



## Beyond the Borders of Silence: A Question of Power in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

 **Rosemary Okayo Murundu**

Department of Literature,  
University of Eldoret

Email: [rosahmaria8@gmail.com](mailto:rosahmaria8@gmail.com)

Nairobi Journal of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2017

© 2017 The Author(s). This open  
access article is distributed under  
a Creative Commons Attribution  
(CC-BY) 4.0 license.

### Article Information

Submitted: 30<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Accepted: 5<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Published: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of  
interest was reported by the  
authors

Funding: None

Additional information is available  
at the end of the article



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ISSN 2523-0948 (Online)

ISSN 2520-4009 (Print)

### ABSTRACT

Silence is a two edged sword that cuts from both ends. In her text 'Purple Hibiscus', Adichie Chimamanda has used silence as a dramatic technique of power play. Papa Eugene, the Antagonist, is portrayed as a man of limited words who hardly opens his mouth unless he is either ordering, scolding or reprimanding his 'subjects', family members whom he patronizes over with iron fist. The protagonists, Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice are involved in crisis with religious and domestic stakes from the very beginning of the narrative. The regime under their father has not only prevented them from speaking their minds but also from being themselves. The two not only struggle to make their mouths function within the totalitarian temperament of their father's home but also to engage and listen to the eloquent silence of their bodies sexual metamorphosis. It is the objective of the paper to substantiate Adichie's implied meaning of silence and prove its lethal edge as an instrument of revolutionary power. Kambili, Jaja and their mother, Beatrice use a domineering silence as a survival strategy. The technique of silence is conceptualized in order to articulate how power is played by the dominant group to regulate and control the existence of the subservient trio and how they manipulate power to negotiate their existence around the margins. The text is closely examined through the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's idea of power and Gayatri Spivak's; 'Can the Subalterns speak?'

**Keywords:** *Silence, power, subservient, Foucault religion, freedom*



## 1.0 Introduction

This paper explores the use of power or misuse of it for various reasons by different people. Through the perspectives of Michel Foucault's idea of power and Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the subaltern's speak', the study analyses how Eugene employs power to control and regulate the existence of the subservient group (Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili) around the margins and the way this group attains power and agency in the subversion of silence to negotiate their existence. Silence in Eugene's home is so magnified to the extent that it could be 'heard'. In class, Kambili's tongue can hardly function. Her struggle to express herself usually terminates with a stutter, making her classmates observe her with contempt; she is labelled a 'backyard snob' (53). She is a mute prisoner who is ever dashing away in her father's limousine, a move her classmates call aristocratic arrogance. Like Mosese in Francis Imbuga's 'Betrayal in the city', Eugene's family seems to be privileging silence as the best ship home in the text.

The novel traces the physical and psychological development of the dominated; Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili. A development which designates their struggle to define themselves beyond the stiffened and funless world their Calvinistic husband and father has fashioned for them. It is a world stuffed with materialistic wholeness, a world that lacks ventilation. Papa Eugene, being a phallogentric patriarchal man, believes in the idea of absolute power and its absolute expenditure on his family members. His over-zealous attitude and clipped religious tones reduce members of his family to the size of midgets, or to put it differently, his callousness emanates from a desire not to let his family, especially his children, to experience the bodily pleasure he was denied by the priests while growing up. He therefore assumes that any freedom given to his children would be spent in pursuance of such pleasures. He then does not only lock up their minds, but also locks up their bodies. He works hard to ensure 'comfort' for them; building houses that are capacious yet stifling, the bedrooms are very roomy yet stuffy. Kambili's description of the contrast between their commodious apartment and its airlessness is telling. She says; "Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated (7).

Kambili's words attest to the fact that she detests her father's totalitarian authority over them, what Michel Foucault would refer to as individuating bodies according to their tasks as well as observation and control. Foucault argues that discipline creates a whole new form of individuality for bodies which enable them to perform their duties within the new forms of economic, political and social order. In his concern with power, Foucault pushed to an extreme, the idea of human beings being determined by the conditions of their existence. Eugene's family is in a despotic establishment which in turn reduces it to a resonating silence in almost all their endeavours outside and inside their home.

To get a clear insight into what constitute Eugene's family and its experiences,

Foucault's notion of power becomes relevant and appropriate. This is due to the simple reason that through his works, Foucault has tried to move the thinking of power beyond the view of power as an instrument of repression of the powerless by the powerful to an examination of the way that power operates within everyday relations, that even at their most constraining oppressive measures, they are in fact productive, giving rise to new forms of behavior rather than simply closing down or censoring certain forms of behavior (Foucault 1978:33). His works which include: The history of madness (1961), Discipline and punish (1975), the order of things (1970), The Archeology of knowledge (1972), Power /Knowledge (1980), the history of sexuality (1978) and The Birth of the clinic (1973) are mainly centered on power in its various manifestations. Throughout his career, Foucault focuses on the analysis of the effects of various institutions on groups of people and the role that those people play in resisting those effects. In the text Purple Hibiscus, Eugene uses power to constrain and repress his wife and children's behaviours. However, instead of totally succumbing to the level of domestic servitude in silence, the three surmount their own body powers to contest the effects in various different ways which eventually prove to be successful even if to a limited extent.

## 2.0 Text analysis

Purple Hibiscus begins with crisis which runs through the text in the most gripping manner. The text traces the physical and psychological struggle of Eugene's wife Beatrice and children Jaja and Kambili. This is a struggle to define them beyond the stiffened and fun less world their selfish father has fashioned for them. Papa Eugene has unscrupulously built around his children and wife, a world stuffed with materialistic wholeness, a world that lacks ventilation, which guarantees a steady relationship with the outside when the inside becomes too suffocating to tolerate. This is in tandem with Foucault's thoughts in his work on "bio- power". He argues that it is at the level of the body that much regulation by the authority is enacted and the body 'refined' to become politically useful (Foucault 1980:98). Looking at the text through Foucault's perspective, it is evident that Eugene uses his authority as the head of his family to regulate and totally control his family members but which eventually triggers a revolution in them.

Chimamanda Adichie, through the 'eye' of the shy, submissive and reticent young Kambili, explores the social, religious and political concerns in the Eastern Nigerian environment; a country that graduated from an obnoxiously corrupt civilian administration to the rule by a monstrous military tyrant. The story revolves around Achike's family, headed by the father, Eugene Achike. He leads a life of rosary and carries himself with a donnish air of catholic superiority. The family suffers a fatal family disintegration emanating from religious fanaticism compounded with patriarchal ideology of gender relations. Male dominance occasioned by both inter

and intra gender conflicts form the bedrock of the Achike's, and by extension, many a world families' fatalic gender violence. Through the characters of Eugene, Beatrice, Jaja, Kambili, Ifeoma, Father Amadi, Papa Nnukwu and others, Adichie exposes a family where things are rapidly falling apart despite its social, religious and economic standing.

Eugene owns a fleet of companies of which one is a publishing house reputed for its astuteness and unbiased reportage of the Nigerian political temperament of the military regime in Nigeria. He urges his editor, Ade Coker to ensure that the standard speaks out, yet he continues to muzzle his wife and children. To contest this kind of power, Kambili, Jaja and their mother speak with their spirits, sometimes they converse with their eyes. Kambili's mother hardly talks and when she does, it is in monosyllables. Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1998) observes that:

Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure (75).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, silence is not only a mechanism or weapon of patriarchal control but also of domestic servitude. Kambili, Jaja and their mother, have devised ways of survival within the margins that the utilitarian calculus Eugene has created for them. One of the strategies is the domineering silence with which they observe situations and the other is a filial bonding. Through bonding, mother and children are able to survive the domestic quagmire and the prescriptions of the religious zealotry of their father.

At school, Kambili's survival behaviour is misunderstood. For instance, when the closing bell rings, she dashes off to her father's waiting car without exchanging pleasantries with her classmates before she is chauffeur-driven home. Her classmates see this as aristocratic arrogance. They are unaware that her life is dictated and regulated by a schedule scrolled in both her heart and her psyche so that she cannot even feel her own body as a teenage girl. Kambili and her brother, Jaja, have not even experienced the unforgettable teenage years expressed through sexual metamorphosis. Their father, Eugene, is replaying his own pleasure less life through them. A case in point is the episode where Jaja asks for the key to his room after he had just returned from Aunt Ifeoma's place, pleading for a need to have some privacy. The reaction of the father to this request is noteworthy. He automatically assumes that Jaja is only seeking an opportunity to indulge in sexual pleasure with himself: "What? What do you want privacy for? To commit sin against your own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?" (198). It is amazing that he thinks that a child he had taken such care to give "sound" religious upbringing would not

think of anything else to do in privacy but to masturbate. This is most likely because it is what he would have done at that age and with such opportunity. Thus, he wasn't imprisoning the children because he wanted them to be holy, but instead, because he feared that they were too much like him. For example, after he had poured hot water on Kambili and Jaja's feet for staying in the same house with his father Papa - Nnkwu (whom he considered a heathen), he explains to Kambili that:

I committed a sin against my own body once," he said. "And the good father, the one I lived with while I went to St. Gregory's, came in and saw me. He asked me to boil water for tea. He poured the water in a bowl and soaked my hand in it...I never sinned against my own body again. The good father did that for my own good," he said. (203)

Hence, it is possible that Eugene attempts to justify his actions because his fear is that one level of freedom would only lead to another, and would allow the children to discover a pleasure that had been denied to him. It can also be seen that his confessed self-discovery is at the root of his psychological imbalance. He perhaps would have been a more responsible father if he had been allowed to encounter and deal with the torrent of teenage passion on his own. And if for nothing else, he would have known how to guide his children through the rites of passage of teenage years. It is also not unlikely that his abuse of his family is a vengeful act for what the priest had done to him when he was young and dependent. But now that he had become older and richer and able to wield power of control in his family, his demons are released to punish the innocent for the sins of others. Consequently, his wife bears the most pain in this abuse because she is the one closest to him, the most dependent on him, and yet grateful to him because he decided not to marry another wife.

As mentioned, Eugene's callousness is couched in the garb of religion, and in his view, anything that draws attention to the body or makes it attractive to look at is considered sin. Kambili therefore must cover her long and beautiful hair; she must conceal her lovely athletic legs; she must in no way embellish her face; and she must not look at the nakedness of another person, male or female, for all these were considered sin. However, as the narration nears its denouement, Kambili begins to emerge from the high walls of prison that her father had built around her. Through her body power, as Foucault would say, she is slowly peeling off the mask to discover her true identity as a teenage girl living in a social world. Gayatri Spivak would credit her for self-recognition and speaking beyond the borders of silence.

Kambili's discovery of herself evolves in gradual phases. First, she learns to look at the nakedness of another human being like her by staring at Papa-Nnukwu's naked form while watching him pray. She stands fascinated at his nakedness, even

taking particular note “that his nipples were like dark raisins nestled among the sparse grey tufts of hair on his chest” (169). This is a far cry from her initial reaction at the sight of someone’s nakedness. Seeing Amaka undress on her very first day in Aunt Ifeoma’s house, Kambili could only imagine that she “looked like a Hausa goat: brown, long, and lean” (25), a rather unusual comparison stemming from her non-familiarity with such a sight. Of course, she quickly looks away because “it was sinful to look upon another person’s nakedness” (125-6). However, after only a few days in the house, she peeps at Papa-Nnukwu and confesses: “I did not look away, although it was sinful to look at another person’s nakedness” (175).

Kambili’s initial reaction is not surprising, considering that she had even been brought up not to look at herself, or much more to look at someone else. As much as she wanted to, she couldn’t bring herself to look at and admire herself in shorts because it would be vanity, and “vanity was a sin.”(187). It was then apparent that Eugene has managed to use the power of religion to subdue and control Kambili’s feelings. Her sense of guilt, spelt out through the word SIN, is so strong that she has to shed it off gradually to reclaim her true self. It is worthy to note that Kambili becomes well on her way to emancipation only when she becomes comfortable with her own body and conscious of that of others. Her fast movement towards the break from the mental chains her father had put on her is premised majorly on her decision to lay aside her religiosity and let her body respond to the attractiveness of another person. Undoubtedly, we also learn that Kambili’s attraction to Father Amadi is from the very beginning a physical one. During his second visit to Aunt Ifeoma’s, she notices “the way his hair lay in wavy curls on his head, like the ripples in a stream” (170). By the time he comes to pick her up for the soccer game, her awareness of him had graduated to the threshold of sensuality. She reflected thus:

His shorts seemed longer the last time I saw him in them, well past his knees. But now they climbed up to expose muscular thigh sprinkled with dark hair. The space between us was too small, too tight. I was always a penitent when I was close to a priest at confession. But it was hard to feel penitent now, could not focus on my sins, could not think of anything except how near he was” (175).

There is no doubt that it is Kambili’s never-to-be-consummated attraction to Father Amadi that helps in unlocking her potentials. His notice of her legs made her join the volleyball group on the second day of school despite the whispers and ridiculing laughter from her fellow students. In fact, her recovery after the near-fatal beating her father gave her can be attributed to the impact of her encounter with Father Amadi. In some form of internal monologue, she relieves her thoughts thus:



He picked up the water bottle, drank deeply from it. I watched the ripples in his throat as the water went down. I wished I were the water, going into him, to be with him, one with him. I had never envied water so much before. His eyes caught mine, and I looked away, wondering if he had seen the longing in my eyes (226-227).

Visibly Kambili is undergoing sexual metamorphosis, what in the thinking of Foucault would be looked at as the power of her body eventually overcoming all the feelings of restrictions put upon her body by her father, that is, the power of body overcoming power over bodies. Her body is gradually taking its own trajectory. She is able to surmount her own body power to overturn the oppressive power of her father. She is able to appreciate the aesthetics of her sexually ripe body and not see it in terms of sin like her father had made her to believe. Spivak on the other hand would credit Kambili for breaking her silence and speaking through her body power; the subalterns are speaking after all.

Eugene's sense of production enunciates his stance both as a capitalist and a phallocentrist. This is especially seen when from time to time he brings a new product home from his factories to be assessed by his reticent family which he has turned into a pathetic doping machine. This phallic and capitalist drive is extended to his children's academic enterprise. Coupled with the sickening and choking home characterized by her father's sense of material acquisition, Kambili's academic business begins to lack creativity and enchantment. Both her home and school become a prison for her, as she slips down the academic ladder. The kind of educational system Eugene wants for his children is dehumanizing. He is mechanical in all spheres of life, and he condemns and discourages all forms of leisure. When Kambili comes second in her class rather than encourage the girl to put more effort into her academic business, he petulantly asks a mechanical question. "How many heads has Chinwe Jideze?," the girl who beats her to the second position. He didn't stop there, he brings out a mirror and gives it to Kambili, to ascertain the number of heads she has. For fear of being tortured, Kambili devices a new method of studying:

It was like balancing a sack of gravel on my head every day at school and not being allowed to steady it with my hand. I still saw the print in my textbooks as a red blur, still saw my baby brother's spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood. I memorized what the teachers said because I knew my textbooks would not make sense if I tried to study later. After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back (52).

Eugene's educational standards are not only placidly faulty, it is banal and

unproductive; hence Kambili turns the entire academic enterprise to cramming and calculation. The educational standard stresses the training of the intellect without any complementary ties with the emotion and imagination. To him only the human reason is important. Kambili and Jaja's lives are reduced to facts and figures thereby subjecting them to mental torture. From Kambili's account, her father stands for something repellent though respectable. His utilitarian posture is what eventually leads to the crumbling of his family's psychological configuration. Eugene is a symbol of rugged individualism. His entire world is woven around self-assertion, power and material success. The items in his agenda are strict and tight, making him lack interest in ideals or ideas, except the idea of being the perfect definition of a self-made man. This is what he uses to intimidate his family as he rightfully confesses, "I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools" (49). He is therefore bitter and inhuman to the extent that he regards his house help, Sisi, as "that girl". All through the novel, he never addresses her by her name.

Due to patriarchal power manipulations to torture female bodies, the woman has been reduced to commodity status and is likened to a jute sack of rice flung over a man's shoulder, while the male has been given the macho characteristics of a fierce Fulani nomad; a no nonsense man who would not hesitate to tear apart the bodies of those he dominate hence inflicting maximum physical and psychological pain in the victim. However, this macho presentation does not seem to include the marginalized Jaja and papa Nnku. To Eugene, they are all 'women' and must be treated so.

Looking at *Purple Hibiscus* through the lens of Foucault's idea of power, we encounter a society in which power is played at various levels: Domestic, Social, Political and Religious levels among others. At each respective level, power is manipulated to serve individual, groups or institutions' interests. At domestic level, Adichie exposes to the reader an economically, religiously and politically correct family of Achike, headed by the father, Eugene Achike. Though wearing a mask of ideal happy family to the public for convenience, the family is suffering a quiet fatal disintegration due to patriarchal and religious power manipulations.

Eugene who is the head of this family is a religious fanatic who uses patriarchal ideologies of male domination to unscrupulously reinforce Christian values in to his family members. As Adichie puts it, things begun to fall apart in this family when Jaja refuses to receive the ritualistic Christian holy communion. Violent erupts between Jaja and his father Eugene. Eugene hurls a missal at Jaja but misses him to hit the glass *étagère*, Beatrice's precious possession of ceramic figurines of ballet dancers which she possessively polish quite often.

Justifying his action, Jaja says "the wafer gives bad breath and the priest keeps touching my mouth" (6). Jaja is trying to assert himself as an individual with individual difference from his father. Simply put, he seems to be telling his father that he does not have to do as he commands because he (Jaja) is his own person. Jaja is clearly



contesting his father's authority as he tries to create another centre of power; the power of reason or knowledge as Foucault may put it. He says; such a power of the body opposes the power over bodies, and thereby represents, for Foucault, the source of revolution (Foucault 1972:156). Rather than remain silent and suffocate under Eugene's authoritative domineering power, Jaja projects a voice of rebellion to enable him survive. He is determined to wade off the domestic quagmire and the prescriptions of the religious zealotry of their father. He reinforces his rebellious stand by remaining rooted to the same spot despite his father trying to hit him with the missal. Instead, it is his father who swayed under the impact of his own rage. The narrator says "Jaja did not move. Papa swayed from side to side" (7).

When writing on the impact of institutional and discursive forces on the body, Foucault suggests that the body should be seen as the focus of a number of discursive pressures; the body is the site on which discourses are enacted and where they are contested (1978-1986). This notion is realized in the person of Beatrice, Eugene's wife. In silence," She stared at the figurine pieces on the floor and then knelt and started to pick them up with her bare hands. The silence was broken only by the whir of the ceiling fan as it sliced through the still air (7). Having absorbed the effect of Eugene's domineering power over them, in silence, the power of her own body then springs to play against Eugene's power by breaking the deadly silence and restoring normalcy. She orders her children Jaja and Kambili and her husband Eugene to various chores respectively. She tells them:

Nne, Ngwa. Go and change. Mama said to me, startling me although her Igbo words were low and calming. In the same breath, without pausing, she said to papa, "Your tea is getting cold", and to Jaja, "come and help me biko" (8)

Kambili says she suffocated in the tension marked by the silence. However, it is necessary to point out that despite the intra and inter gender conflicts depicted in this scene, there is also evidence of gender complementarity which is seen through the efforts of Beatrice and Jaja in cleaning up the mess and restoring some order just as the narrator puts it , " Jaja knelt beside mama, flattened the church bulletin he held into a dustbin and placed a jagged ceramic piece on it. (8).

This complementarity is further reinforced by Jaja's concern over the mother's well-being. This is evidently conveyed through his words "Careful; mama, or those pieces will cut your fingers" (8). Filial bonding between mother and son or complementarity as one may call it, is one of the strategies employed by the Achike family to subvert oppression and domination for the necessary ventilation. Jaja does not talk of the bribe deal between the federal government and Eugene which he

overheard. Mama does not accuse Eugene for breaking her figurines and Kambili says “I’m sorry your figurines broke” instead of what she had earlier on intended to say. “I’m sorry Papa broke your figurines (10). In the same breath, Kambili does not come out openly to listen to her father’s conversation with his guests instead she eaves drops. This shows the determination by Kambili, among others to break the doctrinaire attitude of their father which creates a cyst- around them.

Even within this circumscribed space, Kambili continues her quest for her voice through eaves dropping. She tries to make sense of her father’s conversation with his guests whenever they come calling. The process towards locating her voice begins with what would have been a normal ritual of another silent Christmas celebration if her aunt Ifeoma had not shown up with her family. The process of creating her own voice begins with Kambili’s location of her mouth, which has been in a perpetual state of incapacity. Ifeoma’s presence in Aba during the Christmas celebration is fumigating, because the vector of silence that has clipped Kambili’s lips and the cyst shielding rays of humanity from her life begins to shade into a mincing voice. The conservative mindset of their father makes them observe anything he labels as evil abominable to them without any rational or dialectical questioning. Kambili’s doughty aunt, Ifeoma becomes a symbol of the iconoclastic identity and demystifier of patriarchal and despotic establishments.

Though a catholic devotee like Kambili’s father, Ifeoma creates the leeway that would give her brother’s family leverage from domestic servitude. Since her perception of religion is at variance with her brother’s, it is not surprising that the conflict between the two of them subtly detonates on the dining table. Eugene almost blinds his family with prayers during lunch. It is only the ebullient Ifeoma who is able to express the implication of lengthy prayers at meals: “Did you want the rice to get cold, Eugene?” She belongs to the category of women who Rosemary Moyana (1996) describes as “women who refuse to be compartmentalized into their chiseled up roles” (30). Eugene only grants his children audience with their grandfather for fifteen minutes. Anything more is abominating and sinful and must be confessed before the priest for remission of sin. From their father’s prayers and remarks, they conclude that their grandfather must be very paganistic.

Eugene would not allow his father into his premises because their religious beliefs are polar- a polarity which is characterized by a kind of inverse correlation. It is Ifeoma who gives Kambili and Jaja the exclusive benefit of knowing their grandfather beyond the atheistic portraiture their father has cartographed in their mind. Kambili observes her grandfather, Nnukwu with filial attachment from a distance because she has been zipped up by her father’s doctrinaire stance towards Papa Nnukwu, which is informed by Kambili’s father’s inebriated sense of religion. Ifeoma is able to discern the cosmetic life her callow nephew and niece are leading. She observes that their expressions are glacial unlike her children who have plenary

rights to converse inside and outside their home. In order to initiate an osmotic pressure in their lives, she prescribes a trip to Nsukka, for Kambili and Jaja, a trip that marks an eclipse of Eugene's unbridled religious hegemony. Although Eugene's acquiescence to this proposal is a welcome development to their mother, he gives them a schedule they would strictly adhere to, because the schedule becomes a symbol of his authority and their mainstay.

"Things actually started to fall apart" when Kambili and Jaja embarked on the trip to Nsukka. Ifeoma's house boisterously glows, yet it is not obstreperous. On arrival to Nsukka Kambili and Jaja are stunned by the polarity between the frolicking temperament that pervades the cramped apartment in Nsukka and their forlornly existence even in the midst of everything that should make life relishing. Kambili becomes confused by the untrammelled grace with which everybody carries himself or herself in the house. Her inability to comprehend this disposition makes her dissolve even further into silence.

At domestic level, Eugene resorts to exercising the power to punish his family members. The narrator says:

Papa was like a Fulani nomad. As he swung his belt at mama, Jaja and me, it landed on Jaja first, a cross his shoulder. Then mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back (102).

Eugene did this to repress feelings and actions of his family members so that they just follow his orders and demands blindly. He does what Michel Foucault refers to as torture of bodies. He says, those bodies must be individuated according to their tasks as well as training, observation and control...Discipline creates a whole new form of individuality for bodies which enable them to perform their duty within the new forms of economic, political and military organizations emerging in the modern age and continuing today. Foucault (1977:93) Eugene expects total submission and loyalty from his family members to feed his patriarchal religious fanaticism ego. To Eugene, little Kambili would rather go to church in an empty cramped belly than eat a little corn flakes to hold panadol in her stomach because this would conform to Christian values. He ends up beating up Kambili and all her sympathizers like Jaja and mama. He succeeds in turning Kambili and Beatrice into masked human zombies that only exist to please him. For instance, no one accuses him for breaking Beatrice's figurines. The women are used to keeping mumb and only speak through silence.

The two women also force out false compliments for Eugene's new product from his factory. Kambili and Beatrice have to always say what Eugene wants to hear

but inside they perfect a gnawing silence that is full of power resistance. This is the concept of power that Foucault talks about as the way of the body's own power, the body's own force of will and desire. He argues that such power of the body opposes the power over bodies hence the source of all revolution. In deed there is revolution in the text, Beatrice obtains poison through Sisi and the two women work together to eliminate Eugene. This is a practice that has become very common in the contemporary society. Many women have resorted to eliminating their husbands as a means to freedom. This method of gaining freedom may not be right against the backdrop of societal norms but it is a point of departure from patriarchal domination and oppression

Can the subaltern's speak? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests that it is impossible for us to recover the voice of the subaltern or oppressed subject. However, a radical critic Michel Foucault, she says, is prone to believing that the oppressed subjects can speak for themselves. Jaja and Kambili eventually get their voices audible and can enjoy some liberty. Their teenage development becomes complete at nsukka because for the first time Kambili's mouth performs almost all its functions. She smiles, talks, cries, laughs, jokes and sings. Through Ifeoma, Kambili discovers Papa Nnukwu's sense of pantheism, as she watches him from a distance commune with his [G]ods- an occasion which proves the old man a better believer, who understands the intricate arithmetic of religion, most especially, the relationship between God and man, thereby disproving and debunking her father's stony fundamentalism. For the very first time they live a life not dictated by schedule, though the items in the schedule are concretely engraved in their hearts. Ifeoma consigns her nephew and niece's schedules and customizes them to her world; a world characterized by the application of the commonest of senses. In Ifeoma's house everybody has the liberty to say anything, provided elders are not insulted.

This enthusiasm with which discourses are introduced and sustained is not only mind boggling to Kambili, but also causes consternation in her psyche. Through Father Amadi she discovers a new brand of Catholicism, which is not mechanical and dictatorial but lithe, which is a direct contrast to the one her father and Father Benedict practice, one which makes room for dissent. Father Amadi discerns with relative ease that Kambili is gnomic, even though she is conditioned by the ritualized sense of religion her father has created for her. He devises a means with which to wring her from her silent space. Since her sense of Catholicism is ritualistic, and Jesus or God becomes the common denominator, it becomes apparently glaring that she will be willing to do anything provided it is associated with God or Jesus. Through this device, Father Amadi cracks her frozen sense of comportment and broke through her programmed psychic networking. Father Amadi takes advantage of her dogmatic naivety as she falls for the bait and runs for it:

Do you love Jesus?" Father Amadi asked, standing up. I was startled. "Yes. Yes, I love Jesus". Then show me. Try and catch me, show me you love Jesus." He had hardly finished speaking before he dashed off and I saw the blue flash of his tank. I did not stop to think; I stood up and ran after him. (176)

As Father Amadi continues to cosset her, she beams her first smile, though icy, it is a process towards emancipation. On their way home, Kambili opens her mouth and laughs a mirthless laugh. At the time her grandfather dies she is only beginning to know him. Her aunt's children and Jaja seem to be closer to him, but she was too distant- a fact she hates herself for. Amaka, her cousin, gives her the uncompleted painting of their grandfather she did, while he was alive, a painting, which symbolizes something she earnestly desires but cannot have. She handles the painting sacredly as their father takes them home to Enugu, the painting, which becomes the link, between her aunt's world, and Enugu.

The rift in the novel begins when they return home from Nsukka, while they are mid-way in their metamorphosis. Invariably, this is when everything begins to change for instance, Jaja asks for the key to his room, which has been in the possession of their father. The request marks the beginning of their quest for emancipatory rights. Their father, who is astounded by this demand, decides to take pragmatic and overt steps to ensure he un-teaches his children that have been removed from the borderline of his doctrinaire standards. As a means of cleansing from the sinful dust of Nsukka and the paganistic temperament of the air of Ifeoma's home, he bathes Kambili's feet in hot water. The cleansing rituals did not produce the elutriating effects Eugene desires. As stated earlier, both kids brought with them different items from their aunt's. Jaja brings seeds of purple hibiscus while Kambili brings the uncompleted painting of their grandfather. Both items represent freedom from the rigid life style of their father's world.

With these items, they are to sustain a steady link with their aunt's airy world en route liberation. With these items they hope never to plunge into the borders of frustration, disillusionment, alienation, and the existential solitude of the world they know too well. The items will help cram the vacuum created in their lives. Kambili's painting is suddenly, discovered by her father as she and her brother are admiring their grandfather. Like the extremist that he is, Eugene takes the painting from his children who claim ownership of the painting simultaneously. Stunned by this development, Eugene destroys the painting as if it is Papa Nnukwu himself. Kambili could not hold back anymore. She is not ready to watch her father tare something she holds sacred from her just like that. She is not willing to observe her father truncate the stable transition of her development, which the painting will help her realize even within the circumscribed radius of her father's walls. The painting

symbolizes freedom to her and at the same time she remains of her grandfather which she never had while he was alive. She hurriedly begins to piece the destroyed painting on the floor together solemnly. Her father cannot believe his daughter can degenerate to such low ebb of heathenism. Like Louisa in Dickens' *Hard Times* who collapses before her father, a condemnation and disintegration of the unproductive upbringing that her father, Gradgrind has given her, Kambili remains in her solemn state in order to string the pieces together.

The furtiveness with which she handles the painting embarrasses everything her father stands for. He becomes stunned at the confutation of his conservative religious standards, an occasion where he is completely subdued by the first shocking witness of the result of his rigid religious matrix; Kambili's handling of the pieces of the painting symbolizes the collapse of his father's system. Rather than realize and admit that his philosophy is inhuman and inefficacious, with a doleful expression on his face, he degenerates into an uncontrollable fit of anger and duffs her up heavily, until she falls unconscious. The trip to Nsukka becomes a domino effect on the developmental process of the children. Contrary to Anthony Oha (2007) contestation on the passivity of Kambili, he erroneously contends that "Kambili is not a contributor character. She never acted to change neither her situation nor the things around her" (207). To have pieced the torn portrait of her grandfather destroyed by her father is a potent statement of her assertion of her identity and an indication that she has transversed her limitations; at this point she is no longer a victim but an actor. Through this incident Kambili succeeds in breaking out of the social and religious silence of her earlier life. She declines to acquiesce the status quo- escaping from her entrapment, by debunking her father's authority, a definitive statement of rebellion against the phallogocentric and autocratic set up.

Kambili is able to show her feelings of love for father Amadi and was even able to discuss her feelings. She is going through sexual metamorphosis. Kambili now has a chance to recognize her sexuality. Amaka is not shy to discuss sex, a topic many look at as a taboo. She is also able to express her thoughts on the corrupt way of treating people in the prisons through letter writing. Ifeoma is able to freely talk of her overseas play even after her job is terminated illegally by university authority. And finally, Beatrice is able to speak her mind concerning the mourning of her husband.

Looking at the events as they unfold in *Purple Hibiscus* through the lens of 'Can the subaltern speak?', we encounter a patriarchal ideology of Gender Relations, exercised through psychological and physical violence against the marginalized with women taking centre stage. From the beginning, Beatrice does not oppose anything her husband says or does, even when it means Eugene beating Jaja for not receiving holy communion, Eugene breaking her figurines, her going into father Benedict's house despite her feeling unwell just to please Eugene,



her offering to serve Eugene's tea but instead meeting rejection, her being beaten in the bedroom in silence extra...However, as the text comes to its denouement, we realize that the women are not as docile and submissive as they may appear, that behind the submissive façade, are strong restless women looking for space for self-emancipation.

This is especially evident in Beatrice's confession for having killed Eugene. She admits having used poison as she tells her son, Jaja: "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witchdoctor" (290). The calm and confidence she exuded at her confession is very telling of her justifiable stance. To some extent, Beatrice seems to share on the thinking of Carol Gilligan, a psychoanalyst feminist who, when discussing the advantages of a different voice for women in *The Feminist Case for and Against Women's Morality*, argues that when making a moral decision, women espouse a somewhat more consequentialist point of view, calculating the effects of the moral agent's action on all who will be touched by it (162). Beatrice believes that her elimination of her husband Eugene is synonymous to an elimination of an obstacle to independence and self-emancipation of members of her nuclear family.

Kambili eventually throws in the towel and faces her intense sexual feelings for Father Amadi. He evokes raw intense sexual feelings in Kambili when he says to her, "you have good legs for running: You should practice more". To Kambili, it seemed too close, too intimate, "to have his eyes on my legs, on any part of me" (183). Her sexual anticipation is expressed very simply: "His body touching mine was tense and delicious" (776). It is also subtly expressed with metaphors as in "He picked up the water bottle, drank deeply from it. I watched the ripples in his throat as the water went down. I wished I were the water, going into him." (231).

Kambili's newly acquired freedom of expression culminates into what seems to add to the image of sexual foreplay:

Father Amadi ran his hand over the loosening braids, in gentle, smoothing motions. He was looking right into my eyes. He was too close. His touch was so light I wanted to push my head toward him, to feel the pressure of his hand. I wanted to press his hand to my head, my belly, so he could feel the warmth that coursed through me. (232).

Kambili's transformation is also depicted through her defiance to her father when she pieced the torn portrait together (253). The change in Jaja is marked by his asking for the key to his room, which has been in the possession of their father. The request marks the quest for emancipatory rights. In the unfolding events, it is evident that the subalterns can also speak. Beatrice's voice took shape as soon as she hatched the plan and obtained the poison. She has exercised what Foucault refers to

as power of body over bodies. She has manipulated her own body power to eliminate the powerful oppressive Eugene and get her own space and voice.

### 3.0 Conclusion

The unfolding events in Adichie's text, *Purple Hibiscus*, are best summarized by what Michel Foucault say on power over bodies and of bodies. He suggests that the body should be seen as the focus of a number of discursive pressures. The body is the site on which discourses are enacted and where they are contested. (Foucault (1978-1986). The dominant master of power manipulation papa Eugene, employs silencing not only as a mechanism or weapon of patriarchal control but also of domestic servitude over his wife and children. His power welding personality is as a result of several contradictory discourses upon his body. The author describes him as the most amusing character because he is a pack of contrast. For instance, he is so religious that he is unable to draw the lines between social responsibility and religious commitment. He forbids his family from identifying with traditional tenets yet he takes the traditional title 'Omelora'. He admonishes members of his immediate family not to bow before any mortal being, yet when Kambili proudly refuses to bow before Father Benedict during communion he spansks her. He refuses to marry a second wife, when his wife is unable to give birth to more children even when his relatives heavily pressure him, yet he does not treat his wife as a partner in the matrimonial enterprise. His barbarous act makes his wife suffer chains of miscarriages. His missal, which is supposed to be sacred, judging from his parochial sense of religion, becomes a missile which he throws at Jaja, thereby destroying the figurines on the étagère. This scene sums up the entire narrative. As the figurines go down, the foundation of his family begins to crumble and everything about him begins to have a downward trajectory.

The shards of the figurines represent the gradual disintegration of his authority in his home and the gradual fragmentation of the organic and psychological wholeness of his family. His fussy sense of Christianity is anchored on just heaven, hell and sin, so that when Papa Nnukwu dies the only question that comes to his mind is. "Did you call a priest to give him extreme unction?"(188). How can Ifeoma initiate Papa Nnukwu into Christianity at death, when it is expected of the initiate to be conscious of the initiation rite and process? He is blinded by his religious dogmatism, his high handedness that he does not see beyond his warped philosophical cum religious standards, which are wrecking his home. As noted earlier, Adichie creates a vent in Eugene's household from where she explores the Nigerian nationhood and the plight of the ruled. Eugene's home becomes a microcosmic of the entire Nigerian nation. Eugene's hegemonisitic cum religious rule coupled with his idiosyncratic posture articulately parallels the despotic disposition and histrionics of General Ibrahim Babangida's regime. Adichie satirizes various aspects of society.

The satirical methods she employs include exaggeration, irony, sarcasm and contrast. Just like Eugene gives his children fleeting moments with their grandfather, Papa Nnukwu, a character symbolic of democratic ideals, which connotes freedom. So also the military regime deceptively initiates a transition programme that would return Nigeria to a democratic state. Just like Eugene is a pack of contrast, the head of state, a military ruler insisted on being addressed as a president, and ensured he never uses his beret. He orchestrated a transition programme which he truncated at the point fruition. No ruler in the history of Nigeria has ever pursued democracy with such enthusiasm denuded of forthrightness- little wonder he was never forthcoming.

Eugene employs this power to regulate the existence of the subservient group around the margins and how the subservient group attains power and agency in the subversion of the weapon of domination to negotiate their existence. Power contestation becomes a reality in their lives. Eventually they rid themselves of Eugene; he is poisoned by his own wife and the house girl. Jaja and Kambili find their voice and are able to express their feelings. The subalterns have been able to speak and redefine their spaces and identities.

## References

- Adichie C. (2006). *Purple Hibiscus*: Kwani Trust. Nairobi
- Foucault. M. (1977) *Discipline and punish; The Birth of the Prison*.trans Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth; Penguin
- Foucault M. (1980) *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An introduction*, Tran's .Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books
- Foucault .M (1974) *Michel Foucault on Attica*. Telos
- Foucault M (1961) *Folie et deraison: Histoire de la folie a l age classique*, Paris: plon
- Foucault M (1980) *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books
- Foucault M (1983) “*On the Genealogy of Morals: An overview of Work in Progress*”, in Hubert L. dreyfus and Paul Rainbow Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics Second Edition. With an Afterword by an Interview with Michel Foucault, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Foucault M (1980) “Introduction”, in Herculine Barbin: Being the recently Discovered Memoirs of a nineteenth- Century French Hermaphrodite, trans. Richard Mc Dougall, New York: Pantheon Books
- Foucault M (1977) *Language, Counter – Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* by Michael Foucault ed. With intro. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press
- Imbuga F. (1976) *Betrayal in the City*. Kigali: East African Publishers Rwanda Ltd