

**THE INTERPLAY OF MOTHERHOOD AND
TRAUMA IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS***

Ifeoma Oyovwi

Abstract

Motherhood and womanhood experiences are aspects of gender issues that are commonly explored by African female writers. They appear to be aspects of the major focus in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Therefore, this study examines Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* to uncover the interplay of motherhood and trauma in the novel. The study relies on pieces of information from the primary texts and critical materials from secondary sources. The novel is subjected to a critical, qualitative analysis, focusing on the events as well as the utterances and conducts of some of its characters. The analysis reveals that Beatrice (Mama) is traumatised by the domestic violence that her husband, Papa Eugene, unleashes on her. It is further revealed that the various abuses and assaults received by Beatrice are informed by her commitments to her role as a mother and wife. The study concludes that as represented in Adichie's novel, it is evident that motherhood sometimes comes with a lot of mental strains in Africa.

Keywords: Literature and Trauma; Gender studies; Domestic violence; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Introduction

Motherhood in African literature is an aspect of gender discourse that interrogates the traditionally defined roles of the female African as a woman and a mother. African literary writers have continued to portray mothers who are subjected to marital strains. The discourse on gender, in Nigerian literature, creates a conversational atmosphere between the writer and the reader, it shows that the patriarchal atmosphere of Africa impinges on the growth and health of the average African woman. The African woman is subjected to physical and mental strains, which are the common experiences that go with motherhood. This is what Buchi Emecheta paradoxically foregrounds in her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, where the physical and psychological tortures of the African woman are constructed as the privileges of motherhood. Thus, there is a close intersection between motherhood and traumatic memories as represented by a good number of African female writers, including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Besides childbearing and nursing children, the African woman is also subjected to the stress of home management and financial support for the home. These experiences have been represented by a good number of African female writers. Akujobi (2011) examines the socio-cultural and religious roles of women in African literature. Akujobi further reveals:

In literature, different patterns and methods of motherhood are portrayed for example, most of Emecheta's works deal with the portrayal of the African woman. Her main characters often show what it

feels like to be a woman, an African woman and a mother in society. Emecheta looks at how sexuality and the ability to bear children may sometimes be the only way by which femininity and womanhood are defined (p. 2).

Emecheta's works have earned a lot of critical discussions concerning her realistic narration of the traditional roles imposed on African women. *The Joys of Motherhood* explicates the challenges of the African woman who is subjugated and devalued by the dictates of patriarchal traditions. Though Emecheta, like other women writers of her generation, does not put up a wrong impression in her narration of women's problems, she convincingly foregrounds the trauma and physical sufferings of the African woman as a wife, mother, and breadwinner. As Ogundipe (1987) avers:

Most deeply concern women issues such as polygamy, childbearing, motherhood, the subordination of the female to the male, have been jaundiced. It is only with the advent of the women writers that women-related issues begin to be objectively analysed (p. 123).

The above is the common theme that is encountered in the works of pioneering female writers. In her analysis of the works of Mariama Ba, Sontusa (2008) states that in a typical African woman's fashion, Mariama Ba reveals the essence of motherhood for an African woman. She goes further to assert that "Zaynab Alkali, like Mariama Ba,

expounds love, endurance, forgiveness, and tolerance as the principles of true marital happiness for the oppressed African woman” (Sotunsa, 2008, p. 75). These writers’ portrayal of the problems and industriousness of the African woman earns the sympathy of the reader (Okonjo-Ogunyemi, 1988).

It is, however, observed that Adichie’s narration of the interplay of motherhood and trauma has not been given adequate critical attention. Adichie tries to expose the psychological and physical challenges faced by mothers in Africa in the process of mothering a child. The traumatic experiences faced by African women as mothers, are depicted in Adichie’s novel, *Purple Hibiscus*.

The Concepts of Motherhood and Trauma

Motherhood is one of the roles or identities through which the image of African women is projected. In this capacity, she is a mother to her children, husband, and outside her home. From traditional to modern times, the African woman has maintained a high level of industriousness, which manifests in the domestic and public domains. That is why Akujobi (2011) defines motherhood as an automatic set of feelings and behaviours that are switched on by pregnancy and the birth of a baby. The term, motherhood, as used in this study, is both biologically and socially constructed. Biologically, motherhood is a concept derived from “mother”, and it is used to describe the woman’s ability to give birth and nurse children. Motherhood, therefore, celebrates the role of the woman as a mother, both biologically and socially. Motherhood is the state or experience of having and raising a child

whether adopted or given birth to. In the process of nursing and raising children, the woman suffers a series of physical tortures and psychological traumas that are often overlooked. The common denigration of the woman's image as one who is only relevant in procreating and nursing children is a demotion of the woman's worth. For instance, besides the portrayal of the female as a mother and home manager, the woman's image highlights her intellectual capacity which rivals the domineering attitudes of her male counterpart. So, if the woman is subjected to strains and demotions, she becomes a victim of psychological injury (Asonibare, 2021).

Trauma is a mental condition that is concerned with a feeling of deep distress. This implies that a traumatic episode causes psychological and emotional damage which becomes apparent in physical conduct and utterances of people. Trauma is a contemporary field of study in the domain of literary and cultural studies in the 1990s; it was pioneered by scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominick LapCapra (Caruth, 1995, 2003; Brown, 1951; Buelens & Craps 2008). Trauma has been theorised in the fields of sciences and social sciences, especially medicine, psychology, and literature. Trauma studies in literature attest to the utilitarian value of literature as a discipline that transcends other disciplines. According to Kekeghe (2018, p. 1), "[Literature] has come to serve as an effective instrument in conveying the theories and practices of other disciplines. Besides the Humanities and Social Sciences where literature pitches its tent, it has for some decades now, become a relevant field of study in medical and environmental sciences" Kekeghe (2018)

adds that as a means of expressing the psychological dimension of reality, literary writers explore traumatic experiences that manifest in people, some of which are the writer's agonies and distresses. Traumatic narratives show how literary expressions account for the psychic spaces of people, showing burdens of thoughts they experience in the society (Kekeghe, 2017; Kekeghe, Obasuyi, & Obot, 2024).

Trauma theory is adopted as our framework to show the interplay of motherhood and the psychological sufferings of women in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Trauma theory is an offshoot of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis that was developed in America in 1895. Caruth's model of trauma shows that trauma is an event that causes a dislocation or fragmentation of the individual's consciousness. The model draws attention to the severity of the suffering by suggesting that trauma irrevocably damages the psyche. The traumatic experiences exert a negative and frequently pathological effect on consciousness and memory that prevents the past from becoming incorporated into the life narrative. Caruth's (1996) trauma model interprets Freud's trauma theories and advances to post-structural concern. Cathy argues that latency and dissociation caused by trauma disrupt the ability to fully understand or represent traumatic experiences and collective historical extreme incidents are ultimately never known directly but only through an interrupted referentiality that points to the meaning of the past only as a type of reproduction or performance (Caruth, 1996). Viewing trauma through the theories of Freud and Lacan as the delayed return of the repressed and a defining absence, Caruth argues that

trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past.

Caruth's innovative ideas on trauma theory have influenced other scholars who have carried out extensive, critical studies that help in the development of trauma as a literary theory. The constant application of the ideas of Caruth by scholars like Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Herman, Leigh Gilmore, Jill Bennett, Richard Mollica, and Stanislav Grof has led to the promotion of trauma theory in literature. This is evident in some of the ground-breaking works that have been written by these scholars of trauma studies. Some of such influential studies are Felman and Laud's *Testimony* (1992), Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography* (2001), Bennett's *Empathic Vision* (2005), Mollica's *Healing Invisible Wounds* (2006) and Grof's *Healing Our Deepest Wounds* (2012).

Motherhood and Trauma in *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* centres on the narrative of a fifteen-year-old Kambili, who lives in Enugu with her father, Papa Eugene, mother, Beatrice (Mama), and elder brother, Chukwu (Jaja). The narratives begin on Palm Sunday, a Catholic feast. Jaja refuses to receive communion at church, and Papa Eugene throws his missal, breaking Mama's beloved figurines. Kambili then explains the events leading up to this scene. Papa, a wealthy factory owner, is an active philanthropist in public and an upstanding Catholic, but at home, he is a strict and violent authoritarian. He publishes a newspaper,

The Standard which is the only paper willing to criticize the new Nigerian Head of State.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie conveys the traumatic experiences of motherhood which are engendered by the abuses meted on the children of Beatrice. Even though not directly abused, witnessing abuse may be as damaging psychologically. The narrator, Kambili, explores the close link between motherhood and psychological trauma as evident through the conduct and utterances of Mama (Beatrice) in the novel. The novel narrates the negative effects of domestic violence in the family of Papa Eugene, which is a major challenge in motherhood. Papa Eugene is a wealthy man who fights for democracy through his newspaper, *The Standard* but ironically, he is a brute at home. Papa Eugene subjects his children to domestic violence. He treats his children, Jaja and Kambili, like slaves and brutalizes them with the slightest provocation. Given the brutalities faced at the hands of their father at home, Beatrice begins to show symptoms of trauma which also affect her children. The suffocating atmosphere at home provokes traumatic memories in Beatrice, Kambili, and Jaja:

Papa who has very high standards and strict rules in the household, and then Jaja breaking one of these rules which is one of the most important “going to communion. The narrator reveals in the novel: “Jaja, did not go to communion and papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère” (Adichie, 2005, p. 1).

The narrative shows that Jaja is intensely afraid of Papa, and he lives with that shock. It also reveals how Papa can lose control of his emotions very easily to the point of throwing his sacred text. Jaja goes to Auntie Ifeoma's house for a while and begins to feel as if he has a voice he never had when he was under Papa's roof: "Jaja said in English, with authority, as if doing so would make his words come true" (Adichie, 2005, p. 183). This quote shows how Jaja has started to find his voice and has begun to live comfortably without Papa around to keep him under check. Unfortunately for him, Papa comes to Auntie Ifeoma's house and strips Jaja of this feeling just by walking into the house. "Jaja came out of the kitchen then and stood staring at Papa" (Adichie, 2005, p. 188).

These textual illustrations show how afraid Jaja is of Papa and how Jaja's voice which he has only recently been able to find, has been taken away. Amid the abuses and brutalities at home, Mama struggles to sustain the job of nursing her two children. The domestic violence the children are made to face at the hands of Papa Eugene makes the job of motherhood very challenging for Mama Beatrice. Kambili does not like the living environment under her father after she gets used to the freedom of Nsukka. This is because she witnesses the abuse. She has been on the receiving end of the said abuse, as evident in the novel. This is captured in the following extract from the novel:

I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes" There's blood on the floor, Jaja said. Get the brush from the

bathroom. We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water color all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped (Adichie, 2005, p. 210).

This attests to the violence in the family of Papa Eugene which affects the general atmosphere of the home. Beatrice appeals to the reader as a committed, peaceful mother and a submissive wife. Her physical and psychological responses to the assault that her husband subjects her children to greatly attest to this. The violence at the domestic front is humiliating to her and her children and it affects the peaceful aura at home. The narrative reveals that Kambili is always tense when her parents exchange words over everything. This is depicted in the excerpt below:

I was in my room after lunch, reading James chapter five because I would talk about the biblical roots of the anointing of the sick during family time, when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. ... I sat down, closed my eyes and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty and there was blood on the floor (Adichie, 2005, p. 41).

Kambili relates the psychological trauma to which her father subjects other members of the family. Every moment Jaja and Kambili experience abuse and violence

at home, they show revulsion towards their father and this makes them very rebellious thereby posing serious challenges to parenting, especially, motherhood. Kambili and Jaja are pained that most of the domestic violence is provoked by inconsequential issues. A case in point is when Mama receives severe assault from Papa Eugene for allowing Kambili to eat on the day of the Eucharistic fast. The narrator reveals that Beatrice excused Kambili from fasting because of her ill health at the time. Papa Eugene, being a chauvinist and a religious fanatic, does not see any justification in her daughter not partaking in fasting. So, instead of commending the wife for playing her role well as a committed mother, Papa Eugene gives Mama a terrible beating. The pain that Beatrice receives from her husband's torture becomes her "reward" for motherhood.

As a result of the violent atmosphere in Papa Eugene's family, the home becomes tense thereby posing a parenting challenge. This is given the fact that Beatrice is being humiliated by her husband in the presence of her innocent children who should need quality parenting and also the fact that she could not protect her children. The absence of love and tenderness in the home destroys the family's peace and poses intense psychological trauma to the victims of such violent manifestations. As victims of domestic violence, Kambili and Jaja experience intense psychological and emotional strains which traumatised their mother (Beatrice). The narrative reveals that Papa Eugene does a lot of philanthropic job outside the family space, but shows cruelty towards his children at home. Beatrice endures the agony for too long and it eventually destroys her mind. She does not speak against oppression; instead, she maintains an unhealthy silence. Kambili, the

narrator, illustrates this point when she notes that Beatrice speaks the way birds eat in small amounts. Towards the end of the novel, Beatrice becomes intensely traumatised. This is what makes her poison her brutal husband, Papa Eugene.

In many African countries, the majority of women remain silent. This is because traditional African societies have cultural and traditional practices that hold them together and act as their codes of conduct and this has been complicated by social, economic, political, and cultural structures built on the beliefs that are deeply rooted in our society. This fact is taken by women as well as men to be part of us. Domestic violence is the most common type of emotional and psychological gender abuse in *Purple Hibiscus*. Generally, it has a significant impact on the health and well-being of women both in the immediate and long term, even after the relationship has ended. The psychological consequences of violence can be as serious as the physical effects. It could be behaviours used by one person in a relationship to control the other.

Beatrice struggles to manage her pains as well as the injuries inflicted on her children— Jaja and Kambili. As a result, she looks completely broken. The narrator reveals that Beatrice, after a series of tortures that her children went through by Papa Eugene, becomes weak, vulnerable, and powerless: “I followed her downstairs, she limped slightly, as though one leg were shorter than the other, a gait that made her seem even smaller than she was” (Adichie, 2005, p. 19). Despite the agonies faced by Mama at the hands of her husband, most of which are bordered on her motherhood decision to stay married and take care of her children, she continues to play her role of

nursing and raising her children with love and care. This display of affection facilitates her bond with the children. In the following passage, Kambili recounts the anguished mood of her mother:

She cried for a long time. She cried until her hand, clasped in hers, felt stiff. She cried until Aunty Ifeoma finished cooking the rotten meat in a spicy stew. She cried until she fell asleep, her head against the seat of the chair. Jaja laid her on a mattress on the living room floor (Adichie, 2005, p. 254).

As a result of the domestic violence Mama's children encounter in the novel, she becomes emotionally and psychologically broken. For instance, there is a time in the novel when Papa Eugene beats up Kambili to the point that she loses consciousness. When Papa discovers that his daughter faints from the beating, he abandons her in the hospital. As a caring mother, Mama goes to the hospital to stay with Kambili, sharing her pains. Sadly, Papa Eugene refuses to show up. All of these have a terrible psychological effect on Beatrice, she bears agony and suffering from her cruel husband in exchange for financial support and the availability of resources for her children and to avoid being a social outcast.

Kambili, the narrator, laments the agony she and her mother are subjected to by Papa Eugene:

He poured the hot water on my feet,
slowly...The pain of the contact was so pure,

so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed...

...Mama had come inside the bathroom. Tears were running down her face. Her nose was running, too...She mixed salt with cold water and gently plastered the gritty mixture onto my feet” (pp. 194-195).

Papa Eugene pours hot water on the feet of Jaja and Kambili for going to live under the same roof with his heathen father, Papa Nnukwu. He beats up Kambili until she becomes unconscious for keeping his heathen father’s portrait. He also beats and breaks Jaja’s little finger for not answering two questions properly in a test. Papa Eugene uses missal to stone Jaja for missing communion. These violent assaults create an atmosphere of tension in the family, which poses a negative impact on the minds of Mama, Jaja, and Kambili. From this point, Beatrice begins to show signs of psychological disturbances: Papa throws his missal and breaks all of Mama’s figurines, but she cannot say anything about it, “she starred at the figurine pieces on the floor and then knelt and started to pick them up with her bare hands” (Adichie, 2005, p. 188).

For Mama, the figurine is more important because Papa is at home; she has no control over anything other than the figurine. Mama mixes these pains with the complex role of motherhood. Her constant calmness in the home makes it look like it is a norm for mothers to be subjected to physical and psychological pains just because they want their children not to be stigmatized by society as children raised by a divorced woman. Kambili wishes

that Mama could react to the torture. She ridicules Mama's silence and inaction and wishes that women should react against oppression to confront the conscience of their oppressors:

Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory worker bought in bulk at the Seme border... we cleaned up the trickle of blood which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water colour all the way downstairs. (Adichie, 2005, p. 41).

Adichie uses the character of Beatrice to make commentary on the trauma that most African women are subjected to while doing their jobs as mothers. What the narrative conveys of Beatrice underscores the fact that she is a victim of physical and psychological torture as the result of her role of mothering and nursing her children, to keep the family together because she claims that "A husband crowns a woman's life" (Adichie, 2005, p. 75). The brutalization by Papa in the novel causes a terrible shock on the psyche of Jaja and Kambili thereby compounding Beatrice's motherhood commitments. The children were unable to communicate with anyone, Kambili lacked the confidence to open up to her cousin, and she also did not have many friends at school. Her world exists and grows inside her. Jaja on the other hand, becomes aggressive and refuses to listen to his father. He does this to struggle for their freedom.

The pain that Papa Eugene inflicts on his children is both physical and psychological. For instance, the hot tea, given to Kambili by Papa in the name of "love sip" is

a source of torture. This kind of punishment that Kambili suffers yet cannot complain about serves to explain how patriarchy manifests itself and destroys those who it is meant to shelter. The hot tea experience points to the contradictions in Papa's house. The abuse that the children are subjected to by Papa Eugene creates an atmosphere of fear and tension. This also affects the mother's psyche badly. For example, all through the story, Beatrice is seen as a dehumanized and reproached woman. Her children, Jaja and Kambili are also nervous and dejected.

Mama bears suffering while playing her role as a mother. She bears the characteristic traits and conduct of a traditional African woman. Mama typifies the roles of womanhood and motherhood. She is a quiet, maternal figure for much of the novel, representing a softer, more passive presence in the home. For instance, Beatrice suffers two miscarriages after severe beatings from Eugene but she still summons the courage to nurse the pain of her children. Kambili's narrative voice conveys her revulsion and anger towards her father. Kambili recollects how Papa Eugene broke the small table where they keep the family Bible on Mama's belly:

You know that small table we keep the Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly...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 (p. 248).

The shame associated with domestic violence, rape, and other forms of indignity meted to women persists because

they are afraid of the consequences and the social stigma. Although Beatrice feels that her children are abused and unloved, she is still submissive to her husband as expected in her marriage. She can only respond to her predicament by crying: “A thin line of tears crawled down her cheeks as though it has been a struggle for them to get out of her eyes” (Adichie, 2005, p. 253).

Beatrice cannot cope with Eugene's behaviour and she poisons him. Her son, Jaja, takes the blame for the crime and she continues to deteriorate mentally after this point. Although Beatrice is not imprisoned because Jaja willfully takes the blame for her actions; she, however, suffers mental instability, which manifests in the form of trauma. She suffers the trauma of seeing her son in prison because of her actions. Kambili reveals that:

She has been different ever since Jaja was locked up since she went about telling people she killed Papa... but nobody listened to her; they still don't. They think grief and denial, her husband is dead and her son is in prison, have turned her into a bony body of skin speckled with blackheads, the size of watermelon seeds... most times, her answers are nods and shakes of the head and often she just sits and stares” (Adichie, 2005, p. 296).

Jaja is imprisoned at an adolescent age and stays with hardened criminals. Beatrice, who then feels insecure outside Eugene's home and hides behind her husband's identity, resolves to carve a place for herself by breaking

from that position. After her initial demonstration of weakness and docility,

she did not lower her voice to a whisper...she did not sneak Jaja's food to his room, wrapped in cloth so it would appear that she had simply brought his laundry (p. 306).

One can argue that Beatrice displays a rare form of courage, which involves standing by the children in the face of domestic violence. As depicted in the novel, it seems that Beatrice is only married by Eugene for procreation, as she tells Kambili: "Nne, you are going to have a brother or a sister...you are going to have a baby" (Adichie, 2005, p. 28). After several beatings from Eugene, she had some miscarriages. In the face of such agony, family elders under the umbrella of the Umunna, advise Papa Eugene to have children with another woman. Beatrice decides to stick to Eugene because she is helpless in the male-dominated society. The narrator reveals that so many women are willing to throw their daughters at Papa Eugene.

Beatrice in the novel plays her role as a mother even in the face of dehumanization which could suggest that there is a close link between motherhood and trauma as represented by the character of Beatrice in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The physical battering of Jaja and Kambili in the novel triggers Beatrice's traumatic breakdown. The narrative shows that Beatrice is subdued, which eventually destroys her happiness and vision of a healthy family setting. The rest of the narrative shows that Beatrice becomes helpless and yields to oppression. She seems to conceive that her sufferings are the normal toxic

experiences that go with motherhood. Beatrice, in the novel, is portrayed as a vulnerable mother unable to save herself and her children from Papa's assault but later asserts herself by redefining the woman's exercise of authority and seeking entry into the public sphere and also challenging patriarchy with its several manifestations.

Motherhood and trauma through the character of Beatrice are socially convincing. The average African woman and mother is a victim of male-chauvinism which manifests in different forms. A society that privileges the traditional stereotypes of patriarchy imposes these sufferings on women. Beatrice becomes dependent and helpless. For example, when Aunty Ifeoma advises her to leave her abusive husband, she responds by expressing her frustration and helplessness:

Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house?
Tell me where would I go? Do you know how
many mothers pushed their daughters at him?
Do you know how many told him to impregnate
them even, and not bother paying a bride price?
(p. 123).

As depicted in the excerpt above, the domestic violence that Papa Eugene perpetrates on Kambili and Jaja caused her a lot of trauma. This trauma also affects her children, Jaja and Kambili. The narrative conveys the nervousness of Kambili. Jaja, on the other hand, becomes extremely rebellious and aggressive. By implication, the teenage children of Papa Eugene are psychologically affected by the domestic violence that is recurrent in the family. To emancipate themselves from a choking and hostile

environment, Kambili, Jaja, and Beatrice negotiate their freedom.

Aunty Ifeoma's house is healthy, and free from experiences of domestic violence. This is why Papa Eugene's children enjoy being with Aunty Ifeoma. As Kambili discovers her true self, her desire for freedom is heightened. The cousins have voices to speak their joys, aspirations, and sorrows and to explain their worlds, which are the things Jaja and Kambili miss at Enugu. There is always silence in Eugene's house but there is a lot of talk, laughter, singing, and exchange at Aunty Ifeoma's house. Amaka has to choose a confirmation name and insists on an African name but Kambili has Papa pick the name Ruth for her. This suggests that Papa Eugene's home is cold and traumatic, and Aunty Ifeoma's home is warm and conducive. In placing side by side the two environments, Adichie advocates for upbringing like that of Ifeoma where girls are not discriminated from boys, and domestic chores are shared equally regardless of gender. Aunty Ifeoma serves as a counter to the quiet, privileged housewife, Beatrice. Yet, despite her voicelessness at the beginning of the novel, Beatrice transforms into an empowered postcolonial woman through her deadly rebellion against her violent and abusive husband, Eugene. Her interactions with Ifeoma work to strengthen her resolve and propel her toward her defining moment of resistance. Together, the two women form a complete and dynamic representation of postcolonial women, their dilemmas, and their victories.

Silence is extensively shown to be largely a result of trauma in *Purple Hibiscus*. Beatrice bears the abuses and dehumanization at the hands of her husband in silence

because of the shame associated with domestic violence, rape, and other different forms of indignity meted to women. This is why Beatrice endures physical battering on her children at the hands of Eugene without letting anyone know about her anguish. The only way her suffering is conveyed to the public is through the “jagged scar on her forehead, the swollen eye, and the fact that she polishes the figurines on the étagère after every episode of beating” (Adichie, 2005, p. 18). In this novel, silence becomes the safest, immediate choice for those experiencing trauma. It is the deep-seated trauma that leads to Beatrice’s killing of her oppressive husband, Papa Eugene. Because of the beneficial motherly role that Beatrice plays on her children, they show a kind of bond towards her. This is why Jaja decides to serve punishment in place of his mother over the murder of Papa Eugene.

Conclusion

The discussion above shows Adichie’s narration on the interplay of motherhood and trauma in *Purple Hibiscus*. Through the character of Beatrice, the reader is made to understand the physical and psychological agonies that some African women are subjected to in the course of playing their roles as mothers and wives. Papa Eugene in the novel frustrates the efforts of Beatrice, which border on healthy commitments of motherhood by compelling her to comply with its ideology through the use of violence. The physical and mental injuries inflicted on Kambili and Jaja affect the general atmosphere of the home. By implication, Mama is mentally affected by the violence in the home. At the end of the novel, Mama

becomes severely mentally broken leading to her killing her husband, Papa Eugene.

References.

- Adichie, N. C. (2005). *Purple Hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina
- Akujobi, R. (2011). "Motherhood in African Literature and Culture". In: *CLCweb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. Purdue: Purdue University Press.
- Akorede, Y. O. (2011). *Feminism and Literature: Womanism and the Intra-Gender Conflict Theory*. Republic of Benin: Editions SonouD'Afrique.
- Asonibare, D. M. (2021). "Patriarchal Abuse and Depressive Episodes in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*". M.A Dissertation. Dept. of English. Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.
- Ba, Mariama. (1981). *So Long, a Letter*. Ibadan: New Horn.
- Brown, M. L. (1981). *Screams Somehow Echoing: Trauma and Testimony in Anglophone African Literature*. Proquest, UMI Dissertation Publishing
- Buelens, & Craps, S. (2008). "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels". In *Studies in the Novel* 40. 1-2.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Emecheta, B. (1979). *The Joys of Motherhood*. London: Allison and Busby
- Kekeghe, S. E., Obasuyi, Y. O. & Obot, I. S. (2024). "Dramatizing Psychic Spaces: Interface between

- Spousal Relationship and Mental Health in Bode Sowande's *The Spellbinder*." *NIU Journal of Humanities* 9(2): 231-238.
- Kekeghe, S. E. (2017) "Creativity and the Burden of Thoughts: Deconstructing Melancholia in Wumi Raji's *Rolling Dreams*". In *Matatu*, 49. 2. 293-306.
- Kekeghe, S. E (2018). "Psychiatric Conditions in Selected Nigerian Literary Texts". PhD Thesis. Dept. of English, University of Ibadan X+ 276.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1993). "African Women Culture and Another Development". In: *Theorising Black Feminism: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women* (eds.) Stanlie, M. James & Abena Busia. London: Routledge. Pp. 102- 117
- Ogunyemi, C. O. (1988). "Woman and Nigerian Literature". In: *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature, Vol 1*. Lagos: Guardian Books Nigerian Ltd.
- Ogunyemi, C. O. (1996). "African Woman Palava". *The Nigerian Novel by Woman*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Sontusa, M. (2008). *Feminism & Gender Discourse: The African Experience*. Sagamu: Ojoko-Biri-Kale Press.
- Walker, A. (1984). *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.