
LOSS OF IDENTITY AS REPRESENTED IN PURPLE HIBISCUS

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Received: Apr. 2019 Accepted: May 2019 Published: Jun. 2019

Abstract: The study speaks about the potential disabilities which lies in human minds regarding the identity and the image it holds on a societal platform. Cultural differences and implication of certain norms lie as the base for the whole conflict. It demonstrates the hardships faced by a bloodline to an obstinate head of a family, who aims to follow the westernized form of practice in his own family. It also details the fragmented images manifested by a mere man who deliberately falls as a prey for cultural shock. His disability to form the right image encircles the whole paper in detail.

Keywords: Catholicism , Colonialism , Cultural shock, Westernization.

Introduction: The novel taken for this study *Purple Hibiscus* is a book set in postcolonial Nigeria, a country beset by political instability and economic difficulties. The central character is Kambili Achike, aged fifteen covers the major part of the book, a member of a wealthy family dominated by her devoutly Catholic father, Eugene. Eugene is both a religious Zealot and a violent figure in the Achike household, subjecting his wife , Kambili herself, and her brother Jaja to beatings and psychological cruelty. The story is told through Kambili's eyes and is essentially about the disintegration of her family unit and her struggle to grow to maturity .

A key period is the time Kambili and her brother spend at the house of her father's sister, Ifeoma, and her three children. This household offers a marked contrast to what Kambili and Jaja are used to. It practices a completely different form of Catholicism, making for a happy, liberal place that encourages its members to speak their minds. In this nurturing environment, both Kambili and Jaja become more open and more able to voice their own opinions. While at Auntie Ifeoma's home, Kambili also falls in love with a young priest, Father Amadi, who awakens her sense of her own sexuality. Ultimately, a critical mass is reached in terms of the lives of Kambili and Jaja and the existence of their family as it once was.

Unable to cope with Eugene's continual violence, Beatrice poisons him. Jaja takes the blame for the crime and ends up in the prison. In the meantime, Auntie Ifeoma and her family move to America after she is unfairly dismissed from her job as lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The novel ends almost three years after these events, on a cautiously optimistic note. Kambili has become a young woman of eighteen, more confident than before, while her brother Jaja is about to be released from the prison, hardened but not broken by his experience there. Their mother, Beatrice has deteriorated psychologically to a great degree.

Loss of Identity: The identity crisis has demonstrated its power as one of the main thematic concerns in literature. Tragedy becomes ineluctable when characters are unable to remove themselves from the conflict between whom they are and who they are supposed to be. On the other hand, characters' awareness of their true selves is essential to the eventual achievement of self-actualization. In African literature, especially contemporary African literature, an identity crisis is frequently occasioned by conflict. Conflict between a person or group and another person, group, or natural force is what drives one into change.

Purple Hibiscus explores the issues of ethnic tensions and political unrest in Nigeria as parallels for coming of age and issues of identity definitions. The story, although set in Nigeria, is common to adolescents from other times and places- a perspective supported by the fact that it has been translated into languages as disparate as Lithuanian, Polish, Castilian, Turkish and Malayalam. It is the story of discovering oneself amidst cruel peers and crueler parents in a seemingly brutal and uncaring world.

The allegory between personal and national identity elevates this from a typical narrative of adolescent anguish into a thoughtful analysis of the formation of self; further, it does so in a way that dissipates some of the isolation that typically marks adolescence, allowing a reader to belong to a larger world.

Among all the themes, loss of identity has an important place in this novel. As a post-colonial novel, almost all the characters in this novel feel that they have lost their individualism. Mainly, it is experienced by Jaja, Kambili and Beatrice, as they seek to carve out their own identities. Kambili and Jaja are allegories for, growing post-colonial Nigeria, which must also face adolescent-like emergence into an identity separate from its colonial roots.

Jaja, Kambili and Beatrice can be compared with the colonized people, while Eugene takes the role of a colonizer. Like any colonizing country treats the people under colonial rule, Eugene assumes that the needs of his children and his wife are the same as his own. Eugene controls the smallest details of their lives, scheduling them for every minute of every day.

Part of growing up is building one's own identity by choosing which paths to follow. In Enugu, the only path Kambili and Jaja are allowed to follow is Papa. He writes out schedules and severely punishes them when they stray. When Kambili and Jaja visit their Auntie Ifeoma in Nsukka, they are astonished by what they find. Though her home is small and devoid of luxuries, there is love and respect. Her children Amaka and Obiora are allowed to question authority and choose their own paths.

Obiora, though he is three years younger than Jaja, is articulate and protective. He has been initiated into Igbo culture by performing a rite of manhood. Jaja was not allowed to participate and is ashamed that he is lagging behind his cousin. In Nsukka, Jaja is encouraged to rethink his allegiances and make his own decisions.

Kambili happily accepts her father's control totally forgetting her identity, as she has not yet made her run for independence, nor does she understand that her future is hers to decide. In this way she

losses her identity every time she lowers herself to her father. On one occasion, Kambili takes a bit longer to reach the vehicle and papa slapped her left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on her face and ringing in her ears for days.”

Here, again through violence, Eugene suppresses Kambili's identity. Kambili throughout her childhood totally depends on her father. When her father is killed, “Kambili finds herself without guiding force. She never considers the possibility that papa would die, that papa could die he had seemed immortal” (Adichie 287).

Similar too Kambili, Jaja strives to get his own identity. In the process, he even starts to rebel against her father by going against her father's wish. Both Kambili and Jaja must choose from among the potential futures available to them; by choosing, they will harden their growing identities. Their life at Nsukka has given them proper path to find themselves.

Jaja is perplexed and a bit impressed by life in Nsukka, as he begins to experience the joy of freedom. Ifeoma's style of parenting is represented by the flowers in her yard; which are the name sake of the novel: *The Purple Hibiscus*. Upon first sighting the flowers; Jaja is strangely drawn to them. He asks, “That's a hibiscus, isn't it? Aunt? Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fence. ”I didn't know there were purple hibiscuses. Aunt Ifeoma laughed and touched the flower, coloured a deep shade of purple that was almost blue. Everybody has that reaction the first time” (Adichie 128).

While in Nsukka, Jaja feels for the first time the taste of personal autonomy. Jaja is able to express his own thoughts and make his own choices. Even Kambili notices this sudden change in Jaja. She has listened to him and has also marveled at the wonder in his voice, which seems so different to her.

After Jaja visits Aunt Ifeoma and her family in the university, city of Nsukka, he has changed; he is no longer willing to quietly accept Eugene's rule. Jaja found that Aunt Ifeoma's family was completely different compared to his own family. Aunt Ifeoma rules her family with love and laughter, the characteristics which is unknown to his own family, and she allows each of her children to flourish according to his or her own abilities. Jaja's transformation while visiting Aunt Ifeoma represents not only his promising independence, but also the danger inherent therein.

When Jaja returns home, he refuses to partake in Holy Communion. Eugene is shocked by Jaja's behavior claiming, “You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that”. For this Jaja replies, “Then I will die” (Adichie 6). Eugene is speaking of the death of the soul, but Jaja is not speaking of his soul. Jaja is speaking of his desire to be free from his tyrannical rule of his father. Jaja's defiance does not come without a price. Jaja was imprisoned for almost three years without being formally charged, even taking his ability to defend himself for almost three years

Unlike Jaja, Kambili finds her new defiance, “fragrant with the undertones of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup” (Adichie 16). Ultimately, Aunt Ifeoma and her family flee from Nigeria even as Nsukka fell during the Nigerian Biafra war; the democratic ideal cannot be maintained in Nigeria, where the ground is barren to

such ideals. So, Jaja's hopes for his own independence fall and when his independence comes, it was not complete.

To Kambili, Jaja is a hero; he has sacrificed his freedom and his future in order to liberate his family from a man who could surely be considered a tyrant. However, Jaja himself does not appear the same. She says, "His eyes are too full of guilt to really see me, to see his reflection in my eyes, the reflection of my hero, the brother who tried always to protect me the best he could. He will never understand that I do not think he should have done more" (Adichie 305).

The guilt that Jaja feels is not for his action, for his only transgression has been dishonestly, and that in the pursuit to protection for his protection for his family. The guilt that Jaja feels is the guilt of not being able to protect his family more, of not being able to prevent the events that forced his mother's hand in murdering her husband, of not being able to prevent Kambili's hospital stay for injuries sustained when her father beat her, of not being able to prevent the miscarriage of an unborn sibling that resulted from Eugene's violence.

His guilt is the guilt of a holocaust survivor or an individual who does not stop the a person who could not prevented circumstance, but wishes that he had tried harder to find some way, anyway to prevent calamities that have be fallen his family and society.

Kambili and Jaja emerge into adulthood together, at the time of Eugene's murder. Wounded, self-sacrificing, and struggling to find and keep his voice, Jaja's decision to protect his mother elevates him to the role of patriarch. He enters into the role of father figure and therefore becomes an allegory for Nigeria that must be. Like Nigeria, Jarja suffers from the coup and will have to struggle to find himself in the future. Jaja will forever be marked by the psychological torment of having been increased, as well as literally and permanently deformed through the actions of his father.

Even as Jaja spent years awaiting trial , the Nation of Nigeria is also waiting, waiting for a time when it can heal its own scars and moves forward as a unified whole. Although, there were glorious option for the future, the reality of Nigeria's political situation has made them unreachable. The immediate future in one of struggle and the outcome is certain.

Kambili's laughter at the end, signals that she has fully come in to her own, able to support herself as well as Mama. Her reverence for nature comes across in her planting of new orange trees in her ancestral town, a symbol of new life and new beginnings. Jaja's Purple Hibiscus, a symbol of freedom, will bloom again.

The new rains symbolize the hope of a new beginning, as the environment plays a major symbolic role in this novel. This book ends on a hopeful note. The youth of Nigeria are tasked with rebuilding the nation, depopulated after a destructive war. Similarly, as Kambili and Jaja's family disintegrates, they must come into their own, a task metaphorically equal to the struggle of Nigeria to form its own identity in its postcolonial society.

Findings speak for the hardships in elaborate scale; inference aims to broadcast the shift which isn't necessary on the part of westernization.

Conclusion:The study has elaborated on the clash of identity which is the main focus to be concise about. Through this paper I have brought to light on the marginalization of woman by the men folk. And the exploitation done by the name of western adaptability.

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