

Modernity within Tradition: Female Identity in ‘Purple Hibiscus’**Dr Kanaparthi Suresh**Regional Level Coordinator, TGMREIS, Erstwhile Karimnagar District
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Abstract

Purple Hibiscus (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an important novel for a number of reasons, not least its complexity, but also because of Adichie's complex, fully humanised representation of the female experience in the post-colonial Nigeria. The novel tells the story of 15-year-old Kambili Achike, who lives within the highly religious family that is also very wealthy in a fictional city in Nigeria and was living under a military dictatorship in the 1990s. Through the single-voice narration, Adichie creates a vibrant world in which "modernity", "colonialism", "tradition," and Catholicism all intersect, and an explosive social environment in which the idea of women's identity is limited but, eroding as it is, is still subject to argument. The women in the novel (Kambili, her mother's Beatrice, Ifeoma, and the younger Amaka) all provide some different versions of authorizing themselves in a set of intersecting networks of patriarchal and cultural regulation. Issues that emerge from their ensemble story are not exclusively ones of victimization or triumph in the struggle to be free, but are multiply complex issues of female identity in a world characterized by constant jumper between tradition and modernity.

Adichie has been communicating on several occasions the sense of what she calls the "single story", the way the aspects of human stories get all erased, leaving room for a singular story alone. It's a mind-wiring eye-washing that was rejected by her imagination in the form of *Purple Hibiscus*. The characters of the women are not archetypes of victimization or power and strength, but real women with identities that are formed by and supersede the social constructions that define them. The institutionalization of the female in the construction of the female in *Purple Hibiscus* is an ever-present and fraught process and that it can only be understood as a process that is not wholly distinct and separate from the intertwining processes of patriarchy, colonial religion, indigenous culture and political modernity. This paper examines the core female characters of the novel, the spatial metaphors and figurations in the novel, language and silence and the symbolic use of nature and body as the space of inscription of the female.

Keywords: colonialism, space, patriarchy, political modernity, language, tradition, modernity, female space etc.

The Architecture of Oppression: Space, Domesticity, and the Female Body

Purple Hibiscus is one of the many aspects of the book that immediately would capture one's mind as being particularly well written, namely the specific focus on the home-domestic space as an ideological site of production. Somewhere in the Old Compound Road of the City of Enugu is a compound known as the Achike House which is both beautiful and magnificent in its material ornaments, has a lawn that is well looked after, has the swimming pool, and has imported fixtures, and yet it serves as a prison. Everyone in the family knows that "Eugene Achike," or "Papa," as he is called by many, plays the master of the family, be it religious devotion, wealth or brute force. In Kambili's narrative, the word 'immaculate' is used nearly to the point of obsession, bathing the scene of the house in a sort of hard, brutal beauty, a beauty that doesn't bother with nature or ideas that might be spontaneous, human. The word invades the house like the suppression of something natural, spontaneous, human; in the sense that Kambili describes, 'immaculate' would be a word that means more than cleanliness (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 10). Cleanliness of one's home is cleanliness of one's life devoid of all doubt and it is the women, Beatrice and Kambili, who are the tools and the chief victims of the cleansing.

The home is not an ideologically safe space, and has long been a target for feminist critique as a forum where gender hierarchy is produced. Feminism departs from the idea that we need a division between the private and the public that segregates women to the private sphere because this division is not a structure without politics, but one which creates a political structure of women's subordination (Tong 2). *Purple Hibiscus* puts this abstract understanding into a vivid reality. Beatrice spends a lot of time at home, only going out when she goes to Mass or when she goes along with Eugene on the mandatory social activities. Her job is to clean, to polish the figurines in the étagère, to scrub floors already clean, dispiritingly as though the external task of erasure the internal one demanded of her by Eugene's power. After Mass Kambili notices that her mother will "clean the figurines after Mass like every Sunday, carefully lifting" each one and "wiping the base" (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 10) with a damp sponge. In fact, the rote-like and routine function of the activity reveals the form of domestic labour that is described as not a meaningful work in the novel, but also as a way of regulating women's behaviours, occupying them and containing them within "service."

This containment sees the violence Eugene brings to bear on Beatrice as a physical manifestation. Beatrice is beaten by Eugene for revealing her pregnancy; she ends up losing the baby. The beating itself is not shown in graphic form but is "felt" through the effects of the beat, e.g. the "blood that trickled down her legs" (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 33). In this instant the body of the woman writes the most legibly the authority of the man. The miscarriage isn't the first, Beatrice has experienced many such pregnancies ending in miscarriage and it has all been a sign of the sinister power of her husband. The community is not an active presence, however. A great bootlicker of the community, a generous giver to the church and the poor, his voice tender for the matter of the day in his newspaper, the *Standard*, Eugene is an honest and a good man. Adichie's novel's focus on postcolonial manhood is articulated through this antihero's public decency and the private brutality resulting from it, a dichotomy representative of a broader critique that situated male post-colonialism as inextricable from both colonial and indigenous patriarchy.

The discipline and inscription in Kambili's own body are the source of another discipline and inscription. Not only does she have a schedule but her schedule is spelled out on paper by her father, how she speaks, how long she spends in the bath, what foods she buys and when. A timetable is certainly a powerful sign of colonization of subjective time, of the colonizing of a young woman's life into a series of administered activities that are approved. It is also her body that is telling her that the life being put on her is impossible when she is ill from exercising being strictly a fast and then her body needs time to eat (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 33). The sickness in this novel acts as an expression for the body that cannot articulate verbal, loaded with actions. In this way, the illness becomes an act of somatic protest; it is the voice of a voiceless subject. Elaine Scarry's idea about how pain "unmakes the world" is relevant here. Both Beatrice and Kambili have experienced repeated physical trauma, trauma not only to themselves but to their ability to be autonomous subjects inhabiting their world in this manner (29).

But a home cannot be just an environment of subjection in the novel. Aunt Ifeoma and her family live at a different place than the Achikes: Kambili and Jaja stay at Aunt Ifeoma's flat in Nsukka, containing a plot space subtly juxtaposed with the Achike household. The setting of the Achikes is contrasted carefully with that of Aunt Ifeoma's house, which is Nsukka's flat where Kambili and Jaja spend a few days that has a plot space within the plot space. The Nsukka flat is small, destitute, and often violent, but is the space of radical openness. Here the children laugh and they eat together here, and there is no rigid form of Achike table. In this, Amaka teases her siblings and argues with her mother. Here, Father Amadi sings and plays music. The difference between the two domestic spaces illustrates one of the novel's major themes, that social arrangements that prescribe relationships between people in closer proximity create conditions for female freedom and human thriving,

rather than material wealth. The atmosphere of home is a place of talking yes and no that transforms into a place of respect too, a home full of conversation and disagreement, one where the young woman becomes a fixture.

Silence, Voice, and the Politics of Language

Some of the most neatly manipulated aspects of *Purple Hibiscus* involve the presence and the lack of language. The style of the narration changes in the early part of the book, with Kambili being very quiet, almost shy. She has trouble speaking, stutters and sometimes cannot get words out at all. This silence is registered in living conditions and produced; it is a result of living years in an environment in which the voices of the females are tolerated only when they follow approved scripts. Eugene's home life is bound by language norms just like other aspects of home life. Dominican authorities spoke the language of the colonists and he speaks it deliberately, his Catholic prayers are uttered in formal, liturgical English which sets the tone for all of home life. The black community does not speak Igbo and it is tacitly discouraged in Eugene's value system, being backward and superstitious.

With this language situation there is a great deal of postcolonial meaning. The casting out of indigenous languages by the Europeans was not just a practical measure but a strategic attack on the culture, a means of making the colonized people think in a different language, foreigners to their own experience of life, and as Ngugi argues, as they were cast out of their culture, so were they cast out of their thought. (Ngugi 15) This logic of the colonizer has been internalized and reproduced in the Achike home in a home-like manner. English is not just an indicator of Eugene's westernisation; in fact, it is a defensive measure of authority, of keeping his family separated from what is now the Igbo cultural terrain where they might find alternative frameworks of value. At Kambili and Jaja's visit to Nsukka, the presence of Igbo in addition to English, the use of Igbo at Grandfather Umunna's house, and the use of both languages in the household, which is likely a result of the relationship between Jaja and Kambili, suggest a more harmonious and less divided cultural identity.

Kambili's silence and her oppression is evident through the narrative style of Adichie. The novel begins with a representative example of shattering. Jaja's rejection of the sacrament of communion on Palm Sunday (Eugene's celebration begins with his throwing his heavy missal at the étagère, smashing the glass and shattering the little statues of two Saints on the crèche) and immediately sets off into retrospective narration. Now that Kambili is recounting it, doing so is a kind of realisation and effecting of voice, a speaking that can't be spoken. It's an important retell order and it certainly argues that identity of the female in literature (in the novel) is not passive but does require active narration, or its ability to be told. Adichie thus falls into line with a broader tradition of feminist practices that see the power of story as an act of political resistance. When we learn to see, hear, and feel the

language that we use, and that uses us, we start to understand a material for which women have never collectively tried to use for its transformative capacities, Adrienne Rich goes on to say, "to the extreme" (247).

Despite the little progress Kambili makes toward speech, her emerging relationships with others, including with Father Amadi, the young Catholic priest at Nsukka and a fiddler, are charted. She meets him and the relationship between them becomes an apprenticeship to self-expression. He questions her, and awaits response. He sings with her. He gives her the permission to run. What are these activities, question, song, movement, if it does not seem a revolutionary act in this life where silence and stillness reign. If Kambili manages to say anything spontaneous, anything not scripted, it is marked by care like as Adichie marks the care while she is marking the violence in the Achike household. Voice is no ordinary detail of the novel, but it is an event.

Amaka is a type of contrasted speech of females. Amaka is anything but her cousin: Amaka is loquacious, outspoken and aggressively-confident. She has to say her say with respect to anything ranging from her mother's Catholicism to the political situation in Nigeria. Being good at arguing and challenging, and having something to say, which seems to make Kambili very uncomfortable, historic behaviour for one who has only been allowed to be like Kambili, and is one of the most important influences on Kambili's growing sense of self. Amaka's voice isn't a blessing, however. Indeed, not just because her household at home urges her to express her views, but because expressing her views is a manner of asserting herself against the culture that often doesn't "get it" about the views of young women or, doesn't want young women to express them. Adichie is grateful for the confidence that Amaka displays, but again, finds it uncomfortable given that he also thinks confidence can be acted out, and that it's not really owning selfhood.

Beatrice's "relation" with language might be more involved; it is certainly the saddest in the novel. Rarely, if ever, speaks; instead, she expresses herself mostly in elliptical, half-finished sentences, as though a woman, whose voice has been broken down, step by step. But this is not a blind eye she turns to the lack of verbiage. Gradually, Adichie tells us, it is a game of strategic endurance, a way to endure where, in the war it is quite clear there will be a lot more of that violence to be dealt with than necessarily if a person expresses himself fully. What she says, when she says something, when she's about to poison Eugene's tea, it's the best thing she can say: she's incapable of forming language, nothing. This is an unspeakable thing to say because firstly, it doesn't need to describe what she has been hearing for 25 years. The ethics of Beatrice's act have been discussed, but in the economy of the novel, it is a type of female agency silenced by the lack of legitimation of speech. For the oppressed, colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side *Talking Back* written by bell hooks is a defiant rejoining of the oppressed to the arena of speech heals;

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makes new life and new growth possible. Beatrice's act, in its sad and vicious manner, is, in fact, somewhat similar to a kind of speech, another kind of healing, a speech-of-last-resort.

Tradition, Modernity, and the Double Bind of Female Identity

Purple Hibiscus is a tale that plays out in tension with tradition and modernity, especially with respect to femininity. First of all, the novel is not at all the one that Imagines that tradition is oppressive and modernity is liberating, or vice versa, that tradition is authentic and modernity is corrupting. Rather, it offers both in the form of complex formations, some of which are enabling and some constraining the idea of female subjectivity.

Eugene Achike exemplifies a hideous chimera of the two of them. Western modernity, on economic and religious issues has been completely adopted by him, he's a success as a businessman, building his success through global markets and his Catholicism is the most strict and doctrinal. However, his attitude towards women is nothing but extreme reflection of worst elements of the patriarchal tradition. He punishes his wife and dominates his daughter, and he has an unusual kind of domestic control, no longer paralleling anyone in Europe's fantasies of companionate marriage he represents. In other words, his modernity is selective and self-serving, accepting elements of western culture that enhance his authority, and either dismissing or disregarding those that might undermine it. The rationale for rejecting his father, Papa-Nnukwu, because he is "papa a heathen" is the same. Tradition is okay except it rears up against his fundamentalist Christian convictions.

Papa-Nnukwu exemplifies a different sort of tradition, indeed, a tradition, which is inspired with some great sympathy and complexity in the novel. His own religious beliefs, which are a focus of his argument, his ability as a storyteller, his uneven portrayal of him sitting in the background respectfully, his stoic attitude, they all look better than his son's effort to overthrow the government through bloody revolt. Indigenous traditions may not be all the same; rather, they can coexist with modernity (and not against it) and serve to nourish and sustain humans in ways that an imported religion like Eugene's cannot. This happens when Kambili sees Papa-Nnukwu doing his morning ritual which does not bother her but just an effect of his peaceful devotion which she is struck by, 'unhurried' (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 166). In this scene, Kambili's growing perception of the world, so she has been taught to see as the only one, connects this novel to one of the most influential scenes in Thomas' work, *Odysseus* and Telemachus growing more sensitive to the other worlds in their world. This is one of the most significant scenes in the novel; the moment when Kambili begins her awareness that her world is 'one of many'.

Ifeoma's function, in a certain way, might be a 'feminist cultural hybrid'. She is a university lecturer, wife and mother of three, a catholic, she sings the traditional Igbo songs and she is respectful of the traditional and religious practices of her father. She moves from

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culture to another without any problems and she comes across very easily moving cultures. Instead, the "hybridity" that is determined by work that is Ifeoma's is a political and finely orchestrated cultural agent that is not in a state of disorientation or compromise, but rather is active and critical in its engagement with both frameworks "valued" by Ifeoma, if that is one can use, and rejected at the same time. In this "third space," as Homi Bhabha says, a dichotomy of colonizer/colonized and tradition/modernity is strained and "new forms of cultural significance are generated" (37). They became collected here. Ifeoma's home, third space rendered domestic (habitable), made 'Ordinary' texture of daily life. In this multiple-inheritance-of-cultural-worldliness is not inauthenticity, but rather freedom, and in fact, a kind of freedom from which it builds the condition of possibility for female selfhood.

Amaka's connection to tradition and modernity is as much different from her mother's as it is complex. She is very aware of the cultural values and traditions of the Igbo people and at first resentful at the "cultural self-negating" of her relations who have imbibed Western cultural values and traditions. Her refusal to give a Christian name at her confirmation, is a message of cultural assertion, asserting against the logic of the colonial era, give way to Indigenous name, give way to a sanctioned European name. She tells her mother, "But I don't want to have an English name, the missionaries made our fathers give up their names (Adichie *Purple Hibiscus*, 273). However, Amaka can hardly be considered like the average traditionalist. She loves hip hop music, loves to be involved in cutting edge world culture, and has a dream that will not be bound by the village and family. Her cultural politics are therefore not nostalgic, assimilationist but rather, strategically raced, self-taking of the best of both worlds, while strategically rejected from the worst of both worlds.

The emphasis on "what tradition does the women's have?" provides fuel for the novel's conflicts as a whole and complicates the apparent "liberation" of women through indigenous culture. Extended family and the Umunna place a lot of pressure on her usually to go on living her old life, if the husband is the one who is being abusive to her, to live with him aptly. Prior to being won over to her will, he must overcome her judgment as well as the judgment of a community which is creating a standard of female virtue on the basis of marital fidelity and endurance. The Umunna's participation in family life is proposed as exemplifying varieties of solidarity and a mechanism of female cage. While Adichie demonizes Eugene, she doesn't demonize the Umunna, she does note however, that the cultural values they promote are at the root of Beatrice's suffering. In the novel, with the well-worn cliches of women's endurance, we see the sanctification of the woman who 'manages' her husband and manages her marriage against odds, which reveals itself the only form of a collective violence; withdrawal of support and bequeathed shame.

The Maternal Body and the Failure of Protection

Like so many of the most fascinating and heart-wrenching characters in the novel, Beatrice Achike's character is brought into sharp focus by her characterization, making her a compelling and heartbreaking figure to read, and a heart-shattering one for women both oppressed and complicit in the oppression of others. Beatrice is a mother who is a failure in protecting her children from Eugene's violence, and the novel will not let that slip. But Adichie's portrayal of the inadequate mother takes a surprising turn; it refuses to condemn Beatrice for being an inadequate mother simply because she is a woman without any demands are placed on her; in its place, it demands understanding of how Beatrice's situation fits into the broader context of the forces that formed her, which is more difficult to be had.

Beatrice was quite young when she was married to Eugene, he took her from her father's home to his and she had been poorly schooled and had no economic support from her father. Her marriage to Eugene, and her childbirth, means her whole social identity, her identity as a person of worth and her material security, to the extent that these exist are mediated. It is not a coincidental effect, but rather a structural one created by a mesh of economic structures and cultural norms that provides women a limited amount of selfhood. When Kambili asks, even if she asks it indirectly as this novel suggests, why her mother does not simply run away. What the novel provides at answer is that she lacks few choices at all none as daring as running away. If she would leave Eugene, she would leave her home, her husband to support her, her social status, and perhaps even her children, as one leaves her husband's compound under customary law, she does not automatically lose her children.

But this novel does not ignore that there are also mechanics in the struggles of Beatrice' endurance other than her sufferings. The presence of Beatrice, her acquiescence to the violence and her own modelling of it to her own children is an accident which ensures its reproduction of whatever oppresses it. Internalizes silence as a norm and thinks suffering is an acceptable part of woman-to-woman love, does not have the ability to imagine marriage to men and authority as it is not supposed to be. Powerful, it is not unstoppable, but Adichie does it deliver, highlighting how much greater the first time Kambili meets herself and what she can do is changed.

Some critics have viewed Eugene's murder by Beatrice as being part of the catalyst that led to her liberation, the final scenario of being her own victim (Emenyonu 42). In a literal sense, Beatrice's liberation is not her own. She does not kill Eugene for one simple reason, but because in a few years, their lives have become too miserable to live down because of the results of her knowledge: Eugene's death and their separation from Jaja, who is sentenced to prison, and because, Eugene's death is not a liberation but another kind of desolation. In some instances, Adichie seems to be saying that violence, even violent self-defense is not able to overcome the structures of victimhood, but will make them worse. Beatrice's act brings an end to Eugene's abuse, but it also brings an end to the family system,

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leaves her completely inactive, depressed, and bereft, almost in the same condition she was before the act. But Beatrice's act ends the abuse that Eugene suffers and also unrolls the family system, captures Eugene's Jaja, and leaves the Beatrice herself at least numbed over as the victim of her own. If it comes it comes from elsewhere, from the building of true selves, of true voices, of living communities.

Nature, Symbolism, and the Purple Hibiscus

Adichie's theme of the novel is symbolized by the very iconic scene of the purple hibiscus plants growing in Auntie Ifeoma's garden at Nsukka, flowers that are, as Amaka explains, "not ginger, not pure white. They're like the wild red ones, but different. They don't grow here, Auntie Ifeoma brought them from Abba. It's said the seeds are very hard to come by" (128). Different from its regular red hibiscus, the purple hibiscus is a hybrid, mutation or something uncommon and surprising in nature. It has to be cultivated and has a special set of conditions under which it will bloom. It is a most fitting symbol of female identity for the novel.

The hibiscus signifies the potential of the self-thingness, which is not purely traditional, it is not purely modern, it is neither the white purity of Eugene's orthodox sense, nor the redness of traditionalism without regard for any mediation, it symbolises something else, something hybrid, something that can only be created in certain conditions of cultivation and permitted freedom. It is not unfamiliar for these conditions to be in Ifeoma's garden, which is where Kambili's transformation starts while she's in Nsukka. The garden, in the literal sense, is a place of potential growth, and in *Purple Hibiscus*, it is female tended growth, growth that is disturbing the sterile perfection of Eugene's manicured lawn.

Yet the hibiscus also in itself offers a veiled critique on the purity narratives that assume cultural or moral purity as a requirement of authenticity. Eugene's world is structured by his deep craving of purity, religious purity, behavioural purity, linguistic purity. In part, his violence is the violence of the purifier, of the one who feels that there's something that needs to be purged, shaped aside, cut away, cauterized for the ideal. This logic does not work for the purple hibiscus. How can it be beautiful just because it is different, just because it's mutated, just because it's not one thing, or another. By creating this symbol, Adichie establishes the woman and her "hybridity", which is complex, as nothing more than a feminine essence, and she implies that women's success is a result of the social conditions that would allow equals to say as much of something as hybridity and complexity, which extremes are both tolerated and celebrated.

The wider nature plays in the novel as a record of all the things Eugene's home discourages. In Enugu, the nature world seems more like a space to be boxed in, disciplined, there are well-cared for gardens, manicured lawns, orderly compounds, all regulated, contained, controlled. In Nsukka, nature is freer and more abundant, free from some

restrictions but not all, something exuberant, with producing things all over, Ifeoma's garden. With Father Amadi urging her on, when Kambili runs, for the first time, she feels herself moving through space, feeling the wind and sun on her skin: a kind of awakening, a sense of possibility, physical and existential, denied her by the management of her every movement (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 170). The body-in-motion turns into the figure for the self-information, an object who must perforce live through her experiences of being subject to discover that she can do more than she has been proposed to.

The Political Dimension: Female Identity and National Crisis

Purple Hibiscus isn't just about home. It takes place amid the backdrop of military dictatorship and political repression in the 1990s Nigeria and, indeed, the political setting is intrinsic to the examination of female identity. He makes strong parallels between the tyranny of Eugene's household and the tyranny of the military government, suggesting that the structures aren't just similar, they're exactly the same and the same logics of control apply in both places, the same way that their families refuse to give in to the legitimacy of "other" people speaking, the same way they try to silence others by force.

The Standard newspaper is courageously publishing reports of government abuses and voice for political dissidents. The wisdom of the person who speaks noisy words of protest to political power is that he is a tyrant in his own house! His own mumbling about 'freedom of speech' and 'accountability', intended for public consumption, sit alongside the systematic blocking of his wife's and children's speech and autonomy, meant for their own use. His own talking points of 'freedom of speech' and 'accountability' sit beside a systematic blocking of his wife's and children's autonomy and speech for his own consumption. This paradox is not unusual but diagnostic and indicative of the unabated conundrum of gender politics in postcolonial Nigeria where rights and freedom as outlined in the public sphere, have never been transferred into the private sphere. In Susan Arndt's discussion on African feminist writing, she writes, that in many postcolonial African novels, the home of the father or husband provides the analogy or metaphor that is the colonizing state; it reproduces top-to-bottom the colonial state's hierarchies and its violence at the most intimate level of relationship (Arndt 58).

There is a political climate that is meticulously affecting the lives and circumstances of Lady Hale, as well as the character when it comes to female possibility in the novel. The violence against Ifeoma after a Negro professor is fired at the university is what finally propels her family to the U.S., one of Nigeria's most dynamic and productive examples of female independence and intellectual free speech. The departure of Ifeoma through emigration is not a personal one, but one that is cultural and political. Her retirement represents a larger brain drain for formerly colonised African states, the outflow of their best and most committed individuals to wealthy western countries due to political unrest and

economic despair. For Kambili, the absence of Ifeoma and Amaka is the end of her apprenticeship in possibility and the return to a more isolated and restricted existence, but one that has been enriched and changed by what she's learned.

The eventual transition to civilian government at the end of the novel does not simply result in improvement of the situation of women. The relative precisions of Adichie's comments on the transformation of gender relations should be noted that he does not claim that the formal democratization of the political will automatically lead to the democratization of gender relations, that when a military dictator falls, the conditions will automatically be created and come into being that will enable women to be independent and dignified. The domestic violence which was a part of the military years is not attributable to the military per se and may have deeper roots in the patriarchal culture, and not adequately addressed by civilian or military government. This political realism is seen, for example, in the novel's enigmatic conclusion, set in a future in which is uncertain yet possible.

The Feminist Horizon: Toward Female Selfhood

As has been remarked it is a novel of development or "bildungsroman", a good word but needs a modifier. In the classic European format of "the bildungsroman" of typically a male character growing up as he or she moves from youth to socialisation/community incorporation, and from naïve innocence to an adult socially productive personality) the author is a conventionally little-moral-religious young person thrust into an environment that robs him of his credulity and converts him into a socially active and productive man (Moretti 15). The development of Kambili is different; it's not the development of integration into the existing social structures but a critical relation to them, the development of a selfhood, which can't be fully accommodated and reproduced by the structures around. She harbours a look for a husband but she fails to find one, she never finds a social niche, never comes to a conclusion. What she finds is more dubious, more valuable: a voice, a point of view, a new belief in her own capacity to make her own judgements.

There is a Kambili at the end of the novel when Eugene dies and Jaja is in prison, and she is developing but it's not exactly the one who couldn't say much when the book began. She goes to visit Jaja in the jail and delivers to him all of what he needs, and "talks" to him over the barrier of the visiting room. In all these final moments her voice is softer, but stiffer, more authentically her. And she has in her the imagination of what will be in the future, as she talks about at the end of the novel: "when Jaja is released from prison, we will go to Nsukka first, anywhere else and see the purple hibiscus blooming" (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 307). It really is related to Ifeoma's garden; the space of female cultivation, the space of possibility, the space of the rarity/difficulty of the flower that's not here and not there.

There is no happy ending. There are legitimate losses, such as Jaja's incarceration, Beatrice's disoriented state, the absence of Ifeoma and Amaka and they are not addressed. Yet it's not a downer ending for the novel. It concludes with an orientation, towards another future with a will towards another future. Kambili has found that she can do something different, that there are other ways of being a woman, other ways of being as a part of a family, other ways of being in a culture; she has found this out through Ifeoma, Amaka, through Father Amadi, through her emerging understanding of her grandfather's quiet dignity. Not all this knowledge is directly leading to liberation, but it's the base on which freedom from whatever it is that puts one there.

Adichie's feminist is not a programmatic or abstract one in this novel. It has no manifesto and has no prescriptions. Whereas it explores in a patient, detailed and personally emotionally honest way, very specific female lives in very specific circumstances from which the reader must watch women construct selves, which takes a lot of doing and a lot of courage that are anything but obvious. This is a particularist, an individualist, and an anti-simple feminism one that doesn't reduce oppressions women face or the identity they possess in response to them.

Conclusion

Purple Hibiscus is a very ambitious book, and a very restrained. It carefully captures the textures of domestic life, develops a nuanced portrait of female identity, draws out symbol and metaphor in abundance, and closely explores the crossovers of patriarchy and colonial religion, of indigenous tradition and of political modernity; it creates a portrait of female identity formation, both intensely particular and widely resonant. The women of the novel Kambili, Beatrice, Ifeoma, Amaka are not symbols or types, but are 'full-bodied characters, human beings each struggle with their own version of the central problem of the novel, how to be a person, a self, in a world invested in definition and limitation of persons and self.' (259)

So, the solution to this challenge that Adichie proposes is not a straightforward denial of the corruption of traditional ways by modernity, nor a straightforward affirmation of the idea of "liberal individualism" of the west, overwhelmed by the constraints of the cultures of Africa. It's harder, more honest than that insistence on the need for critical hybridity; the ability to inhabit a space between cultures without being completely dominated by either; a desire to create what's rare, what's new, what's specific, the purple hibiscus, when it's not conventional or approved. In this novel, female identity is not gifted, it is earned. It isn't female nature as it is at its natural state, but rather, it's a constructed identity built from the relationships in this narrative, from language, from experience, and ultimately from the willingness to conceive oneself as something other than what she's been told she is.

In particular, it is the novel's profound ability to hold in view these complicated forces not only long-term, but without resolving them too early yet, to affirm the reality of the suffering without taking its victims to be the suffering, and to suggest the possibility of a different future without ever disguising that future as having already been reached. In this it enhances the legacy of African feminist literature, one that represents not what African women have been but rather what they can be, what they are becoming, what they can and will be. Its lasting power depends on its ability to elicit and abide with these tensions while not adding them up prematurely, to confront the fact of suffering without flattening the rest of the book, to not take the veiled hint of hope, hinting of a second thing but not redefying it. It is doing that which fosters in part the tradition of African feminist writing not as a statement of what women have done, but an expression, a provisional and difficult, but yet real and possible as what women can do.

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