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Panorama of African Feminist Prototypes and the Interpretation of Domestic Cannibalism as Delineated in the Select Novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

Literature embodies and showcases the varied modes of interaction among individuals hailing from distinct societal spheres. It serves as both an art form that brings pleasure and a medium that stimulates and modifies person's encounters. In Literature, there are moments when people reflect upon the challenges they confront in their lives and consider the teachings and values they can acquire from these obstacles, empowering them to lead a positive and purposeful existence. The literature of Nigeria is interconnected with African literature, serving as a representation of the customs and culture prevalent among its populace. In particular, Nigerian women's predicaments have been discussed by contemporary writers. In this article, the discussion revolves around the prototypes of African feminism and domestic cannibalism in literature from Africa and Nigeria. Western feminists focused on achieving economic independence and equality with men, whereas black feminists fought for their fundamental right to merely survive, reflecting a regrettable contrast. Subsequently, this research article discusses the difficulties and position of women in Nigeria, specifically within the pages of *Purple Hibiscus* and other novels by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Keywords: Feminism, post-colonialism, domestic violence, gender, oppression, religion, domestic, cannibalism, encounters, empower, equality

Introduction

The existence of gender-based violence is a grave concern in present-day society. Across diverse cultures, racial groups, ethnicities, and social standings. The central theme of Adichie's stories centres on the disparities between men and women. In the story centered around Eugene Achike's family in eastern Nigeria, the narrative brings forth violence as a form of physical aggression. Women in African society are commonly undervalued and subjected to the dominance of men, which poses a significant problem. The primary cause for this can be mostly attributed to cultural aspects. Women in African society face discrimination due to a patriarchal culture that not only perpetuates bias against them but also normalizes male control over women. In the Nigerian feminist novels, the depiction of women reflects their subordinate position in a male-dominated society. Women are often perceived as powerless, with portrayals frequently characterizing them as both hazardous and seductive. The main objective in most writing is to bring attention to the accomplishments of women. Some feminist books criticize the way society controls and restricts women. The narrative depicts the journey of women who initially lack knowledge and face mistreatment, but gradually discover their true selves and achieve liberation. Nigerian women writers sought to narrate stories portraying the experiences of women in the

past. At the outset, they concentrated on the societal responsibilities of women as well as the challenges they faced in their relationships and the inability to conceive children.

Violence is a routine event that happens regularly in multiple African households. Domestic violence within a family occurs when an individual deliberately causes harm to their partner or other members of their household, either physically or emotionally. Adichie introduces a concept in her initial publication. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the author emphasizes the significance of change in shaping people's thoughts and actions. Kambili's father, Eugene Achike, is depicted as a respected individual and devoted partner in the narrative, yet he conceals a darker side behind closed doors by inflicting abuse on his family. The customary African family structure generally includes a father, mother, kids, and additional relatives from both the paternal and maternal sides. There exist various kinds of families. Certain families are remarkably tight-knit and exude an abundance of affection and coziness. Other families have rigid rules and regulations, lack warmth and affection, and tend to maintain a formal atmosphere. These families may have a lot of money, but they lack affection, care, and attention.

Eugene Achike, along with his wife, Beatrice, and their two children, Jaja and Kambili, forms the Achike family. Achike is inflicting both physical and psychological harm upon his

wife, children, sister, and father, treating them harshly. Eugene was regarded by everyone as a deeply religious and modest individual. During mass, he would consistently occupy the front row of the church, sitting at the centre with Mama, Jaja, and me by his side. He was the very first person to have communion. Most people didn't bend down to receive communion at the marble altar. However, Dad did. He would close his eyes really tight, causing his face to scrunch up in pain. Eugene is highly respected by the priest and the people who go to church because he and his family regularly attend the Holy Mass at St. Agnes Catholic Church.

In the sermons of Father Benedict, individuals frequently express their appreciation and admiration for someone who serves as an outstanding role model deserving of both reverence and emulation. Kambili is a character. It was common for Father Benedict to mention the Pope." Dad, and Jesus- in this order. He used the word "Papa" for his father. The Gospels contain narratives that describe Jesus' life and teachings. As a philanthropist, Eugene assist and contribute to those in need. Eugene is generous and helps both the church and community. Because of this, he is known as "The One Who Does for the Community". Furthermore, he actively participates in advocating for social causes. Eugene peruses the newspaper.

Through this, Chimamanda aims to uncover, probe, and censure the faults within the Nigerian government. On the other hand. Eugene Achike proved to be an extremely unpleasant and malicious figure in his role as a husband and father. He displayed a lack of kindness towards his family, frequently causing them pain. In addition, he demonstrated a lack of care for both his siblings and parents. By exhibiting anger and launching attacks, he would create an environment of fear and confinement for his loved ones. The son's hand clearly indicates his inclination towards carrying out severe acts of physical violence.

The author initiates the exploration of violence and religion in the first section of the novel. It is stated in the novel that issues emerged within the family when his son, Jaja, opted out of partaking in the communion ceremony. Papa's anger reached its peak as he threw his weighty book, leading to the unfortunate demise of the miniature statues displayed on the shelf. Jaja demonstrates his defiance towards his father by deliberately abstaining from receiving communion during church. The disrespectful behaviour of Eugene's son, who referred to the 'host' as 'wafer' and described the priest's touch as 'nauseating', has caused Eugene to become upset. Eugene strongly believes that this act is extremely disrespectful and contradicts his religious beliefs. This event is the beginning of Jaja rebelling against his father and religion.

Eugene's violent tendencies are triggered and he finds solace in forgiveness following each atrocious deed. Kambili, a teenager, is also subjected to the influence of her Father's expectations. Struggling between her longing for independence from her father's controlling ways and his violent actions, her entire life revolves around seeking his approval and striving to earn his admiration. However, she contemplates whether these sensations result from her apprehension of not wanting to provoke him and confront his enraged demeanor. Due to her fear, Kambili ultimately ends up in the hospital with bodily and head injuries. Each day, Eugene presents Kambili and her brother Jaja with a list of tasks to complete. Some of these activities consist of studying, praying, engaging in family time, and getting rest. The limited space available restricts the ability to enjoy,

laugh, engage in play, and behave in a childlike manner. In the words of Beatrice as follows:

"The silence of waiting until Papa was
Done with his siesta so we could have
Lunch...the silence of driving to the church
For benediction afterward. Even our
Family time on Sunday was quiet..."

(Adichie 31).

Eugene's strict rules extend to both Kambili and her mother, Beatrice. Beatrice tells Kambili when she is pregnant, also sharing that she had multiple miscarriages after Kambili was born. It is a sorrowful experience for the daughter as Beatrice discloses the extent of her husband's anger and cruelty. Eugene hurts his wife, which makes her lose her baby. Whenever this occurs, he instructs his children to say a unique prayer, seeking forgiveness from their mother. His intention is to induce a feeling of guilt in others, as he convinces himself that he is the exclusive source of guidance towards the right path for them.

Beatrice carries a sense of fault for her own lack of freedom and feels incapable of conceptualizing a life outside of her marriage. By being violent and constantly exerting control, Eugene instils fear in his family. The portrayal of Eugene highlights the extent to which Nigerian culture can be rigid and domineering. To put it more straightforwardly, his wife and children are merely bystanders, not actively participating in their own predicament. Exploitation occurs when someone or something is utilized for personal gain or benefit, typically disregarding their welfare or emotional state. Through the character of Beatrice, the novel exemplifies the plight of Nigerian women, reflecting the myriad forms of oppression they have endured, including male dominance, cultural traditions, colonial influence, and the constraints of gender norms. In this story, Kambili was silent and unable to go with her classmates to school, which made them think she was stuck-up. She is in pain from the illness. Ifeoma alerts Beatrice:

"This cannot go on... when a home is
Ablaze, you run out before the roof
Collapses on your head..."

(Adichie 213)

Her reluctance to speak stems from her intention to avoid implicating her father in any wrongdoing. As the only person, she can talk freely with her brother Jaja. They both can understand each other just by looking at each other. Beatrice finds a lot of joy in her marriage to Eugene, but also a lot of sadness. The source of her pain and suffering lies solely with Eugene, affecting not only her body but also her emotions and spirituality. However, there are certain issues that still exist, such as the negative perception of divorce and the well-being of the children involved. Because she wants to feel financially safe, follow her religion, and meet the expectations of her community, she feels like she has to stay with him. Her disfigured and traumatized children bear witness to his brutal actions, while she silently accepts and endures, as Kambili's revelations unveil.

Aunty Ifeoma and her house in Nsuka are like freedom symbols in the novels. It depicts the process of transformation and liberation from their oppressive father. A sensation of freedom enveloped Beatrice and her kids. This suggests that they had the opportunity in Nsuka to uncover and develop their sense of self. It felt like a completely different world to Kambili and Jaja, where they started to grow and become

more like their cousins. In this story, Aunty Ifeoma's arrival is being compared to the beauty of nature. This demonstrates how significant her character is. She is the only person who knows how Kambili and Jaja feel inside, and she is the one who makes them happy.

Aunty Ifeoma tells Kambili and Jaja that they should feel free to express themselves and be open. Kambili lives with her aunt and learns about Nigerian customs and Christian beliefs that are not very strict. In the end, she realizes that things that seem different can actually coexist in a strange but reasonable way. The kids and their aunt's family become close and form a strong connection. This connection also excludes their "heathen" grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, whom they are not allowed to spend time with. It is the strong connection that makes Kambili keep asking for her aunt, even after her father hurt her so much that she passed out. She had bravely put up a painting of her grandfather in their home, which upset them. Eugene considers someone who holds different beliefs as him as a heathen and believes they are unworthy of his love and care.

Frustrated with his children's behaviour, Eugene employs extreme tactics to teach them life lessons, causing immense suffering: he physically assaults Kambili by hitting her for being late to the car after school, resorts to using a belt to punish her for breaking a Eucharist fast, intentionally harms Jaja's finger for missing church and answering religious test questions incorrectly, resulting in lasting deformation, and subjects Kambili to the pain of scalding hot water on her feet upon discovering a picture of her with her grandfather. Eugene not only inflicts physical pain on them but also brings about numerous emotional challenges for his family. His children are compelled to adhere strictly to a study schedule, limiting their ability to partake in enjoyable activities such as wearing casual attire, watching TV, or listening to music. He also limits their interactions with their aunt and doesn't let them form a close bond with their grandfather. Eugene not only declines opportunities to spend time with his family and father, but he also fails to offer his father the expected love, support, and financial aid that are typically associated with a wealthy son.

Respecting and showing honour to the father of a wealthy son holds significance in African culture. If Beatrice doesn't take action, she may lose her children, and Kambili's experience is the crucial catalyst that prompts her to finally stand up for them. The message conveyed here is that women, when exposed to the perils of violence, have the ability to create measures for their own safety. In a desperate plight, lacking any remaining alternatives, the woman opted for poisoning Eugene to escape from his manipulation. Aunty Ifeoma is determined to offer support to her sister-in-law, Beatrice. Rather than going back to Eugene, she suggests that she stays in Nsuka, looks for work, and focuses on taking care of her children. With the aid of her maid Sisi, Beatrice would regularly administer poison into Eugene's tea. With Eugene's passing, Jaja shoulders the responsibility, thereby preventing his mother from being sent to prison. This suggests that ensuring universal freedom is essential, as the absence of such freedom might instigate a desire for rebellion among individuals. In numerous circumstances, this rebellion can manifest as a forceful or assertive act that frequently leads to casualties.

Kambili's emotional well-being has been profoundly affected by Eugene's traditional fatherly behaviour, which is marked by aggression and control. She believes that only the things written in her father's schedule are acceptable and anything

outside of it is considered sinful. This has severely hindered her personal development and growth. Her not speaking has a natural effect. It hindered her ability to communicate with others, find pleasure, and feel fulfilled in a relationship. Kambili yearned for her father's validation and gratitude, but instead she was left feeling sorrowful and isolated due to her limited companions. Kambili constantly sought her father's endorsement and acknowledgment, but instead she experienced feelings of sadness and solitariness as she lacked many individuals to converse with. Despite her desire for her father's approval and admiration, Kambili often found herself lonely and dejected since she had few people to confide in.

Adichie delves into a significant element of family life and the responsibilities associated with being a mother or father. She suggests that the decisions made by parents regarding their children's lives and shape their character. She shows this in her book *Purple Hibiscus*. She accentuates the importance of the maternal role within the family structure, emphasizing that the overall well-being of both the family and the country are dependent upon it. Women, especially mothers, should be valued, respected, loved, and taken care of. At home, these rights and privileges ought to be granted to them by their families, husbands, and all the men in their community. Ensuring that women's lives are marked by tranquillity, equity, and empathy is of utmost importance for these men.

Conclusion

The violent actions portrayed in the novels are vivid and forceful. Adichie's novel incorporates one of the most effective writing tools, as it appears to be among the best. In terms of the mind and emotions. Girls who are victims of physical attacks suffer psychological repercussions due to the violence they endure. Kambili's emotional well-being is significantly more impacted by her father's relentless physical abuse than her physical state. Witnessing her father's mistreatment of her mother fills her with immense sadness. Keeping it concealed, she and her brother share the desire for their father's demise. As the story unfolds, she undergoes a transformation, emerging as a formidable and self-sufficient woman who assumes the responsibility of supporting her mother and brother. It is imperative for every woman to have this significant attribute.

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