarchy and violence.

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¹ Charles C. Fonchingong, "Unbending Gender Narratives in African Literature," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2006), pp. 136-147.

² Ketu H. Katrak, "Womanhood and Motherhood: Variations on a Theme in Selected Novels of Buchi Emecheta," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1987), pp. 159-170.

Intersectionality: An Overview

Kimberlé Crenshaw proposed that ‘gender’ was not the primary factor determining a woman’s fate in 1989. She coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to refer to the way gender, race, and other social organisations form an overlapping and interdependent system of discrimination or disadvantage for those who are the most marginalised in society. It advocates for feminism to be fully inclusive, that is, taking into consideration factors such as race, class, religion, gender, and disability. Crenshaw argues that the experience of being a black woman cannot be understood entirely in terms of either being black or a woman; it must include interactions between both identities, which will often reinforce one another. She points out that since the existing discourses are designed to address either race or sex, but not both at the same time, non-white women are marginalised within both of these systems of oppression as a result.³

This theory, which began as an exploration of the oppression of black women, was further expanded to include many more aspects of social identity. Crenshaw also recognised that “the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color.”⁴ Patricia Hill Collins further developed the theory in the 1990s by replacing the previous coinage ‘black feminist thought’ and expanding the general applicability of Crenshaw’s theory from African-American women to all women.⁵ Collins is also of the opinion that forms of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Collins and Sirma Bilge emphasise that intersectionality’s ‘two organisational focal points’ are critical inquiry and critical praxis.⁶ The collaboration between these two operational spheres “can produce important new knowledge and/or practices.”⁷

Long before the term was coined, the ideas behind intersectional feminism existed in Sojourner Truth’s speech “Ain’t I A Woman?” (1851) and in Anna Julia Cooper’s essay “The Coloured Woman’s Office” (1892), which both describe black woman’s experience with multiple types of oppression. The term also has historical and theoretical links to the concept of ‘simultaneity,’ which was advanced during the 1970s by members of the Combahee River Collective in Boston, Massachusetts. Simultaneity is explained as the simultaneous influences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, which informed the member's lives and their resistance to oppression. The influence of racialisation was also highlighted many times by scholar and feminist bell hooks, specifically in *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*.⁸ Thus, Black feminists through their work accentuated their distinctive positionality and its resultant intersecting social identities, emphasising the need to take cognizance of the same. The concept

³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” in *Feminist Legal Theories*, ed. Karen Maschke (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 33-34.

⁴ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, ed. Martha Albertson Fineman (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 93-118.

⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 2022).

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2016), p. 31.

⁷ Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, p. 33.

⁸ bell hooks, *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

which had articulated the distinct and discernible traits of Black women's oppression since the 1970s, albeit without a name, emerged on the theoretical horizon in 1989 as 'intersectionality.'

Considering the theory's scope for inclusion and analysis of multiplicity, multidimensionality and simultaneity of oppression in the lives of women, I here examine intersections encountered by Nigerian women as represented in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Adichie is one of the leading contemporary feminist voices from Nigeria whose work exposes the segregation and inhuman cruelty that characterises the life of women in Afro-American society. The main thematic concern of her writing is the suffering of African women at the hands of male patriarchy and their exposure to oppression of race, gender and class.

Nigeria: A Patriarchal Society

Purple Hibiscus is a coming-of-age narrative that focuses on a fifteen-year-old Kambili and her fight to "stretch her wings" as she experiences the intersection of gender, class, and religion. The novel illustrates the Nigerian post-independence reality of gender inequity and domestic violence sustained by religious fanaticism and cultural conventions. Adichie extends one of Chinua Achebe's themes in *Things Fall Apart*, of "the breakdown of family and community under the pressures of colonialism and religion, and recasts it in post-independent Nigeria, at a time when colonialism's heirs—corruption, political strife, and religious dogmatism – strain family and community."⁹ One of Adichie's most successful novels, the story depicts the various oppressions that the protagonist Kambili and other female characters experience in the hands of patriarchal societies fortified by religious fanaticism. The challenges and hardships that women face in such societies are attributed to their unequal treatment by the patriarchal norms of these societies. These mistreatments often result from the erroneous and misinterpreted reading of the religious teachings. Nigeria is a significantly religious nation, and has used religious teachings and doctrines to justify discrimination, oppression, and exclusion of women. Traditional belief in the Bible is used as evidence to uphold discriminatory customs.

Besides, gender inequality stems from the culture of a society. Culture is an institutionalised value system that governs beliefs. An important aspect of identity and culture not only shapes behavior but also the narratives people craft. Family structures, political and economic institutions are shaped and created through culture. Patriarchy is at the foundation of Nigerian culture, where a belief system has been established which promotes the superiority of men over women. As a result of this gender disparity, stereotypical gender roles position masculinity as the accepted power and have simultaneously placed women in subservient roles. In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie says, "Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture."¹⁰ We are human beings first before being divided into gender, class and other categories. Rethinking cultures and building new inclusive cultures is an urgent need.

Adichie, through the protagonist Kambili, identifies how female characters undergo gendered discrimination, violence, and religious oppression. The narrator of the novel,

⁹ Heather Hewett, "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation," *English in Africa*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2005), p. 79.

¹⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 46.

Kambili, is a shy and quiet girl who lives in an Igbo family with her teenage brother Jaja, mother Beatrice, and father Eugene. Eugene is a wealthy factory owner and a strict Catholic but at home, he behaves violently. A philanthropist in public, he is a staunch religious fanatic who imposes his religious ideology on his family. He punishes his wife and children for deviating from his set norms, rituals, and traditions. They are severely punished for the small misdeeds that they commit. The children behave as per his expectations, and become silent observers of their own, and their mother's, maltreatment at the hands of their strict and violent father.

Class Privilege: A Prison for Kambili

While tradition and religion still play a major role in the oppression of women in Nigeria, it is usually associated with extreme poverty, genocide, and disintegrating families. Adichie's novel, however, can be read as a record of the impact of domestic abuse on children of middle-class families. Nabutanyi sees this as "a link between performativity of respectability and propriety within some African middle-class homes and child abuse."¹¹ Kambili and Jaja belong to a well-to-do family and can afford all the luxuries of life, yet that very privilege becomes a prison for them. For example, they are picked up and dropped in their father's cars to and from the school. Kambili observes that she had to rush out of the school as a slight delay on her part could result in severe punishment. "Once, Kevin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days."¹² The physical abuse that Eugene subjects his children to adversely affects their lives. He sets impossibly high standards for his children. He does not talk to Kambili for days when she comes second in class. Later, as a punishment, he takes her to her school to make her realise that privileges do not allow her to be second in class.

Why do you think I work so hard to give you and Jaja the best? You have to do something with all these privileges. Because God has given you much, he expects much from you. [...] Nobody dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school.¹³

Kambili pays a heavy price for her privileges. She compares her situation with the market woman and the beggar whom notices at the market with her mother to buy new sandals and bags at the start of the new term, a ritual in their house. The market woman is being whipped by the soldiers as they destroyed her stock. She links her helplessness with the "helplessness of despair" of the market woman and the "helplessness of joy" of the beggar on receiving charity from her father.

¹¹ Edgar Fred Nabutanyi, "Ritualised Abuse in *Purple Hibiscus*," in *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, ed. Ernest N. Emenyonu (London: James Curry, 2017), p. 73.

¹² Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 51.

¹³ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 47.

Silence: An Expression of Patriarchal Dominance

Kambili develops as a shy and quiet girl owing to the authoritarian nature of her father. His abusive nature damages her psychologically. She is not able to express herself freely and translates everything she wants to say into what she should say, always wanting to say something, but ending up saying something else, or else nothing at all. On a routine Sunday afternoon, when Jaja refuses to attend communion, Eugene throws a missal which breaks the figurines on the etagere. Instead of blaming her father, the only thing she could do was to apologise to her mother. Unable to communicate what she really wanted to say, she says “I meant to say I am sorry that Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, ‘I’m sorry your figurines broke, Mama’.”¹⁴ At another time she says, “I mumbled to my plate, then started to cough as if real sensible words would have come out but for the coughing.”¹⁵ She is equally shy and reserved at school with her classmates. For them, she is a “backyard snob”¹⁶ and for others she is a “quiet” and “shy”¹⁷ girl. This ingrained quietness is the result of the continual subjugation of Kambili, as she is at a loss for words and only expresses herself in phrases and stutters. Terry Eagleton observes that when women speak of being silenced, “they don’t mean they are incapable of adequately speaking a language, rather they are referring to social and cultural pressures, which undermine their confidence and make them hesitant about speaking.”¹⁸ There is a continual struggle taking place behind their silence and voicelessness.

In such patriarchal households, silence becomes a level of conscious obedience, whereas resistance signifies insubordination that can only be remedied by punishment. Kambili is described by her teachers as “intelligent beyond her years, quiet and responsible” and “A brilliant, obedient student and a daughter to be proud of.”¹⁹ When Eugene’s publisher, Ade Choker, comments that the children “are always so quiet.... So quiet,”²⁰ Eugene proudly contrasts them to “those loud children people are raising these days, with no home training and no fear of God.”²¹ Kambili recalls the years before that particular Palm Sunday when everything changed as “the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than with our lips.”²² The silence manifests itself in their day-to-day activities:

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 time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterwards. Even our family time on Sunday was quiet, without chess games or newspaper discussions, more in tune with the Day of Rest.²³

¹⁴ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 97.

¹⁶ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 52.

¹⁷ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 57.

¹⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Feminist Criticism* (London: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 16-17.

¹⁹ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, pp. 38-39.

²⁰ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 57.

²¹ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 58.

²² Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 16.

²³ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 31.

The silence of the patriarchal household is a way of expressing the dominance and repressing the freedom of its members. Another way of dominating the children is to make them follow a rigorous disciplinary schedule. Kambili and her brother's world is restricted by their father's schedule and unrealistic religious rules. Their daily routine is circumscribed by the schedule drawn by their father. Any deviation from strict adherence to the schedule would lead to severe punishment. From washing their uniforms, themselves, to not allowing the elders to do their errands or taking food in their rooms, strict discipline is maintained in the house.

Intersection of Gender and Religion

Eugene's ironic use of Catholic rituals to foreground domestic abuse is Adichie's creative way of depicting the intersection of religion and gender in some African middle-class homes. Eugene believes that his wife, son, and daughter are sinners and must be punished to redeem them. He believes that it is his divine responsibility to fulfil God's will by punishing any transgression of his piety. That is why when his wife refuses to take part in Holy Communion on account of her early pregnancy nausea, he beats her which results in a miscarriage. Kambili is also conditioned from the beginning to believe that her father is right and has the power to punish her for her "sinning." When she breaks her Eucharist fast because of her menstrual cramps and is helped by her mother and Jaja in this act of "sinning," she endures the physical violence silently. To "discipline" his family, he uses a leather belt, "a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather...It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm...I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back."²⁴ Through this incident, Adichie paints a vivid picture of the victim's agony and thus unmask the veneer of this dignified middle-class home. Eugene seems to be more interested in upholding his religious uprightness rather than caring for the welfare of his family. Both the women are beaten and abused because Eugene feels that his patriarchal pride is threatened and challenged.

The exploitation of religion to serve patriarchal purposes has been depicted in the novel through these utter abuses and maltreatment of the women. Eugene's violent behaviour towards his family members when they seem to stray from ideal religious conduct according to him, can be seen in his act of pouring boiling water on Kambili's feet when he comes to know that she had been staying with his "heathen" father (her grandfather) against his wishes:

He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen.... I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed.²⁵

²⁴ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 102.

²⁵ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 194.

Eugene this time targets Kambili's feet because she had "walk(ed) into sin" and by doing so he fulfils the enactment of Biblical dictum: to punish the offending body part. He asks his children to "pray for forgiveness."²⁶

Kambili eventually stands up to her father's ritualised abuse as her brother Jaja had done earlier by refusing to attend communion. Though Jaja's defiance is more vivid, Kambili's standing up to her father's abuse is more subtle and nuanced. She is aware of her rebellion; she comments that after coming home from Nsukka, "things were destined to not be the same, to not be in their original order."²⁷ This is evident from her description of the last physical abuse that she undergoes when Eugene finds Papa-Nnukwu's (her grandfather) painting in her room:

He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones... the kicking increased in tempo.... I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery... More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet.²⁸

This demonstrates how in the African middle-class homes; a good child is a silenced and dehumanised victim of abuse. Kambili's silence and her imagery in this episode articulate her rejection of her father's abuse. By comparing her father's kicking to a mosquito's biting, she tames the pain she is subjected to.

The image of a doubly oppressed woman who finds herself at the intersection of gender and religion is fulfilled by Kambili's mother. Beatrice is presented as a typical African woman, a quiet motherly figure who is a victim of her husband's religious ideology. A subordinate and passive figure in the house, her language is made up of more signs than words, mostly marked with nodding and shaking of the head. Kambili observes that Mama "spoke the way a bird eats, in small amounts ... [and] there was so much that she did not mind."²⁹ She endures brutal treatment from her husband when she expresses her unwillingness to visit Father Benedict after Mass because she is ill. Later we come to know that due to the physical torture, she miscarries. In fact, she had suffered two miscarriages earlier on account of his beatings. She later narrates to her children: "You know the 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. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it ... I was six weeks gone."³⁰

After the miscarriage, the family stays after the Mass on the coming Sunday to pray for her forgiveness, although Kambili wonders "what Mama needed to be forgiven for."³¹ Beatrice just endures this kind of barbaric treatment at the hands of her husband. Kambili observes that she usually "heard the sounds from their room, like something being banged against the door" and "There were never tears on her face" even when "her (Beatrice) swollen eye was still the

²⁶ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 69.

²⁷ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 209.

²⁸ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, pp. 210-211.

²⁹ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, pp. 19-20.

³⁰ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 248.

³¹ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 36.

black-purple color of an overripe avocado.”³² Many instances of her bruised body in the novel indicate that she is also a victim of ‘bedroom-based’ violence which she endures silently.

The oppression of women in a patriarchal society is traced to their continual socialisation to “expect and accept different roles in life” which has “created a social mechanism for the development of values that engender the several forms of discrimination against the female sex.”³³ Beatrice has come to accept the construct that “a husband crowns a woman’s life.”³⁴ She blindly obeys her husband’s commands and believes that she cannot leave a wealthy and powerful man like him despite the brutality he inflicts on her. This ‘forever’ attribute in a marriage in religion leaves many married women with no other choice but to remain in an abusive and enslaving relationship throughout their lives. Since the *Umunna* suggests “Eugene to take another wife because a man of his stature cannot have just two children,”³⁵ Beatrice is thankful to her husband for not doing so.

A passive figure in the house who does not even get to choose the colour of curtains, her daily course of actions includes supervising the maid Sisi, preparing and serving food, and nursing her children back to health after suffering physical torture at the hands of their father. Unable to protect her children from their father’s oppression, she finds solace in polishing the figurines as a way of coping with her abuse. Her passive stance in the face of oppression, violence, and tyranny can be attributed to the social construct which prescribes a virtuous woman to remain silent, compliant, patient and gentle. Thus, although the family is economically sound yet the females have to suffer because in patriarchal societies, they find themselves at the intersection of gender and religion.

Aunty Ifeoma: A Victim of Class Oppression

Adichie emphasises that the role of women in Africa is significantly different from female roles in the West. Though Aunty Ifeoma is portrayed as the most candid and unconventional woman, yet she is shown as a victim of class oppression and gender oppression. A widow and a university lecturer employed under a dictatorial government; she is seen tirelessly raising her children on a limited academic salary. Her clear-sightedness and her failure to conform to many traditional views set her apart from the rest of the female characters in the novel. Kambili is impressed by her aunt’s “tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life” personality.³⁶ She is mesmerised by “the fearlessness about her, about the way she gestured as she spoke, the way she smiled to show that wide gap.”³⁷ In comparison to Kambili’s mother, Ifeoma is an assertive woman who is not intimidated by her brother Eugene. She is the only character in the novel who seems to challenge the patriarchal and religious ideology of Eugene. She is not only able to persuade Eugene to allow his children to watch the traditional festivities against his fanatical religious convictions, but also about staying with her family for some time.

³² Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, pp. 10-11.

³³ Damilola T. Agbalajobi, “Women’s Participation and the Political Process in Nigeria: Problem and Prospects,” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2010).

³⁴ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 75.

³⁵ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 75.

³⁶ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 95.

³⁷ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 76.

A widow herself, Ifeoma believes that “sometimes life begins when marriage ends” emphasising the fact that marriage is not an essential determiner of women’s lives.³⁸ She also counsels Beatrice to not to bear the violence and oppression at the hands of her husband. Beatrice is apprehensive that she has borne only two children to Eugene and that his community will feel that it is inadequate and might persuade him to take another wife. Aunty Ifeoma dissuades her from measuring her worth by the number of children she has borne. In response to Eugene's violent nature, she counsels Beatrice that when the house is on fire one must run out before the roof falls in, trapping the victim. It is perhaps this courage that she instils in Beatrice which eventually leads her to take the extreme step of poisoning her husband to death.

While Kambili and her mother experience the intersection of gender and religion, Ifeoma’s life is an example of gender and class intersection. Aunty Ifeoma, like her father, Papa Nnukwu, refuses to succumb to her authoritative, rich brother. Being a widow and an employee of a dictatorial government, her meagre salary makes it difficult for her to make both ends meet. However, she refuses to succumb to her brother Eugene’s capitalist demands and does not want to take his help. She reminds Mama Beatrice:

I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima's trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things.³⁹

Aunty Ifeoma thus adopts a positivist attitude to the crises she is faced with— unpaid salaries, escalating prices of commodities as a result of fuel scarcity and the antagonism of Ifediora’s family. Instead of submitting and succumbing to her crises in tears of helplessness, regret and complaint, she is defensive, daring and industrious.⁴⁰

It is in Aunty Ifeoma’s home in Nsukka where Kambili and Jaja experience freedom of speech and action coupled with responsible behaviour. Although a strong Catholic, Aunty Ifeoma maintains a liberal and open-minded attitude at home. Kambili is struck by the laughter in their home, in comparison to the silence of her own house. She has nurtured her children with respect and encourages them to speak their minds. Kambili experiences many new things in her home that were denied to her. She writes how they used to sing at the dinner table and when Aunty Ifeoma asks them if they knew any of the songs, Jaja answers, “We don’t sing at home.” “We do here,” Aunty Ifeoma said, and I wondered if it was an irritation that made her lower her eyebrows.”⁴¹ In comparison to Aunty Ifeoma’s house which prayed for *laughter* at the table, Ifemelu remembers that at home they could only speak for a purpose.

Ifeoma becomes a role model of everything that Kambili wants to achieve. Where her own home is concerned with formality and discipline, Ifeoma is concerned with free expression and exchange of ideas. While Kambili’s parents had a rule for everything and would be punished if she digressed from the same, Ifeoma didn’t seem to bother about rules. She does

³⁸ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 75.

³⁹ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ T. M. E. Chukwumezie, “Beyond the Emancipated Woman: Revisiting Fictional Experiences in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*,” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2014), p. 66.

⁴¹ Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 125.

not let Kambili and Jaja follow their schedules in her home. And it is in her house that Kambili begins to expand the horizons of her life.

It was what Auntie Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time, believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we thought we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't.⁴²

The way Ifeoma encourages her children whether it is in terms of overall growth or day-to-day affection, leaves a mark on Kambili who realises the other way of living her life which eventually marks a difference in her own life.

Thus, Kambili's coming-of-age narrative experiences a turning point at her aunt's home in Nsukka. It is in this liberal atmosphere, that Kambili grows into that rare purple hibiscus who is more assertive and self-conscious. In her aunt's family, she learns to speak for herself and becomes more responsible. Hewett points out, "the binary structure under which she had grown up begins to unravel and she begins to question her father's rigid dogmatism."⁴³ After suffering years of oppression and subjugation, their mother gets rid of their abusive father by poisoning him. In the end, they emerge as mature and responsible children. While Jaja takes the blame for his father's murder and is imprisoned, Kambili manages her family affairs, and her mother eventually suffers from mental illness. On the other hand, Auntie Ifeoma, achieves emancipation by making a purposeful and positive choice of leaving her job and settling in America with her children.

Conclusion

Adichie realistically portrays the tragedy of African women, which is the result of racial segregation and gender discrimination. They not only suffer from gender discrimination perpetrated by white men but also men of the same race. Women characters in her novels belong to the underprivileged sections of society and are seen consistently struggling with issues such as receiving lower wages, being subjected to stereotypes and discriminated against, or being hired for exploitative domestic positions. Thus, in the works of Adichie, women persistently struggle to achieve much-desired freedom from various 'interlocking systems' of society, be it the rules of tradition, socio-political and economic disempowerment, male oppression or racial discrimination. However, they work hard to free themselves from the shackles of oppression by asserting themselves and proving their mettle.

⁴² Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p. 226.

⁴³ Hewett, "Coming of Age," p. 86