

Women Friendship and Oppression by Men in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract:

Feminism, which has many types and waves, is an awareness of women's oppression in society and within the family through conscious actions to change this injustice condition and achieve equality for

women. This study uses feminist literary criticism to analyze Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The study questions the oppression of women by men in Nigerian society as well as how women's friendship with each other develops their empowerment. It also demonstrates how the novel's female characters reflect the oppression of women. therefore, as the story develops, attempts will be made in order to show how African women are seen based on the real and good women as portrayed by Ifeoma and Beatrice. Moreover, it reveals that Adichie's method for confronting male oppression implies that, despite the difficulties they face, women are able to identify themselves and achieve their goals in the male-dominant world through education and friendship.

Keywords: Feminism, *Purple Hibiscus*, Women Friendship, Oppression by Men.

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Introduction:

Women have been mistreated and faced violence in a number of ways, whether it is public or domestic violence. Women's voices were silenced because they were considered inferior human beings. Simone De Beauvoir, a French philosopher, writer, social theorist, feminist activist, and the author of *The Second Sex*, explains how men look at women: “She is sex... absolute sex, no less. He is the Subject; he is Absolute... she is the Other (De Beauvoir 2010, p. xxii). According to Katrak, who is a professor of drama at the University of California and the author of *Politics of the Female Body*, when a female matures, she is under the ownership and control of her father, her husband, and subsequently her sons. In this way, women will continue to be subjugated in societies where men are in power (Katark 1987, p. 159).

In contemporary novels, women are portrayed differently than they were in the past, according to the messages and aims of the writers. Giddens states “It is through socialization that the helpless infant gradually becomes self-aware, skilled in the ways of the culture in which he or she was born” (Giddens 2009, p. xxi). This study attempts to explain how a young female writer portrays male oppression and drives victims to befriend each other in order to obtain women's empowerment and then free themselves from oppression.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer, is famous for her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. She focuses on the history of the Nigerian civil war in that novel. She also drew the attention of critics more than any other African writer in recent years. The reviews of her writings can be seen in both newspapers and academic journals. The success of *Purple Hibiscus* made Adichie's reputation grow even more. *Purple Hibiscus* is Adichie's first novel. It obtained the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award and The Commonwealth Writer's Prize after being published in 2003. Additionally, it was included on the longlists of the 2003 Booker Prize, The Financial *Times* magazine, and *The New Yorker*, as well as shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and the Orange Prize for Fiction (Tunca 2020, p. 15).

Purple Hibiscus is set in post-colonial Nigeria in the 1960s. It highlights some female characters who have faced unfair treatment from their male-dominated families. In her *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie reworks women's images by highlighting male oppressors that disempower women and cause them to suffer mentally and physically. Adichie portrays the situation of women inside the family as well as in society and focuses on different forms of oppression and how those oppressions push women to support each other. Through analyzing *Purple Hibiscus*, it will be clear that Adichie pushes women from the margins to the center as she challenges patriarchy. She

was successful in making her female characters support and be friends with one another, which led them to achieve empowerment.

Method:

Women's rights and privileges are rejected by male-dominated societies. It is a male-dominated system which puts women in marginalized situations because of its dominance and oppression. The unfair power relationships between men and women have an impact on the control of men's power as well as women's position. Eisenhart, a Professor of English and Communication at North Dartmouth College in the United States and the author of *Rhetoric in Detail*, states that "Struggles over power and control are often struggling over whose words get used and whose do not" (Eisenhart 2008, p. 21). Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* asserts that male oppression and patriarchy have an impact on all aspects of society. According to her, patriarchy considers women as inferior to men or views them as a force to be controlled in both the public and private spheres in order to keep control over them (Millett 2016, p. 42). Millet is not the only one who stood up for women's issues. There have been a large number of writers who have produced literary works that depict the male dominance and oppression of women. Years of male oppression and dominance have resulted in feminism movements, a refusal of male-domination, and a search for women's exploration of the self.

A type of literary criticism based on feminist theory, or more specifically, the politics of feminism, is known as feminist literary criticism. According to Tyson, feminist literary criticism is "the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson 2014, p. 83). Feminist literary criticism highlights several ways that women are marginalized. It demonstrates how the gender of the writer influences how literature is written and reinforces the belief that men and women write in different ways. A lot of feminist critics pay attention to how the characters are portrayed, specifically the female ones, and push us to think about how the female characters have been portrayed. Feminist criticism promotes female assertion and motivates women to demand equal treatment and positions in society. As a part of second-wave feminism, gynocriticism, which was introduced by Elaine Showalter, centers on female identity and the exploration of women's literature (Showalter 1999, p. 233), will be used to examine women friendship and oppression by men in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Moreover, Adichie presents a concept for knowing aspects of women's power and control that is formed by the life experience of women in a male-dominated society.

In doing this study, primary materials were gained from *Purple Hibiscus*, and secondary materials were gathered from articles, literary works, and critical essays in keeping with the main

goal of the study. The gathered material is examined using feminist literary criticism to explain women friendship and oppression by men in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The findings are presented in a descriptive manner.

Women Friendship and Oppression by Men in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*:

In *Purple Hibiscus*, all members of the Achike family are victims of Papa Eugene's brutality. Throughout their lives, Kambili, her mother Beatrice, and her brother Jaja have lived in fear. Papa, Kambili's father, completely controls each step in their lives and directs them in the direction he prefers. Hence, the family members are unable to speak freely and they have only one opportunity to express themselves "with their spirits rather than their lips" (*PH*, p. 16).

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is an attempt to voice the needs of women in a manner that changes the current situation of women. She portrays Eugene as oppressive, evil, and bigoted, and the way he governs his family is a typical instance of the male-dominance way of life which she observed in several African families. His wife and children live according to his strict planned schedule, in which there is no room for their personal free time. This is supported by Orie, who says: "Eugene (Papa) is the symbol of patriarchy whose mere presence sparks off the fire of danger that keeps the females under fear, tension; so they are silenced" (Orie 2010, p. 196).

Eugene's wife and children do not have the right to use their own minds; instead, they are obliged to follow his commands and restrictions, and he subjugates them to the extent that they consider the oppression "normal.". Beatrice (Mama) herself tolerated her husband's mistreatment for many years, even though this situation put her life in danger to the point where she lost her unborn child. Mama is portrayed by Adichie as being submissive and silent at the beginning of the novel, but she turns radical toward the climax to demonstrate how she can react when things start to fall apart. Therefore, *Purple Hibiscus* focused on the obvious inequalities to bring about the serious change that would lead to equity between wives and husbands. Through Beatrice's Character, Adichie depicts how wives are mistreated by their husbands. Beatrice is the type of woman that Africans describe as being a "good" woman since she always obeys her husband. She has no choice or feelings of her own because she lives in a world that is ruled by her husband (Ann 2015, p. 427).

An example from the novel that indicates this is once the family goes to meet Father Benedict during a Sunday Mass. Beatrice knows that she is ill and about to vomit, so she asks her husband to remain in the car rather than accompany her family to meet Father Benedict. But Eugene interprets her speech as an attack on his power. Hence, after observing Eugene's face, she

immediately changes her speech and accepts to accompany him, enduring the suffering in silence. As Kambili recounts: **“Let me stay in the car and wait, biko,” Mama said. “I feel vomit in my throat.” Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. ... “My body does not feel right,” she mumbled. “I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car.” Mama looked up. “I’ll come with you”** (PH, p. 37). Although she complies with her husband’s demand, she is subsequently violently hit at home, which causes her to lose her pregnancy. Beatrice is not the only victim in the family; her children, Jaja and Kambili, also suffer from their father's abuse and live in terror as a result of his violent attacks. Jaja is thrown the missal by Eugene for not attending Sunday mass. **“Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the “étagère”** (PH, p. 5).

Although Eugene expresses his affection for them and fulfills their financial requirements, the maltreatment they receive far exceeds the affection he seems to have for them. One instance of his brutality is witnessed when he tortured Kambili for sleeping in a home with a pagan who was both his own father and Kambili's grandfather: **“He poured the hot water on my feet”** (PH, p. 194). Another instance of his aggressive behavior is after he realizes that Kambili brings a photo of her grandfather to their house and tries to prevent it from being destroyed. He kicks her, and “The kicking increased in tempo...The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal buckle on his slippers landed on open skin by my side, my back, and my legs. Kicking, kicking, kicking... A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet” (PH, p. 210). Kambili is hospitalized for a few days and is unconscious because of this violent attack. This happens because Eugene does not accept any pagan objects in the home, although the picture is of his own father. Here, Kambili is upset with her mother for not defending her from her father's brutality and for providing a justification for his action. She “wished she could get up and hug her, and yet (she) wanted to push her away” (PH, p. 213).

Beatrice has been traumatized as a result of the years of abuse from Eugene to the point where she is in a catatonic condition and seldom speaks to anyone. She has no idea how to get herself out of this situation. Although she is aware that she is being mistreated and tortured, she refuses to leave her marriage. It can be said that Beatrice is powerless because she is a mother and loves her children too much. Hence, she cannot leave her children or take them with her if she leaves the marriage, as Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* asserts that women’s ability to bear children is ultimately the source of their subordination. Beauvoir argues that motherhood signals that women are twice doomed: biologically during pregnancy, as we can see, Beatrice is totally powerless during her pregnancy, and socially when children restrict them at home (Begum 2017, p. 414). She knows that leaving the marriage would not have been the only way to escape Eugene's oppression because his power and wealth would have been able to kill her and further

torture her children. So, with the help of her friend and servant, Sisi, who brings her the poison, she sets up a plan to fully eliminate him by slowly poisoning him. Beatrice explains to Kambili and Jaja: "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka" (*PH*, p. 290). Beatrice's response to her husband's oppression is murder. She must discover a solution to eliminate the source of her trauma.

Besse Van Der Kolk, in her book *The Body Keeps the Score*, claims that trauma victims struggle to recover because they are unable to eliminate the causes of their trauma (Van Der Kolk 2014, p. 242). Beatrice comes to believe that getting rid of Eugene is the only way she can recover from her trauma. Because of her fear of Eugene and his wealth, as well as societal expectations of her, she kills him rather than speaking up about how he was treating her and standing up for herself. Jaja, who always wishes to keep his sister and mother from their father's brutality, pretends to have killed his father and endures the consequences of his imprisonment.

Instead of remaining silent, Audre Lorde, who is an African-American female writer, radical feminist, professor, womanist, and civil rights activist, encourages women to speak up when they are afraid or tired. She also says that silence and its weight can destroy us (Lorde 2007, p. 44). Kambili's silence and trauma are dissimilar from her mother's. Eugene established in her ideology that obeying is the correct option and that speaking up is considered disrespectful. However, after spending time with Auntie Ifeoma, Kambili makes the decision to speak out for her beliefs, and one of the instances she does so is by shouting "No" after Eugene tears up Eugene-Nukwu's picture. She challenges Eugene's actions rather than obeying him and being silent. She also rejects getting up from the pieces, despite his commands to leave the pieces of the picture. Kambili's trauma is presented through her silence due to her fear of Eugene. She starts speaking and using her voice more after Eugene's passing; she befriends her mother and speaks to her to calm her after Eugene dies.

Auntie Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, is an intelligent and independent woman, in contrast to Beatrice. She takes care of herself and her children after becoming a widow. She doesn't ask any man to support her. Adichie presents these two women as examples of the different types of women and their different stories in Igbo culture. Auntie Ifeoma is a university professor who manages both her house and her career. Beatrice is a housewife and she cannot even take care of herself. Ibeku Ann described Auntie Ifeoma as a "real" woman (Ann 2015, p. 427). Even though Auntie Ifeoma is educated, she is still open to the Igbo culture; she talks with her children in Igbo and wears traditional clothing to identify with her culture. She also permits her children to participate in some cultural practices. In contrast to Beatrice, who is terrified of Eugene, Auntie Ifeoma confronts him. When others remain silent, she speaks out against oppression. Udumukwu

describes her by saying: “even in the face of tyranny, she will not remain silent” (Udumukwu 2007, p. 3).

Also, Aunty Ifeoma helps Beatrice by directing her to leave her husband due to his violent and dominating behavior. She is against male dominance and the exploitation of women. She tells Beatrice that "sometimes life begins when marriage ends" (*PH*, p. 75). She befriends Beatrice and advises her to celebrate her separation from Eugene. She also knows the significance of women's independence because she has succeeded on her own since her husband's death. Despite having financial difficulties, she will not give in to Eugene's demands because of his wealth. It was easier for her to develop her life and care for her children after her husband passed away because she wasn't totally dependent on him while he was living. It can be said that she has gained her freedom through education. When Eugene Nnukwu tells Ifeoma that he has been praying for her to find a suitable husband to marry after her husband passed away, Ifeoma criticizes him, because what she really wants is to be promoted to a senior lecturer, not a husband. She is free of male influence and wants to take advantage of her independence. The influence of education can be seen in Ifeoma's openness and self-confidence. So, it can be said that she is educated, hence liberated (Zanou 2018, p.74).

Aunty Ifeoma finally helps Kambili to find her real voice in order to confront Eugene and his cruelty. However, she and her family don't have much money, but they serve as a guideline for Kambili. Hence, she understands the fact that having a family whose members support one another, are happy with one another, and are open towards one another is more essential than having money. While she is visiting Aunty Ifeoma, she is given the freedom of expression which she was unable to practice in her own home. Unlike Beatrice, Aunty Ifeoma is a modern lady. She is self-reliant and ready to try new things, including makeup and clothing fashions that Beatrice was unable to even try because of Eugene and his beliefs. She and her daughter, Amaka, are close friends. She affects her due to her independence and self-confidence. Like her mother, Amaka is a strong, outspoken, and opinionated girl. Amaka follows her mother's legacy of being a powerful, independent lady and has her own perspective regarding politics and religion. She did not experience any kind of parental physical or psychological abuse, but she did experience financial difficulty and witnessed her mother's struggle as an independent woman. Amaka learns how to be a powerful, confident woman from her mother. By portraying Ifeoma's character, Adichie demonstrates that the oppressed should always confront their oppressor (Giwa 2022, p. 72).

In the novel, Ifeoma befriends Beatrice, who is her sister-in-law and tries to rescue her from a miserable marriage so that Beatrice can stop domestic violence and think independently. By

doing this, Ifeoma pushes women who are in disrespectful relationships to look for a different way of life outside of marriage. Also, Beatrice's servant, Sisi, brings poison to kill Eugene. Thus, Adichie shows how women should help other women to stop oppression.

Conclusion:

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie demonstrates domestic abuse, tradition, religion, and women's oppression. She also encourages women to speak up in order to confront those who oppress them. The female characters of Ifeoma and Beatrice in the novel are perfect instances of how women may assert their status in society and confront male oppression. Beatrice represents the stereotype of women in Africa as subjugated, oppressed, silenced, and victimized, but she changed and developed when she became friends with Ifeoma, who gave her confidence. Beatrice confronts Eugene and plays the proactive role that completely removes male oppression by deciding to poison her husband. Also, Kambili's visit to Aunty Ifeoma's home directs her to revolution because she finds her real voice there, which leads her to desire freedom. Beatrice and Kambili take over the family business after Eugene dies and Jaja is imprisoned. Even though they are silent, their silence is one of happiness, freedom, and peace. Moreover, the novel presents the case of women joining together, being friends, and supporting each other to achieve common goals. This is very well depicted by Adichie because there is an achievement in groups, and because there is strength in numbers, there are more chances of success. Thus, her female characters in the novel reflect a strong reaction to life in a male-dominated society because they succeed in liberating themselves from oppression by men.

هاورپیه‌تی ژنان و چهوسانه‌وه له‌لایه‌ن پیاوانه‌وه له رۆمانی پێرپل هیبیسکه‌سی چیماماندا ئادیچیدا

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پوخته:

چه‌ندین ره‌وتی فیکری جیاوازی فیمینیزم هه‌یه، و فیمینیزم بریتیه له هۆیاری چهوسانه‌وه‌ی ژنان له کۆمه‌لگا و خیزاندا. ژنان به‌هۆشیاری خۆیان ده‌یانه‌ویت ئه‌م نادادپه‌روه‌ریه بگۆرن و یه‌کسانی به‌ده‌ست به‌ینن. ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه ره‌خنه‌ی ئه‌ده‌بی فیمینیزم به‌کاردینیت بۆ شیکردنه‌وه‌ی رۆمانی پێرپل هیبیسکه‌سی رۆماننوس چیماماندا ئادیچی. ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه باس له چهوسانه‌وه‌ی ژنان له لایه‌ن پیاوانه‌وه ده‌کات له کۆمه‌لگای نه‌جیریا و باسی هاوپی یه‌تی ژنان له نێوان خۆیاندا ده‌کات که چۆن هاوکاری یه‌کتر ده‌بن بۆ ئه‌وه‌ی پیگه‌ی خۆیان به‌هێز بکه‌ن. هه‌روه‌ها باس له کاره‌کته‌ره سه‌ره‌کیه‌کانی ناو رۆمانه‌که و چهوسانه‌وه‌یان له لایه‌ن پیاوانه‌وه ده‌کات. هه‌روه‌ها له‌ناو رۆمانه‌که‌دا چۆن باس له ژنانی ئه‌فریقی کراوه که ژنانی باشن یاخود راسته‌قینه‌ن وه‌ک له کاره‌کته‌ری ئیفۆمیاو بیاتریس وینا کراوه. له‌گه‌ڵ ئه‌وانه‌شدا، توێژینه‌وه‌دا ئه‌وه ده‌خاته‌ روو که رۆماننوس ئادیچی میتۆدیکی به‌کاره‌یناوه بۆ رۆبه‌رووبونه‌وه‌ی چهوسانه‌وه‌ی ژنان له لایه‌ن پیاوانه‌وه که سه‌ره‌رای چهوسانه‌وه‌یان ژنان ده‌توانن به‌سه‌ر ناره‌حه‌تیه‌کاندا زال بن و ئامانجه‌کانی خۆیان به‌دی به‌ینن له جیهانی‌کدا که پیاوان تیایدا زالن ئه‌ویش له ریگه‌ی په‌روه‌رده و هاو‌رپیه‌تیه‌وه.

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