

# The Role of British Missionaries in the Rejection of Igbo Religion and Culture in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand

Islamic Azad University, Boroujerd Branch, Iran

**Corresponding author:** Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand

**ABSTRACT:** European colonizers resorted to a widespread cultural hegemony to justify their lucrative presence in their colonies. They referred to their presence in the colonized countries as “the white man’s burden” aiming at civilizing the “barbarous” East. According to Edward Said, a large number of authors and propagandists contributed to the promulgation of the cultural policies of colonizers through depicting a distorted image of Eastern nations as uncivilized and primitive. They played a major role in the brainwashing of indigenous people into thinking that renunciation of native culture on favor of Western civilization is the key to happiness and dignity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie concentrates in *Purple Hibiscus* on the role of British missionaries in the corroboration of Western cultural hegemony in Nigeria. British missionaries claimed that Igbo religion and cultural practices are immersed in paganism. Apart from the total rejection of Igbo culture and language, indigenous people are supposed to abjure their religion and convert to Christianity instead in order to escape eternal damnation in Hell.

**Keywords:** colonialism, cultural hegemony, identity, language, religion.

## INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* traces the mental growth of its characters and their subsequent rejection of colonial discourse. Eugene Achike, a domineering husband and father encourages his children to trust their British teachers who are supposed to acquaint them with the great civilization of the West which he assumes to be the only way leading to dignity and honor. As a product of colonial education, Eugene never hesitates to disparage Nigerian indigenous culture. He does his best to protect his children against the barbarity and backwardness of natives who are loyal to their African origin. Eugene is a loyal servant to British colonizers who trained him in colonial missions and British Universities. The basic premise underlying colonial education is the barbarity of colonized nations. The cultural imperialism of the West brainwashes indigenous individuals into thinking that resorting to the civilized West will save them from primitivism. Inspired by such an ideology, Eugene holds that since Nigerian culture misleads native people and encourages paganism, there is no way to stay immune to its pernicious influence except the total erasure of all its tenets.

By emphasizing on the eradication of Igbo traditions, Eugene serves British colonizers who try to justify their policies through cultural hegemony. He vigorously dictates the principles of colonial discourse at his home tolerating no violation of his dogmatic beliefs. Nevertheless, unlike Eugene who follows blindly the colonizers, his children; Kambili and Jaja, eventually question the authority of colonialism and revolt against it upon realizing the true nature of Western cultural hegemony. Eugene's behavior corresponds to Frantz Fanon's critical arguments concerning the psychological consequences of cultural imperialism. According to Fanon, a Negro suffers from inferiority complex when coming into contact with the whites, because he has been constantly reminded of his barbarity by white colonizers who place him at the bottom of the great chain of being. African students like Eugene chosen by British colonizers to study in Europe try to imitate the whites in all manners to expedite their advancement and elevate themselves to the status of a dignified man. Fanon argues that:

Every colonized people- in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (2008: 9)

For Eugene, British civilization is the key to dignity and success. It can bestow upon him enlightenment, refinement, morality, and social as well as economic advancement. Apart from mundane matters, he seeks salvation through abjuring his religious beliefs and converting to the religion of the whites instead; because British priests refer to Igbo rituals as the devilish superstition of pagans leading the unconverted natives to the gates of Hell. Eugene trusts the colonizers who insist that renouncement of African traditions is the prerequisite to happiness in both worlds. He forbids his family to speak Igbo at home and warns them against coming into contact with unconverted Nigerians. Fanon criticizes white colonizers for the brainwashing of indigenous people through a distorted depiction of native values and traditions that lead to their rejection by the aspiring "Negro". If the Negro renounces his cultural heritage, white colonizers are to be blamed because they degrade him to the status of an uncivilized individual whose cultural background is to be rejected as the symbol of barbarity:

In other words, I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world ... Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white to acknowledge that I am human. (Fanon 2008: 73)

Eugene's behavior corroborates Fanon's argument. His exposure to colonial discourse in Nigeria persuaded him that the entire cultural heritage of Igbo people is nothing more than a stain that ought to be completely effaced. He holds that civilized Nigerians are to avoid Igbo language. Eugene's daughter, Kambili, affirms that her father insists on speaking English. "We had to sound civilized in public, he told us, we had to speak English. Papa's sister, Auntie Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 6). Eugene praises those indigenous people who reject their native language in favor of English: "Papa liked it when villagers made an effort to speak English around him. He said it showed they had good sense" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 26). As a wealthy man, Eugene Achike feels deeply indebted to the whites who acquainted him with British culture, helped him rise from poverty and converted him to Christianity to save him from the eternal damnation that traditional Igbo religion would lead him to. Rather than pondering on the disastrous economic and cultural consequences of colonialism, he panders to his white masters who deprived him of his history, language and identity. He is grateful to British missionaries for their contribution to his success and reminds Kambili of her chance to be a student in such missionaries:

I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools ... I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was a houseboy for the parish priest for two years. Yes, a houseboy ... I was a gardener for the priests while I attended St. Gregory's Secondary School. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 20).

Eugene is thankful to the British Priests who taught him that his traditionalist father is "an idol worshiper". He never contemplates the basic tenets of colonial education which claims that Western governments send their representatives to undeveloped and barren African countries in order to help wretched nations in different ways. European colonizers refer to their gainful presence in the colonized countries as "the white man's burden" for civilizing the savage and primitive nations. Meanwhile, they plunder the natural resources of their colonies and uproot their language and culture to control them via the language of the colonizer. As a Western researcher challenging the validity of colonial discourse, Rachel Bailey Jones remarks on the true nature of colonialism:

For indigenous groups, colonial education (in the form of mission schools, and later public schools) meant a denial of language, culture, and tradition. To be educated in the colonial system meant that one was schooled in the knowledge and values of the colonizer ... Indigenous students were not only taught the language and culture of the colonizer, they were taught that the subjugation of their people was justified by a natural and technological inferiority. (2011: 69-70)

It is on the basis of such an education that Eugene considers Igbo culture as a matter of shame and dissociates himself from those natives who remain loyal to their indigenous culture, including his own father, Papa-Nnukwu. Intended to turn his back to all signs of primitivism and paganism, Eugene stays away from his destitute father whom he calls "a heathen" and warns his family against visiting him. He repeatedly claims that his father's refusal to convert to Christianity will lead him to Hellfire. Eugene insists that Kambili and Jaja should not even touch Papa-Nnukwu because God will punish those who step to sin by coming into contact with "pagans". His children are allowed to visit their grandfather only once a year on Christmas for fifteen minutes. As a charitable man, Eugene makes generous donations to the poor in his hometown during his annual visits at Christmas holidays but Papa-Nnukwu is removed from his list for being a heathen. Not only he withholds his affection from his father, Eugene agrees reluctantly with

the annual visit Kambili and Jaja pay to Papa-Nnukwu: "I don't want to send you to the home of a heathen, but God will protect you" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 27). They should keep their distance from Papa-Nnukwu during the visit, avoid drinking or eating anything and close their eyes to the "ungodly" parts of his house. Unlike Papa-Nnukwu, Kambili's late maternal grandfather won Eugene's esteem because he welcomed the missionaries, spoke English and converted to Christianity. Eugene is detached from his father on the basis of his backwardness, whereas he reveres his father-in-law and refers to him as a decent and honorable man who contributed to the promulgation of Western culture and devoted himself to the conversion of lots of "heathens". As the narrator of the story, Kambili portrays her maternal grandfather as follows:

He determinedly spoke English, always, in a heavy Igbo accent. He knew Latin, too, often quoted the articles of Vatican I, and spent most of his time at St. Paul's, where he had been the first catechist. He had insisted that we call him Grandfather, in English, rather than Papa-Nnukwu or Nna-Ochie. Papa still talked about him often, his eyes proud, as if Grandfather were his own father. He opened his eyes before many of our people did, Papa would say; he was one of the few who welcomed the missionaries. Do you know how quickly he learned English? When he became an interpreter, do you know how many converts he helped win? Why, he converted most of Abba himself! He did things the right way, the way the white people did, not what our people do now! (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 30)

Eugene and his father-in-law serve as the native agents and eulogizers of British colonizers. They are the native supervisors instigating and observing the enforcement of the cultural policies promulgated by the colonizers. "Eugene does what he assumes to be his duty as the loyal servant of the British Government" (Corneliussen 2012: 49). Approving the superiority of the colonizers' religion over Igbo religious beliefs, Eugene depreciates traditional Igbo belief system and does his best to eliminate Igbo rituals at his home. Papa-Nnukwu maintains that Eugene was beguiled by the whites who distorted the image of indigenous culture. He recounts the arrival of missionaries in this way:

I should not have let him follow those missionaries ... Still, I say it was the missionaries that mislead my son ... I remember the first one that came to Abba, the one they called Fada John ... He had a helper, a man from Nimo called Jude. In the afternoon they gathered the children under the ukwa tree in the mission and taught them their religion. I did not join them, *kpa*, but I went sometimes to see what they were doing. One day I said to them, Where is this god you worship? They said he was like *Chukwu*, that he was in the sky. I asked then, Who is the person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission? They said he was the son, but that the son and the father are equal. It was then that I knew that the white man was mad. The father and the son are equal? *Tufia!* Do you not see? That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 37-38)

For Eugene, Papa-Nnukwu is an ignorant boorish old man worshiping wood and stone, hence a heathen whose company might corrupt Kambili and Jaja. The threat that concerns Eugene seems to be primarily the probable moral depravation of his children, but British colonizers who induce him to reject his father are actually troubled by Papa-Nnukwu's influence over Kambili and Jaja. Papa-Nnukwu considers Western thought, language and religion to be inappropriate and incongruous to Nigerians. His presence is a threat to his grandchildren's constructed identity. He could affect Kambili who believes that God has white hands and speaks English. Under the influence of Eugene, Kambili avoids her grandfather and keeps her distance from him in the annual meetings. She searches for the signs of Godlessness during the fifteen-minute visits at Papa-Nnukwu's home but is not able to find anything that might prove her father's claims.

Eugene tolerates no disobedience and sometimes beats his children upon their negligence of what they learn in British missionaries about the paganism and barbarity of unconverted natives. However, Kambili's low opinion of Papa-Nnukwu as the representative of Igbo culture results mainly from her exposure to colonial discourse. Imprinted in her mind is the backwardness of indigenous culture and its followers. In a visit to her aunt's house, Kambili is troubled upon hearing that Papa-Nnukwu will arrive the next day. She is agitated by the idea of being in the same house with "a heathen" for a few days. Kambili has been divested by his father through his insistence on British education of her native cultural background. "By denying his children access to their grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, Eugene is stripping Kambili and Jaja of a cultural past" (Peters 2010: 28). Kambili never listens to Nigerian folk music. The cassette desk at her room plays only the sound of British priests delivering different sermons in English. She never prays to God in Igbo because such a "debased language" desacralizes the Christian prayers.

Eugene's disdainful treatment of Papa-Nnukwu upsets his sister, Ifeoma. After all, she is worried about the outcome of Eugene's brainwashing of his children. Ifeoma tries to change Kambili and Jaja's attitudes towards Igbo language and culture whenever she invites them to her house. In one of their visits to Auntie Ifeoma's house, Kambili and Jaja agree to accompany Auntie Ifeoma and her children, Amaka and Obiora, to an indigenous masquerade. Ifeoma informs Kambili and Jaja of her decision to pick up Papa-Nnukwu. Shocked by Auntie Ifeoma's decision, Kambili remarks that she cannot be with "a pagan". She is concerned both about the sinfulness of being with a pagan

and the severe punishment awaiting her at home for committing such a sin. Ifeoma resents the way Kambili talks about Papa-Nnukwu:

“Your Papa-Nnukwu is not a pagan, Kambili, he is a traditionalist” Auntie Ifeoma said. I stared at her. Pagan, traditionalist, what did it matter? He was not Catholic, that was all; he was not of faith. He was one of the people whose conversion we prayed for so that they did not end in everlasting torment of hellfire. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 36)

Upon returning from the masquerades festival Kambili goes to Father Benedict to confess her sins. She confesses all the sins she committed since her last confession three weeks ago: “I lied two times. I broke the Eucharistic fast once. I lost concentration during the rosary three times” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 47). She does not say anything about her participation in an indigenous festival. Informed by Eugene of Kambili’s presence in “a pagan ritual” along with her unconverted grandfather, Father Benedict warns Kambili of the consequences of concealing any sin: “It is wrong to hide from the Lord. I will give you a moment to think” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 47). Kambili finally refers to the festival she had attended in company with her “pagan” grandfather, then answers Father Benedict’s questions concerning the details of the story:

“Did you eat any of the native foods sacrificed to idols?”

“No, Father.”

“Did you participate in any pagan rituals?”

“No, Father.” I paused. “But we looked at *mmuo*. Masquerades.”

“Did you enjoy that?”

I looked up at the photo on the wall and wondered if the Pope himself had actually signed it. “Yes, Father.”

“You understand that it is wrong to take joy in pagan rituals, because it breaks the first commandment. Pagan rituals are misinformed superstition, and they are the gateway to Hell. Do you understand that, then?” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 47)

Papa-Nnukwu and the culture he represents are condemned by Father Benedict as the preservers of barbarity and paganism. It might be worthwhile to look into Papa-Nnukwu’s beliefs in order to verify the validity of Father Benedict’s allegations. During one of Kambili’s visits to Auntie Ifeoma’s house, Ifeoma invites Papa-Nnukwu to her house. As usual Kambili tries to stay away from Papa-Nnukwu. Nevertheless, she observes something at Auntie Ifeoma’s home that prompts her to question the foundation of colonial discourse. Kambili happens to see Papa-Nnukwu saying his prayers and finds out that he deserves none of the epithets Father Benedict and Papa Eugene ascribe to him:

“Chineke! I thank you for this new morning! I thank you for the sun that rises.” ... “Chineke! I have killed no one, I have taken no one’s land, I have not committed adultery.” ... “Chineke! I have wished others well. I have helped those who have nothing with the little that my hands can spare.” ... “Chineke! Bless me. Let me find enough to fill my stomach. Bless my daughter, Ifeoma. Give her enough for her family.” ... “Chineke! Bless my son, Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him.” I was surprised that he prayed for Papa with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Auntie Ifeoma. “Chineke! Bless the children of my children. Let your eyes follow them away from evil and towards good.” ... “Chineke! Those who wish others well, keep them well. Those who wish others ill, keep them ill.” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 75)

Papa-Nnukwu gives thanks to his God for the mercy he has on him, then declares his innocence. He prays for the welfare of his children and for the protection of his grandchildren from evil. In his prayers Papa-Nnukwu blames colonizers through referring to their violent treatment of indigenous people as well as their confiscation of lands. Kambili finds out that Papa-Nnukwu’s prayer has nothing to do with paganism and superstition. He prays for the salvation and happiness of his children. She finds love and benevolence in the prayer of a “pagan”. Despite Eugene’s claim, Papa-Nnukwu does not speak to wood and stone in his prayers. Kambili’s horizon of understanding concerning the reality of colonial discourse is later expanded as she comes into contact again to her grandfather without Eugene’s knowledge.

Apart from Papa-Nnukwu, Auntie Ifeoma and her daughter, Amaka, has a great impact on Kambili and Jaja. In a discussion concerning the oppression of natives through religion in the presence of Auntie Ifeoma’s family and Papa-Nnukwu, Father Amadi; a Nigerian priest in the service of colonizers who is going to be a missionary abroad, is challenged regarding the role of priests in the validation of cultural imperialism. Papa-Nnukwu advises Father Amadi not to give a distorted impression of native culture to indigenous people. “But you must never lie to them. Never

teach them to disregard their fathers” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 77). Annoyed by the argument, Father Amadi argues that such ideas resemble madness. Amaka ends the argument with a caustic remark: “Spoken like the true missionary priest, Father Amadi ... When people challenge you, label them mad” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 77).

Kambili finds herself absorbed by frequent anti-colonial discussions at Auntie Ifeoma’s home. Ifeoma tries to modify the misrepresented concept of indigenous culture for Kambili and Jaja. She does not hesitate to correct the inaccurate image of Papa-Nnukwu. In spite of the fact that she is a Christian, Ifeoma is loyal to her African roots. Unlike her Brother Eugene, she rejects the basic tenets of colonial discourse, and is proud of her cultural heritage. Recommended by Auntie Ifeoma to examine Papa-Nnukwu’s beliefs before labelling him a heathen, Kambili scrutinizes Papa-Nnukwu’s behavior, manners, and attitude towards God in different occasions and finds him a good-natured and amiable old man whose beliefs are of no detriment to her faith:

By becoming aware of the various commonalities between her faith and his, she is alerted to their shared humanity. No longer regarding him as a threat to her sanctity and religious purity enables her to bridge the gap between them. Her desire to connect with her grandfather is also a desire to know about her own cultural heritage and history, since he is the primary link that she has with her cultural past. (Smit 2009: 45)

Apart from Papa-Nnukwu and Auntie Ifeoma’s enlightening arguments, Eugene’s coercive behavior accentuates Kambili’s feelings of mistrust regarding what she has learned concerning the backwardness of local culture and paganism of Igbo religious beliefs during her British education. Eugene has tried all along to convince his children that the renunciation of Igbo traditions in favor of Western culture leads to both spiritual growth and mundane advancement. Apart from the brainwashing of his children, Eugene resorts to violence whenever mildness does not work. Kambili and Jaja are severely punished whenever they show any interest in their Igbo roots against the warning of their British teachers. There are frequent references to Eugene’s brutality in the novel. He scalds Kambili’s feet upon hearing that Kambili attended an indigenous festival along with Papa-Nnukwu and Auntie Ifeoma’s family. Eugene finds Kambili guilty of watching “the devilish folklore of ignorant people”:

“Kambili, you are precious.” His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. “You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it.” He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 87).

Eugene cries as he pours hot water on Kambili’s feet not because of Kambili’s agony but for her participation in “pagan rituals”. Inspired by British priests, he considers his punitive behavior as a disciplinary procedure of a responsible father who protects his family against the backwardness and immorality of Igbo culture and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, the final outcome is not what he desires to be. His conspicuous obedience to the whites eventually results in his downfall. A Nigerian old man warns him about his profane behavior towards Igbo religion and adds that he is “a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 31). Eugene becomes a puppet in the hands of colonizers trying to rob his children of their African identity. However, Kambili and Jaja will later turn out to be the defiant natives who counteract the cultural hegemony of the West. Eugene’s children provoke his wrath as they become skeptical of colonial discourse and move towards Igbo culture under the influence of Auntie Ifeoma’s family and Papa-Nnukwu. No longer they feel obligated to obey their father who demands strict adherence to British colonizers. Kambili enrages Eugene on a Sunday morning by breaking her fast before attending the church. It is a religious obligation for everyone in Eugene’s home to fast every Sunday before mass, not eating anything until they return home from the church. Kambili needs medication because of her period. Since she cannot take the required medication on an empty stomach, Kambili eats a bowl of corn flakes against the order of her father’s instructions. Eugene comes to the kitchen and catches her red-handed and begins to heat not only Kambili but also Beatrice, his wife, and Jaja fiercely with his belt:

“Has the devil asked you all to go errands for him”? ... “Has the devil built a tent in my house”? He turned to Mama. “You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharistic fast, *maka nnidi?*” He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather –covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it handed on her upper arm ... I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back ... “Why do you walk into sin?” he asked. “Why do you like sin?” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 45)

Eugene strikes everybody savagely at his home and hugs them kindly after the punishment. He considers himself the moral judge of his family who both judges and punishes on behalf of God. He is going to protect his family against

the threat of adherence to Igbo traditions. Nonetheless, his attempt to cut her family from the world of “paganism” and “barbarity” of Igbo culture is in vain. Eugene’s obnoxious conduct motivates Kambili and Jaja to doubt the authenticity of what they have learned in British schools. They challenge the authority of their westernized father too. Inspired by British colonizers, Eugene promulgates a distorted version of Christianity. The deformed version of Christianity advocated by colonizers and Eugene leaves no room for liberty. “The beliefs practiced by Eugene are so extreme that they tend to burden the believer instead of bringing the intended grace and freedom” (Sinclair 2012: 60). British colonizers utilize Christianity to form a major part of their native followers’ identity. In the encounter of African families with colonial experience, religion becomes a device for colonizers to control indigenous people and impose their intended values on them.

Such a distorted version of Christianity is abhorrent to Jaja too. He is repeatedly punished by Eugene for the least trivial negligence of Christian rules. As a Negro who studies in a British school, Jaja’s identity has been shaped through his exposure to colonial discourse, but he is disabused of the benevolence of the whites following his probing into the nature of colonialism. After all, Eugene’s brutality in forcing his children to be pious Christians reinforces Jaja’s distrust of Catholicism. Eugene’s “staunch and Eurocentric” version of Catholicism is in the service of cultural imperialism. The doctrine of the church, dominant in his home, demands strict loyalty to Catholicism versus absolute renunciation of Igbo religion. This doctrine requires Kambili and Jaja to do penance for the sin of attending “the devilish folklore” of “pagan people”, and induces Eugene to deform Jaja’s finger when he fails to answer two questions on his catechism test:

When he was ten, he had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class. Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears came out supporting his left hand with his right, and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Papa was crying, too, as he carried Jaja in his arms like a baby all the way to the car. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 65)

Jaja turns out to be a defiant native as he grows up. He counteracts the imposed religion and criticizes it frankly before his father. Intended to defy his father and resist the idea of white supremacy, Jaja begins to challenge the authority of Christianity which he regards a device for colonizers to control indigenous people. Jaja begins his revolt on a Sunday morning before the Holy Communion. Inspired by Chinua Achebe’s novel, Kambili says “things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion ...” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 1). Jaja is supposed to eat the wafer manufactured in Eugene’s factory for the communion. He refuses to eat the wafer and says that it gives him bad breath. Moreover, referring contemptuously to a British priest, Jaja shock Eugene when he says “the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 2). Agitated by Jaja’s disdainful behavior, Eugene affirms that Jaja “cannot stop receiving the body of the Lord”. He adds that refusing to eat the host, which he replaces for the word wafer “because wafer was too secular,” is synonymous with death and Jaja asserts that then he would die. Jaja’s irreverence towards Christianity infuriates Eugene. He picks up a missal and throws it towards Jaja. It is the first time a member of Eugene’s household openly disregards a Christian practice. Jaja reacts against the hypocrisy of colonial education that utilizes Christianity to subdue native people and uproot Igbo religion and culture. He is ashamed of being ignorant of his own native culture, and considers his father guilty in this respect. As a domineering father, Eugene controls Jaja and Kambili’s thoughts and bodies to prevent any diversion from the true path of civilization which has illuminated the dark Africa under the auspices of the whites. Following his rejection of Holy Communion, Jaja asks Eugene to hand in the key to his room “to have some privacy”. It is a rule in Eugene’s home that no one is allowed to lock the door to his/her room because in that case they would be away from Eugene’s gaze. Kambili relates Eugene’s response as follows:

Papa’s pupil seemed to dart around in the whites of his eyes. “What? What do you want privacy for? To commit a sin against your own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?” ... “See what has happened to my children” Papa asked the ceiling. “See how being with a heathen has changed them, has thought them evil?” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 86)

Privacy is a threat for Eugene’s authority. His children should be constantly under his colonizing gaze to remain safe and protected against the things that he considers to be evil. This evil can be both in the form of physical desire and intellectual tendencies. Falsely assuming that Jaja is going to masturbate, Eugene refers to an event of the far past when he was caught red-handed by a British priest while committing the sin of masturbation. He says that the priest scalded his hands to cleanse the impurity of his soul, the same kind of punishment he inflicts on Kambili when she accompanies her “heathen” grandfather to an Igbo festival. Eugene’s brutality might be the result of the violence British colonizers imposed on him. He baptizes Kambili’s feet by hot water to sanctify her soul just in the same way that a British priest washed his filthy soul when he committed masturbation. Eugene is a victim of colonialism furthering and reinforcing the victimization of his family. He is a colonized Negro and at once a colonizer at his own home.

Apart from Kambili and Jaja, Beatrice suffers from colonial discourse despite being only a housewife away from British schools. Colonialism aggravated native women's adversity through the introduction of the concept of Victorian Woman that praised submissive, moral and decent women as "Angels in the House". An ideal woman was expected to devote herself to the housework rather than striving to be an independent individual having her own voice. This concept kept women away from society and confined them to the domestic sphere instead. The Victorian image of ideal womanhood deteriorated the conditions for African women who were already suffering the sexism imposed on them by the patriarchal values of African societies.

Beatrice is doubly colonized. She is exposed to both the racism practiced by British colonizers and gender discrimination imposed on her by the patriarchal society. Eugene's intimidating behavior silences Beatrice and confines her to the kitchen. She does not dare protect either herself or her children against her husband's brutality. Eugene beats her fiercely whenever she steps outside the circle of piety and subservience. She suffers two miscarriages as the result of Eugene's harsh punishments. The first case happens when she decides to stay in the car instead of visiting Father Benedict after Mass because she feels nauseated. Eugene stares at her and asks her again if she will come to see Father Benedict. His daunting eyes compels her to go with him. He considers Beatrice's reluctance to visit the British priest after Mass to be a sin. He asks God, upon returning home, "to forgive those who had tried to thwart his will, who had put selfish desires first and had not wanted to visit His servant after mass" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 14). Beatrice is so scared that she is the first one who says Amen, but this is not the end. Kambili hears loud noises a few minutes after her parents go to their bedroom. She finds Eugene coming out of the room with Mama slung over his shoulder. There is blood everywhere on the floor. Beatrice spends the night in a hospital and says, by the next day when she comes home, that there was an accident last night and the baby is gone!

Beatrice is a woman whose identity has been constructed based on the norms of a male dominated community. She has no idea of her own, and never thinks of leaving her husband despite the adversity she has to cope with in his house. After all, unlike Auntie Ifeoma who is a university lecturer depending on no man, Beatrice has no job hence no financial security. Ifeoma urges Beatrice to abandon Eugene but she laughs and reminds her that a woman needs a husband to protect her. Ifeoma whose husband is dead says with a bitter sigh that "sometimes life begins when marriage ends", but Beatrice criticizes her for such "university talks" and says "a husband crowns a woman's life, Ifeoma. It is what they want" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 33). She is grateful to Eugene for the financial and social security he provides for her, and sacrifices her own freedom at the cost of financial security. Nonetheless, her patience expires after the second miscarriage she suffers owing to Eugene's violence aroused by her failure to perform religious duties properly. She joins Kambili and Jaja in Ifeoma's house after recovering from her injuries and relates the story:

"I got back from the hospital today ... You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly" She sounded as if she were talking about someone else. As if the table were not made of sturdy wood. "My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it." Mama shook her head slowly. A thin line of tears crawled down her cheeks though it had been a struggle from them to get out of her eyes ... "It was six weeks gone." (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 112)

Beatrice's second miscarriage is the last straw. Eugene's behavior incites hatred towards British colonizers and their policies. He expects his family to worship the revengeful and dark god who serves the interest of white colonizers. Ifeoma asserts that God does not need Eugene or anyone else to judge and punish people instead of Him. Amaka joins her mother and encourages the Achikies to defy Eugene. Unlike Kambili whose father has raised her in silence, Amaka is a sophisticated girl with a cultivated mind. She deals with concepts in a rational way and withstand the cultural hegemony of colonizers. After all, she lives with a mother who despite being a Catholic never tries to impose her religious beliefs on her children. Amaka is free to choose between Igbo and Western cultures. She examines both of them and concludes that promulgation of Western culture is a hegemony aimed at the subjugation of indigenous people. She believes that colonizers utilize religion and culture to justify their profitable presence in the colonized countries. Denouncing such a procedure, Amaka says "the white missionaries brought us their god, ... which was the same color as them, worshiped in their language and packaged in the boxes they made" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 120). It is due to such a cultural programming that Kambili imagines God calling her with a British accent, a God that creates the world with his white hands.

Amaka is conscious of her cultural background. Being proud of her African origins, Amaka remains critical of colonizers in spite of studying in a British school. Kambili admits that Amaka is a critical girl calling everything into question. She describes Amaka's eyes as "quizzical eye that asked many questions and did not accept many answers" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 35). Amaka is a Christian by birth but she never refers to unconverted Nigerians as heathens. She venerates Papa-Nnukwu and does her best to please him in different ways. Amaka listens attentively to the folktales her grandfather narrates in Igbo language. She is interested in every aspect of Igbo culture including

folktales, music, and festivals. Realizing Kambili's ignorance of Nigerian folk music, Amaka reproaches her for the failure to comprehend indigenous music:

She turned the cassette player on, nodding to the polyphonic beat of drums. "I listen mostly to indigenous musicians. They're culturally conscious; they have something real to say. Fela and Osadebe and Onyeka are my favorites. Oh, I'm sure you probably don't know who they are, I'm sure you're into American pop like other teenagers." (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 53)

Amaka refers to indigenous musicians as "culturally conscious" natives. She listens to Fela Kuti whose anti-imperialist music fascinated a lot of Nigerians. As a defender of indigenous culture, Fela was critical of the cultural policies promulgated by British colonizers, and denounced those natives who rejected their native culture in favor of a western model. "Kuti thought the most important way for Africans to fight Eutopean cultural imperialism was to support the traditional African religions and lifestyles" 5 az Wikipedia. His songs appeal to Amaka and arouse in her a sense of patriotism. Amaka rejects the cultural tenets of colonialism on an intellectual basis. She insists on preserving Nigerian culture, religion and traditions; hence refuses to adopt an English name as her confirmation name. Father Amadi reminds her on various occasions that the Church requires every Catholic to choose a saint's name as their confirmation name, but Amaka disagrees:

"When the missionaries first came, they didn't think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized. Shouldn't we be moving ahead?" ... "What the church is saying is that only an English name will make your confirmation valid. 'Chiamaka' says God is beautiful. 'Chima' says God knows best, 'Chiebuka' says God is the greatest. Don't they all glorify God as much as 'Paul' and 'Peter' and 'Simon'?" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 122)

Amaka's refusal to choose a Confirmation name demonstrates her break with Christianity. She holds that religion is at the service of colonialism reinforcing the cultural hegemony of the West. Furthermore, Amaka believes that Christian missionaries and British priests have a hand in the oppression of indigenous people through proving the primacy of whites and their culture. Advocating the cultural superiority of European nations over colonized people, Christian missionaries become a device for usurpers to justify their lucrative presence in colonized territories as the burden undertaken by the whites to civilize barbarous nations. Kambili refers to some Igbo names the meanings of which confirm God's grace. She rejects the claim that Igbo culture is immersed in paganism. Amaka's intellectual resistance against the cultural hegemony of the West impresses Kambili and Jaja. They are intended now to put an end to their silence at home. No longer they regard their Igbo origin as a matter of shame. Kambili brings home a portrait of Papa-Nukwu, painted by Amaka, in order to reveal to Eugene her affection for Papa-Nnukwu who stands for Igbo culture. Eugene goes berserk upon finding the painting and tears it up. He destroys his father's portrait while keeping constantly a picture of his westernized father-in-law in his pocket to commemorate him. Eugene is shocked when Kambili kneels on the floor to gather the torn pieces:

"What is that? Have you all converted to heathen ways?" ... "Get up!" Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo, and I thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with a calm saxophone and then whirled into lusty singing. I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery. They still had the metallic smell of Amaka's paint palette. The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy ... More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 92)

Kambili's insistence on keeping Papa-Nnukwu's portrait represents her break with the biased concepts she learned during her British education concerning the primitivism and barbarity of native culture. Disabused of the principles of cultural imperialism, Kambili begins to trace her African roots. She does not hide the painting because she is going to disclose her interest for African culture that her father denied her for a life. "For Kambili, the painting represents her final link to a departed past, one which she had only begun to find" (Peters 2010: 19). The painting symbolizes her intellectual growth. Inspired by Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka, Kambili wants to have her own voice not only to defend herself against the tyranny of a domineering father, but also to return to her lost culture. She is going to speak Igbo, worship God in Igbo and communicate freely with those whom her father calls heathens. Kambili and Jaja go to Auntie Ifeoma's house in Nsukka once more following Jaja's continuous defiance of Eugene to stay away from the obnoxious atmosphere of Eugene's house. Their presence in Ifeoma's house is a relief for them, a place



where they are free to express their thoughts. Kamabili refers to the purple hibiscus Auntie Ifeoma grows in her flower bed as the symbols of freedom:

Nsukka started it all; Auntie Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus, rare, fragrant with the undertone of freedom ... A freedom to be, to do. (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 7)

Before leaving Auntie Ifeoma's house to complete the rebellion, Jaja picks up some flowers among the purple hibiscuses to plant them in the flowerbed in his father's house. Talking to Kamabili at their home indirectly about the overthrowing of his father, Jaja refers to the flowers and remarks that "the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom". The flowers that symbolize freedom are about to bloom because Kamabili, Jaja and their mother, Beatrice, are going to end the tyranny of a dictator who forcefully imposes on them the culture and religion of a colonizing country. Jaja's decision to bring home the flowers of freedom corresponds to Kamabili's bold deed to bring Papa-Nnukwu's portrait from Auntie Ifeoma's house. They are going to emancipate themselves from the control of a discourse that depreciates their native culture, and reduces them to primitive and uncivilized Negroes in need of Western civilization. Kamabili and Jaja express overtly their dissatisfaction with Eugene's behavior and the discourse he supports, but Beatrice has never dared defy her husband. Nevertheless, she is the one who eventually dethrones Eugene. Beatrice kills Eugene by poisoning his tea. She obtains the poison from a witch by the help of a maid servant. Despite the fact that she has been a submissive and traditional African wife all along, Beatrice finally liberates a family from the oppression of a man whose deleterious influence robbed them of their African identity and made a hell in this world for them to save them from eternal damnation in Hell. Audrey D. Peters evaluates the murder to be a revolt against colonialism:

The choice to poison with a substance procured by a witch doctor indicates a reaching back to native culture, a complete rejection of colonial rule; further, the choice to poison his tea is indicative of the inherent instability of despotic government. As those who live by the sword die by the sword, these instruments bring down governments that maintain power through fear and violence. Eugene, the colonialist, is brought down by tea- the symbol of colonization. (Peters 2010: 54)

Eugene's death marks at once the end of oppression and the beginning of "the freedom to be". Kamabili and Jaja are free after their father's death to learn more about their African origin. They can worship God in Igbo, listen to native music, attend indigenous festivals and reclaim their Africanness all in all. Eugene's death leads to silence, a silence different from the silence he induced through violence and coercion. This silence brings peace and tranquility. Kamabili distinguishes between the two states of silence: "Silence hangs over us, but it is a different kind of silence, one that lets me breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive" (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005: 135). No longer are Kamabili and Jaja exposed to the hegemony that brainwashed them into rejecting their African roots. Instead of listening to the voice of British priests on the stereo, Kamabili enjoys Fela Kuti's songs. She chooses consciously to resist the cultural imperialism of the West and embraces her departed cultural background instead.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Adichie Chimamanda N. 2005. *Purple Hibiscus*. London: Harper Perennial.
- [2] Corneliussen, Eva. 2012. "The Influence of Class, Culture and Colonisation on African Women's Fight for Emancipation and Equality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*." Master's Thesis, University of Tromsø.
- [3] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 2008.
- [4] Jones, Rachel Baily. *Postcolonial Representation of Women*. London: Springer, 2011.
- [5] Peters, Audrey D. "Fatherhood and Fatherland in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*." Master's Thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2010.
- [6] Sinclair, Tara J. "Beyond Their Control: the Disempowerment of Women in Middle Eastern and African Literature." Master's Thesis, 2012.
- [7] Smit, Willem J. "Becoming the Third Generation: Negotiating Modern Selves in Nigerian Bildungsroman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Master's Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2009.