

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus.

الأبوية باسم الإله: التعصّب الديني والهيمنة الأبوية في رواية زهرة الكركديه الأرجوانية

لتشيماماندا نغوزي أديتشي.

Maireche Menar. معيرش منار

m.maireche@univ-chlef.dz

ORCID: 0009-0006-8566-5133

PhD Student in Contemporary Literature at Hassiba Benbouali Chlef University, Algeria.

د. عراب سمير Dr. Samir Arab

s.arab@univ-chlef.dz

ORCID: 0000-0003-1229-589X

Senior Lecturer at Hassiba Benbouali Chlef University, Algeria.

DOI: 10.46315/1714-015-002-052

Received: 09/ 02/ 2026 Accepted: 15/ 04/ 2026 Published :10/ 06/ 2026

**

Abstract:

This article examines the intersection of religious fanaticism and patriarchal hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, arguing that fanatical Christianity operates as an ideological mechanism that legitimizes male authority and gendered violence within the domestic sphere. Drawing on Gramscian notions of hegemony alongside feminist and postcolonial theory, the study demonstrates how Eugene Achike's rigid Catholicism transcends personal belief to become a system of moral absolutism that disciplines female bodies, silences dissent, and normalizes suffering as spiritual duty. Through close textual analysis, the article explores the psychological and physical victimization of Kambili and Beatrice, highlighting how fear, guilt, and religious dogma sustain patriarchal consent. At the same time, the paper foregrounds Adichie's critique of religious authoritarianism by examining alternative spaces of faith and resistance embodied by Aunt Ifeoma and Beatrice's ultimate act of rebellion. The study concludes that Purple Hibiscus exposes religious fanaticism as a culturally sanctioned form of patriarchal violence while affirming female agency through the reimagining of faith, voice, and resistance in postcolonial Nigerian society.

Keywords: Patriarchal Hegemony; Religious Fanaticism; Gendered Violence; Postcolonial Feminism; Female Resistance.

ملخص باللغة العربية

تناول هذه الدراسة تقاطع التعصّب الديني والهيمنة الأبوية في رواية زهرة الكركديه الأرجوانية لتشيماماندا نغوزي أديتشي، مجادلةً بأن المسيحية المتطرفة لا تعمل بوصفها معتقداً دينياً فحسب، بل باعتبارها آلية أيديولوجية تُشرعن السلطة الذكورية والعنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي داخل الفضاء الأسري. وانطلاقاً من مفهوم الهيمنة عند غرامشي، وبإستناد إلى النظريتين النسوية وما بعد الاستعمار، تُبرز الدراسة كيف تتحوّل الكاثوليكية الصارمة التي يتبنّاها يوجين أشيكي إلى نظام من المطلقات الأخلاقية يضبط الأجساد النسوية، ويقمع الأصوات المعارضة، ويُطبع المعاناة باعتبارها واجباً روحياً. ومن خلال تحليل نصّي عميق، تكشف الدراسة عن أشكال الإيذاء النفسي والجسدي التي تتعرّض لها كامبيلي وبياتريس، مبينةً كيف

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

تُسهّم مشاعر الخوف والذنب والعقيدة الدينية في ترسيخ الامتثال الأبوي. وفي المقابل، تسلط الورقة الضوء على نقد أدبتي للاستبداد الديني من خلال فضاءات بديلة للإيمان والمقاومة، كما تتجلى في شخصية العمة إيفيؤما وفعل التمرد الحاسم الذي تقدم عليه بياتريس. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الرواية تكشف التعصّب الديني بوصفه شكلاً مشروعاً ثقافياً من أشكال العنف الأبوي، مؤكدةً في الوقت ذاته إمكانية استعادة الفاعلية النسوية عبر إعادة تخيل الإيمان والصوت والمقاومة في المجتمع النيجيري ما بعد الاستعمار.

كلمات مفتاحية: الهيمنة الأبوية؛ التعصّب الديني؛ العنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي؛ النسوية ما بعد الاستعمار؛ مقاومة المرأة.

**

1- Introduction

Religion occupies a central position in many African societies, functioning not only as a system of belief but also as a powerful social and moral institution that shapes family structures, gender relations, and individual conduct. In postcolonial African literature, religious discourse often intersects with questions of power, authority, and identity, revealing how faith can both liberate and oppress. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) engages critically with this intersection by exposing the ways in which religious extremism reinforces patriarchal domination within the private sphere of the family.

Set in postcolonial Nigeria, *Purple Hibiscus* narrates the coming-of-age story of Kambili Achike under the tyrannical rule of her father, Eugene, a wealthy industrialist and devout Catholic. Publicly revered as a moral exemplar and generous benefactor of the church, Eugene embodies a form of religious righteousness that masks extreme domestic violence and authoritarian control. His fanatical adherence to Catholic doctrine governs every aspect of family life, from speech and movement to emotional expression, thereby transforming religion into a mechanism of discipline and surveillance. Within this rigid moral framework, female characters—particularly Kambili and her mother Beatrice—are subjected to physical abuse, psychological terror, and enforced silence, all justified in the name of spiritual purity and obedience.

While existing scholarship on *Purple Hibiscus* has extensively examined themes of patriarchy, domestic violence, and female agency, religion is often treated as a background element rather than as a central ideological force sustaining patriarchal power. This article argues that Eugene's religious fanaticism is not merely a personal flaw or exaggerated piety, but a crucial instrument of patriarchal hegemony. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the novel demonstrates how domination is maintained not only through coercion, but through moral authority, internalized guilt, and the normalization of suffering. Eugene's role as both father and religious authority figure enables him to secure obedience by framing violence as discipline and pain as a path to salvation.

Furthermore, Adichie situates this religious patriarchy within a broader postcolonial context, where Western Christianity functions as a colonial legacy that delegitimizes indigenous beliefs and reinforces

hierarchical gender relations. Eugene's rejection of his father's traditional spirituality and his admiration for European missionaries reflect a colonial mindset that equates moral superiority with Western religious norms. In contrast, the novel offers alternative models of faith and social organization through characters such as Auntie Ifeoma, whose liberal, compassionate interpretation of Christianity fosters dialogue, laughter, and female autonomy.

This article contends that *Purple Hibiscus* not only critiques religious authoritarianism but also exposes its gendered consequences, particularly the systematic victimization of women within the domestic sphere. At the same time, the novel foregrounds forms of resistance—both overt and covert—that challenge patriarchal hegemony and reimagine faith as a space of liberation rather than oppression.

This article argues that in *Purple Hibiscus*, religious fanaticism operates as a hegemonic patriarchal ideology that legitimizes male authority, normalizes gendered violence, and silences female voices, while Adichie simultaneously dismantles this system by presenting alternative religious spaces that enable female resistance and the reclamation of agency in postcolonial Nigerian society.

Scholarly engagement with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has been extensive, particularly in relation to themes of patriarchy, domestic violence, female agency, and postcolonial identity. Critics have widely acknowledged the novel's feminist orientation and its exposure of gendered oppression within the Nigerian family structure. However, while religion is frequently mentioned in these analyses, it is often treated as a contextual or symbolic element rather than as a central ideological force that actively sustains patriarchal domination. This section reviews existing scholarship in three main areas: patriarchy and gender violence in African literature, feminist readings of *Purple Hibiscus*, and critical approaches to religion and power in the novel, highlighting the gap this article seeks to address.

Patriarchy and Gendered Oppression in African Literature

Feminist critics of African literature have long examined how patriarchal structures shape women's lived experiences, particularly within the domestic sphere. Scholars such as Florence Stratton and Molara Ogundipe have argued that African women's writing often exposes the family as a primary site of gendered control, where authority, obedience, and silence are enforced through cultural and moral norms. Within this framework, patriarchy is understood not merely as male dominance, but as a system sustained by tradition, ideology, and social consent.

In postcolonial contexts, patriarchy is further complicated by the legacy of colonialism, which often reinforced rigid gender hierarchies through Western education, religion, and legal systems. Feminist postcolonial critics emphasize that women's oppression in African societies cannot be separated from colonial power structures that privileged male authority and redefined morality through imported

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

belief systems. This theoretical background is crucial for understanding *Purple Hibiscus*, where gendered violence is intertwined with religious and colonial discourses.

Feminist Readings of *Purple Hibiscus*

A significant body of scholarship has focused on *Purple Hibiscus* as a feminist text that critiques domestic violence and celebrates female self-discovery. Many studies analyze Eugene Achike as an embodiment of patriarchal tyranny, emphasizing his physical abuse of his wife and children, his authoritarian control of the household, and his intolerance of dissent. Within these readings, Kambili's silence is frequently interpreted as a symptom of trauma, fear, and psychological repression, while her gradual acquisition of voice is read as a metaphor for feminist awakening.

Other scholars foreground Beatrice's suffering, particularly her repeated miscarriages and emotional withdrawal, interpreting her character as representative of silenced African motherhood under patriarchal rule. Auntie Ifeoma, by contrast, is often celebrated as a feminist counterpoint—an educated, outspoken woman who models independence, intellectual freedom, and emotional openness.

While these feminist analyses offer valuable insights into gendered victimization and resistance, they often focus primarily on patriarchy as a social or familial structure, without sufficiently interrogating the ideological mechanisms that legitimize it. Religion, when addressed, is frequently reduced to a personal trait of Eugene's character rather than examined as a system of power with hegemonic force.

Religion, Power, and Moral Authority in *Purple Hibiscus*

A smaller but growing body of scholarship addresses the role of religion in *Purple Hibiscus*, particularly Eugene's Catholic fanaticism. These studies note how religious dogma informs Eugene's moral absolutism, his rejection of indigenous culture, and his obsession with purity, sin, and punishment. Some critics interpret Eugene's faith as a manifestation of colonial mimicry, arguing that his devotion to Western Christianity reflects an internalized colonial mentality that devalues African traditions.

However, even within these analyses, religion is often discussed as an instrument of cultural alienation or psychological rigidity, rather than as an active ideological system that produces consent and normalizes violence. Few studies explicitly theorize religion in the novel through the lens of hegemony—that is, as a moral and ideological framework that secures obedience not only through force, but through internalized guilt, fear, and the promise of salvation.

Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the richness of existing scholarship on *Purple Hibiscus*, there remains a critical gap in the sustained analysis of religious fanaticism as a mechanism of patriarchal hegemony. While patriarchy,

violence, and female resistance have been widely explored, the ideological role of religion in legitimizing gendered domination has not received sufficient focused attention.

This article seeks to fill this gap by drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony alongside feminist and postcolonial theory to examine how religious fanaticism functions as a form of moral authority that normalizes patriarchal violence and silences female voices. By positioning religion at the center of the analysis rather than at its margins, this study offers a more integrated understanding of how power operates in *Purple Hibiscus* and how Adichie ultimately destabilizes this system through alternative models of faith and female resistance.

2- Methods

The primary corpus of this study is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* (Algonquin Books, 2003). The novel is selected for its sustained engagement with themes of religion, domestic authority, and gendered violence within a postcolonial Nigerian context. As one of Adichie's most critically discussed works, *Purple Hibiscus* offers a rich narrative space for exploring the intersections of colonial Christianity, patriarchal dominance, and female agency, making it particularly relevant to feminist and postcolonial literary inquiry.

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in literary textual analysis. Rather than employing empirical or quantitative methods, the research focuses on interpretive close reading to examine how religious fanaticism operates as an ideological mechanism sustaining patriarchal hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to this analysis, as it allows for an in-depth examination of narrative strategies, character construction, and symbolic representations through which gendered power relations are articulated in the text.

The analysis employs close reading and thematic analysis to identify and interpret key narrative moments related to religious discipline, masculine authority, and female victimization. Particular attention is paid to narrative voice, characterization, and recurring motifs that expose the ideological function of religion within the domestic sphere. Selected passages depicting acts of control, punishment, silence, and resistance are examined in relation to feminist theory, postcolonial criticism, and Gramscian notions of hegemony. This analytical procedure enables a systematic interpretation of how patriarchal power is constructed, enforced, and ultimately challenged within the novel.

Following an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, feminist literary theory, and postcolonial criticism to examine the intersection of religious fanaticism and patriarchal power in *Purple Hibiscus*. This framework allows for an analysis of how domination operates not only through physical violence but also through ideology, moral authority, and internalized consent.

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Gramsci's notion of hegemony is central to this analysis. For Gramsci, power is sustained less by coercion than by the ability of dominant groups to present their values as natural, moral, and universally valid (Gramsci). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene Achike's religious fanaticism exemplifies this process: his authority as father is reinforced by his moral and spiritual authority as a devout Catholic. Violence, discipline, and silence are framed as acts of righteousness, thereby securing obedience through fear, guilt, and moral conditioning rather than force alone. Religion thus functions as a hegemonic ideology that legitimizes patriarchal domination within the domestic sphere.

This Gramscian framework is complemented by feminist literary theory, which foregrounds the gendered nature of power, violence, and silence. Feminist critics argue that patriarchy operates through the regulation of female bodies, speech, and emotional expression, particularly within the family (Stratton; Ogunديpe). In the novel, Kambili's muteness and Beatrice's endurance exemplify how women internalize patriarchal norms and religious doctrine, coming to perceive suffering as duty and obedience as virtue. Feminist theory enables an analysis of female victimization while also highlighting moments of resistance, agency, and subversion.

Finally, postcolonial theory provides a broader socio-historical context for understanding Eugene's religious extremism. Drawing on postcolonial critiques of colonial Christianity, the article situates Eugene's Catholic fanaticism as a legacy of colonial domination that privileges Western religious values while delegitimizing indigenous belief systems (Bhabha). His rejection of Papa-Nnukwu's traditional spirituality reflects a colonial logic that equates moral superiority with Western norms, reinforcing both cultural and gender hierarchies.

Together, these theoretical perspectives allow for a nuanced reading of *Purple Hibiscus* in which religious fanaticism is understood as a culturally sanctioned form of patriarchal hegemony. By integrating Gramscian hegemony with feminist and postcolonial insights, this study demonstrates how Adichie exposes the ideological foundations of gendered violence while simultaneously imagining alternative spaces of faith, voice, and female resistance.

Having established religious fanaticism as a hegemonic ideology operating through moral authority, internalized consent, and colonial legacy, the analysis now turns to *Purple Hibiscus* itself to examine how these theoretical dynamics are dramatized within the narrative. By applying Gramsci's concept of hegemony in conjunction with feminist and postcolonial insights, the following section demonstrates how Eugene Achike's religious extremism functions as a mechanism of patriarchal domination that regulates speech, discipline, and bodily autonomy within the domestic sphere. This analysis foregrounds religion not as a private belief, but as a system of power that normalizes violence and secures obedience under the guise of spiritual righteousness.

3- Results

I. Religious Fanaticism as Patriarchal Ideology in Purple Hibiscus

Moral Absolutism and the Legitimation of Violence

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene Achike's religious fanaticism operates as a form of moral absolutism that legitimizes patriarchal authority and transforms violence into an act of spiritual discipline. As a devout Catholic, Eugene assumes the dual role of father and moral guardian, allowing him to exercise control over his family through a framework of religious righteousness. His authority is not presented as arbitrary or tyrannical within his own logic; rather, it is framed as divinely sanctioned, rendering resistance both immoral and sinful.

From a Gramscian perspective, Eugene exemplifies hegemonic power insofar as his domination relies not solely on physical coercion but on the internalization of religious norms by his victims (Gramsci). Kambili and Beatrice do not merely fear punishment; they come to associate obedience with virtue and suffering with spiritual purification. Eugene's frequent invocation of sin, confession, and punishment transforms domestic abuse into a perceived moral necessity, thereby securing consent through guilt and fear rather than force alone.

This ideological function of religion is particularly evident in Eugene's disciplinary practices. Acts of extreme violence—such as beating Kambili for perceived religious failings or punishing his children for contact with their “heathen” grandfather—are rationalized as corrective measures designed to save their souls. Within this framework, patriarchy is sustained not as naked brutality but as moral responsibility. Eugene's fanaticism thus exemplifies how religious ideology can mask patriarchal violence while simultaneously reinforcing male authority.

Feminist theory further illuminates the gendered consequences of this moral absolutism. The regulation of female bodies and voices in the Achike household is inseparable from Eugene's religious worldview, which demands silence, submission, and endurance from women (Stratton; Ogunديpe). Kambili's near-muteness and Beatrice's emotional withdrawal are not incidental traits but direct outcomes of a system that equates femininity with obedience and sanctifies suffering as devotion.

Discipline, Fear, and the Regulation of the Body

In *Purple Hibiscus*, religious discipline functions as a central mechanism through which patriarchal authority is enforced and normalized. Eugene Achike's household operates according to an inflexible schedule structured around prayer, confession, and moral surveillance, leaving little room for spontaneity or emotional expression. This rigid discipline is not merely domestic order; it is a form of ideological control that regulates the body and the mind under the guise of religious devotion.

Eugene's disciplinary practices are grounded in fear—fear of sin, fear of divine punishment, and fear of moral failure. From a Gramscian perspective, this fear is essential to hegemonic domination, as

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

it encourages self-regulation and internalized obedience (Gramsci). Kambili, in particular, learns to anticipate punishment even before it occurs, measuring her actions and speech against her father's religious expectations. Her silence thus becomes a form of self-discipline, produced not only by physical violence but by the constant threat of moral condemnation.

The body becomes a primary site of control within this system. Eugene's punishments are frequently physical and extreme, yet they are framed as corrective rather than abusive. Beatings, scalding, and enforced kneeling are presented as necessary acts of purification, reinforcing the idea that pain leads to spiritual redemption. In this way, religious discipline transforms violence into virtue and suffering into proof of moral worth.

Confession, Guilt, and Moral Surveillance

Closely linked to discipline is the role of confession in sustaining religious patriarchy. Confession in *Purple Hibiscus* does not function as a space for healing or forgiveness; instead, it operates as a tool of surveillance that reinforces guilt and submission. Eugene's obsession with confession reflects his desire for absolute moral control, as it requires constant self-examination and admission of perceived failure.

Kambili internalizes this culture of confession to the point that guilt precedes action. Even minor deviations from her father's expectations—such as enjoying time with her grandfather or speaking freely—are accompanied by overwhelming shame and anxiety. Feminist theory helps illuminate how this internalized guilt disproportionately affects female characters, who are conditioned to associate obedience with virtue and self-denial with holiness (Stratton; Ogundipe).

Confession thus becomes a psychological extension of physical punishment. By compelling his children and wife to scrutinize their thoughts and actions, Eugene ensures that patriarchal authority is maintained even in his absence. This moral surveillance exemplifies hegemonic power at its most effective: domination that operates from within the subject rather than being imposed solely from outside.

Punishment as Spiritual Justification

Punishment in *Purple Hibiscus* is consistently framed as an act of religious responsibility. Eugene presents himself as a righteous disciplinarian whose violence is motivated by concern for his family's salvation. This framing allows him to displace responsibility for his actions onto religious doctrine, positioning himself as an instrument of divine will rather than as an abusive patriarch.

Such justification is particularly evident in moments where punishment follows perceived religious transgression, such as contact with Papa-Nnukwu or failure to adhere strictly to Catholic rituals. These acts are treated not as differences of belief but as moral crimes requiring correction. Postcolonial theory further clarifies this dynamic by revealing how Eugene's absolutism reflects colonial Christian

ideologies that equate moral purity with Western religious norms while demonizing indigenous spirituality (Bhabha).

By sacralizing punishment, Eugene ensures that resistance becomes morally unthinkable. To oppose him is not merely to challenge paternal authority, but to defy God Himself. This conflation of religious and patriarchal power represents the apex of hegemonic control, where domination is fully legitimized by moral and spiritual discourse.

Through discipline, fear, confession, and punishment, religious fanaticism in *Purple Hibiscus* operates as a comprehensive patriarchal ideology that governs both body and conscience. Eugene Achike's authority is sustained not simply through violence, but through a moral system that transforms obedience into holiness and suffering into devotion. In exposing these mechanisms, Adichie reveals how religious absolutism can function as a powerful tool of patriarchal hegemony, setting the stage for the emergence of resistance once this moral framework is destabilized.

II. Colonial Christianity and Masculine Authority

Religious fanaticism in *Purple Hibiscus* cannot be understood solely within the confines of domestic patriarchy; it is deeply embedded in the legacy of colonial Christianity and its reconfiguration of authority, morality, and masculinity. Eugene Achike's devotion to Catholicism reflects not only personal faith but also an internalized colonial ideology that equates Western religious values with moral superiority. Through Eugene, Adichie exposes how colonial Christianity reinforces patriarchal power by legitimizing male authority and delegitimizing indigenous belief systems.

Eugene's rejection of his father, Papa-Nnukwu, provides one of the clearest illustrations of this dynamic. Papa-Nnukwu's adherence to traditional Igbo spirituality is repeatedly framed by Eugene as heathen and sinful. When Kambili recalls her father's refusal to acknowledge Papa-Nnukwu's faith as legitimate, she notes that Eugene considers his father a heathen who worshipped false gods. This language reflects a colonial binary between civilization and savagery, in which indigenous practices are cast as morally inferior and spiritually corrupt.

From a postcolonial perspective, Eugene's absolutism exemplifies what Homi Bhabha describes as colonial mimicry—the adoption of colonial values as a means of asserting authority and moral legitimacy (Bhabha). Eugene's Catholicism is not adaptive or dialogic; it is rigid, exclusionary, and punitive. His refusal to allow Papa-Nnukwu into his home while permitting a white missionary priest underscores the racialized hierarchy embedded in his faith. As Kambili observes, Eugene reveres Father Benedict's sermons, which praise “the wholeness of the white people” and their role in bringing enlightenment. Such moments reveal how colonial Christianity functions as an ideological framework that elevates Western figures while marginalizing African traditions.

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

This colonial religious ideology also shapes Eugene's masculinity. His authority as a father is inseparable from his role as moral gatekeeper, a position reinforced by the colonial Christian model of patriarchal leadership. Eugene's control over his household mirrors the colonial mission's civilizing logic: discipline, punishment, and obedience are justified as necessary for moral improvement. His violence toward his wife and children is thus framed not as cruelty but as corrective duty. When Eugene punishes Kambili for spending time with Papa-Nnukwu, the act is presented as a necessary response to spiritual contamination rather than an act of emotional or physical abuse.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps illuminate how this colonial masculinity operates. Eugene's authority is sustained not only through coercion but through the moral legitimacy afforded by colonial Christianity, which presents his values as universal and unquestionable (Gramsci). By aligning himself with Western religious norms, Eugene secures consent within his household, transforming domination into perceived righteousness.

Adichie contrasts this rigid colonial religiosity with alternative models of faith and authority, particularly through the character of Aunt Ifeoma. Unlike Eugene, Ifeoma embraces a form of Christianity that coexists with indigenous culture and encourages dialogue rather than fear. Her home represents a space where religion does not demand silence or submission but allows for laughter, questioning, and emotional freedom. This contrast exposes Eugene's faith not as inherently Christian, but as a distorted, colonial-inflected ideology that privileges control over compassion.

Through Eugene Achike, *Purple Hibiscus* reveals how colonial Christianity reinforces patriarchal hegemony by legitimizing masculine authority and silencing alternative belief systems. Adichie's critique extends beyond individual fanaticism to expose a broader ideological structure in which religion, colonial history, and patriarchy converge to sustain gendered oppression.

III. Female Victimization under Religious Patriarchy

While Eugene Achike's authority is sustained through colonial Christianity, its most devastating consequences are borne by the women within his household. *Purple Hibiscus* presents female victimization not as incidental but as structurally produced by a patriarchal system that fuses religious absolutism with masculine dominance. Through the characters of Kambili and Beatrice, Adichie exposes how women's bodies, voices, and emotional lives become sites of control, punishment, and silence.

Kambili's victimization is primarily psychological and symbolic. Her father's religious rigidity conditions her into silence, fear, and self-erasure. From the opening chapters, Kambili associates speech with danger, noting that "silence hung over the dining table like a heavy curtain". This metaphor emphasizes how patriarchy operates not only through physical violence but through the regulation of voice. Kambili's inability to speak freely reflects what feminist critics identify as the

internalization of patriarchal discipline, whereby domination is absorbed into the subject's sense of self.

Eugene's violence toward Kambili is consistently framed as moral correction. When he punishes her for perceived religious transgressions, such as ranking second in class or spending time with Papa-Nnukwu, his actions are justified through a discourse of spiritual purification. After one such punishment, Kambili recalls that "the pain in my feet was sharp, but the pain in my heart was sharper". This moment reveals how physical abuse is inseparable from emotional devastation, reinforcing Kambili's belief that love must coexist with suffering.

Beatrice's victimization is more overtly physical and cumulative. Eugene's repeated beatings result in miscarriages, broken objects, and a household structured around fear. Yet Beatrice remains largely silent, embodying what many feminist scholars describe as the socially enforced endurance of abused women within patriarchal marriages. When Kambili observes her mother cleaning blood from the floor "as if it were something normal, something that had to be done", Adichie underscores the normalization of domestic violence under patriarchal authority.

Religion plays a crucial role in sustaining Beatrice's silence. Eugene's faith presents marriage as sacred and suffering as virtuous, leaving Beatrice with no moral language through which to resist. Her endurance reflects what Deniz Kandiyoti terms a "patriarchal bargain," in which women comply with oppressive systems as a survival strategy rather than a sign of consent. Beatrice's apparent passivity, therefore, should be read not as weakness but as a constrained response to structural domination.

Importantly, Adichie does not portray female victimization as static. The exposure to alternative spaces—particularly Auntie Ifeoma's home—begins to destabilize Kambili's internalized silence. In Nsukka, Kambili learns that laughter, disagreement, and religious flexibility are possible without moral collapse. She notes that "words floated freely in Nsukka", signaling the emergence of a voice previously suppressed by patriarchal control.

Beatrice's resistance, though tragic, represents a final rupture in patriarchal hegemony. Her decision to poison Eugene marks a radical, if morally complex, rejection of a system that offered her no legitimate exit. Rather than romanticizing this act, Adichie presents it as an indictment of a social order that leaves women with violence as their only means of escape.

Through Kambili and Beatrice, *Purple Hibiscus* exposes how religious patriarchy produces layered forms of female victimization—psychological, physical, and symbolic. Yet by tracing the gradual emergence of voice and agency, Adichie also gestures toward the possibility of resistance, even within profoundly oppressive structures.

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

4- Discussion

Female Voices, Rebellion, and Narrative Resistance

Although *Purple Hibiscus* foregrounds female victimization under religious patriarchy, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ultimately refuses to leave her female characters confined within silence and suffering. Instead, the novel charts a gradual movement from repression to articulation, from fear to voice. This section examines how female rebellion in *Purple Hibiscus* operates not only through overt acts of resistance but also through narrative voice, emotional awakening, and alternative forms of authority.

Kambili's narrative voice itself constitutes an act of resistance. At the beginning of the novel, her language is fragmented, hesitant, and marked by fear, reflecting the internalization of her father's authoritarian control. Her narration is dominated by observation rather than assertion, mirroring her social position within the household. However, as the narrative progresses—particularly after her exposure to Auntie Ifeoma's home—Kambili begins to articulate desire, anger, and doubt. She notes that "my voice was different when I spoke at Nsukka", signaling a shift from enforced silence to self-recognition.

This transformation aligns with feminist theories that view voice as a fundamental site of agency. As Gayatri Spivak argues, the ability to speak and be heard is central to resisting structures that render women subaltern (Spivak). Kambili's gradual acquisition of voice does not occur through confrontation but through relational spaces that validate speech. In Nsukka, dialogue replaces discipline, and questioning replaces obedience. Laughter, argument, and emotional openness become tools through which patriarchal authority is destabilized.

Auntie Ifeoma functions as a counter-hegemonic figure whose authority challenges Eugene's patriarchal model. Unlike Eugene, her leadership is non-coercive and dialogic. She encourages her children to speak freely, disagree openly, and engage critically with religion. Kambili observes that in Auntie Ifeoma's home, "everyone said what they felt". This domestic environment redefines authority as nurturing rather than punitive, exposing Eugene's dominance as ideological rather than natural.

Beatrice's rebellion, by contrast, takes a more tragic and ambiguous form. Her decision to poison Eugene represents a final rupture with patriarchal domination, yet it is a rebellion born of desperation rather than empowerment. Adichie deliberately avoids presenting this act as liberatory; instead, it underscores the structural failure of social, religious, and legal systems to protect abused women. Beatrice's rebellion thus exposes the limits of resistance within deeply entrenched patriarchal orders.

Narratively, Adichie positions female rebellion as a process rather than a resolution. The novel does not conclude with complete freedom but with fragile possibility. Jaja's imprisonment and Beatrice's psychological withdrawal remind the reader that resistance carries heavy costs. Yet Kambili's final

reflections suggest that voice, once awakened, cannot be entirely silenced. She imagines a future in which speech, memory, and storytelling become forms of survival .

By centering female voices and depicting rebellion as both subtle and radical, *Purple Hibiscus* dismantles the notion that resistance must always be loud or triumphant. Instead, Adichie presents voice itself as a political act—one that challenges religious fanaticism, destabilizes patriarchal hegemony, and reclaims narrative space for women historically rendered silent.

5- Conclusion

This article has examined *Purple Hibiscus* as a powerful critique of the intersection between religious fanaticism and patriarchal hegemony in postcolonial Nigeria. By situating Eugene Achike's authoritarian masculinity within the legacy of colonial Christianity, the study has demonstrated how religious ideology operates as a legitimizing force for gendered domination rather than as a purely spiritual practice. Eugene's faith, shaped by colonial binaries of civilization and savagery, becomes a mechanism through which patriarchal authority is moralized, normalized, and violently enforced.

Through a close reading of female experiences in the novel, the article has shown that patriarchal hegemony manifests most acutely through female victimization. Kambili's enforced silence and Beatrice's sustained domestic abuse reveal how women's bodies and voices are disciplined under a system that conflates obedience with virtue and suffering with moral righteousness. Importantly, this victimization is not presented as an individual failing but as the outcome of interlocking structures—religious absolutism, colonial ideology, and gender hierarchy—that leave women with limited avenues for resistance.

At the same time, *Purple Hibiscus* resists a purely pessimistic reading. By foregrounding female voices, alternative domestic spaces, and narrative articulation, Adichie gestures toward forms of rebellion that challenge patriarchal dominance from within. Kambili's evolving narrative voice and Auntie Ifeoma's dialogic authority disrupt the inevitability of male control, while Beatrice's tragic act of rebellion exposes the moral bankruptcy of a system that denies women institutional protection. Resistance in the novel is therefore neither simple nor celebratory; it is fragmented, costly, and deeply constrained, yet nonetheless transformative.

In engaging with feminist, postcolonial, and hegemonic theory, this study contributes to broader discussions of African women's writing by demonstrating how *Purple Hibiscus* reconceptualizes resistance as a gradual reclaiming of voice rather than a singular revolutionary act. Adichie's novel ultimately dismantles the presumed neutrality of religion and exposes its complicity in sustaining patriarchal power. By doing so, *Purple Hibiscus* asserts the necessity of reimagining faith, authority, and family structures in ways that affirm female agency and reject violence disguised as moral discipline.

Patriarchy in the Name of God: Religious fanaticism and Patriarchal Hegemony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

6- The bibliography.

1. Adichie, C. N. (2003). *Purple hibiscus*. Algonquin Books.
2. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
3. Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers. (Original work published 1929–1935)
4. Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004>
5. Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
6. hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. South End Press.
7. hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: Men, masculinity, and love*. Atria Books.
8. Millet, K. (2000). *Sexual politics*. University of Illinois Press. (Original work published 1970)
9. Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell.
10. Kolawole, M. E. M. (2004). *Womanism and African consciousness*. Africa World Press.
11. Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29(2), 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.1086/342899>
12. Ogunidipe-Leslie, M. (1994). *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*. Africa World Press.
13. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
14. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
15. Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Grove Press.
16. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
17. Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers. (Original work published 1929–1935)
18. Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (pp. 127–186). Monthly Review Press.
19. Chitando, E. (2007). *Living with hope: African churches and HIV/AIDS*. WCC Publications.
20. Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. L. (1991). *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa* (Vol. 1). University of Chicago Press.
21. Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
22. Showalter, E. (1985). The female tradition. In *The new feminist criticism* (pp. 131–145). Pantheon Books.
23. Bryce, J. (2008). Half and half children: Third-generation women writers and the new Nigerian novel. *Research in African Literatures*, 39(2), 49–67. <https://doi.org/10.2979/RAL.2008.39.2.49>
24. Ogbaa, K. (2010). *Understanding Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. University of South Carolina Press.