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# "But you are a woman. You do not count." Does The Woman Count? A Study of Chimanande Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

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**ABSTRACT**

In many parts of Africa and in Nigerian in particular cultural obligations continues to traumatize the woman in many ways thus seeking to cripple her economically and to overpower her psychologically in spite of the woman's self-actualization. This paper set out to re-assess Papa Nnukwu's utterance to Aunty Ifeoma: "But you are a woman. You do not count," in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. Irrespective of Aunty Ifeoma's selfless sacrifice to Papa Nnukwu as against Eugene's total neglect of him, Papa Nnukwu still privileges father/son relationship which guarantees the transmission of patriarchal powers, its laws, its discourses and its social structures. The paper examined the topic using the feminist theory with particular reference to African Feminism. The paper re-affirmed the relevance of the woman within the family and society, and summarizes that the woman is indispensable in parenting which involves: nurturing, caring, and inculcating religions, moral values and discipline in the child. As a womanist Aunty Ifeoma shouldered the responsibility of the family morally, economically and psychologically. Unlike the uncompromising Eugene, Aunty Ifeoma negotiated with her family members for harmonious co-existence without over-looking discipline. She was also the sole sustenance of Papa Nnukwu in his life and in his death. As an individual she was highly educated, and as an accommodationist she communally bonded positively with the advantaged and the disadvantaged in society. The paper is of the opinion that the utterance of Papa Nnukwu was as obsolete as Papa himself who clanged to an archaic religion without followers. From the forgoing the woman is indispensable to the development of both man and society she is the nurturer, caretaker and cultural transmitter and these roles are not insignificant or are they signs of powerlessness as envisaged by patriarchy.

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**Introduction:**

On reading Chimanande Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), I stood still at Papa Nnukwu's utterance: "But you are a woman. You do not count" (83), and ponder at patriarchy's unending under-estimation of the woman. Papa Nnukwu's voice entangles with Aunty Ifeoma's hearing and she retorts "Eh? So I don't count? Has Eugene ever asked about your aching leg? (83). One would ask Papa Nnukwu when last did Eugene visit you or respond to your greetings in spite of his being at Abba town with you? Has he not warned you never to step your feet within the boundaries of his home? Papa Nnukwu's echoes represent the reverberations of patriarchal past, a trans-historical phenomenon prior to, or deeper than other sources of oppressions. Gayle Rubin says:

> the term 'patriarchy' was introduced to distinguish the forces maintaining sexism from other social forces, such as capitalism. … Their powers are not founded on their roles as fathers or patiarchs, but on their collective adult maleness, embodied in secret cults, men's houses, welfare, exchange networks, ritual knowledge, and various initiation procedures (538-9).

Patriarchy as a specific form of male dominance is not only the oldest and the most universal structure of supremacy but the primary form of female oppression and the model for all others. It indulges in an obsolete age-long myth that found form in the binary oppositions of superiority/inferiority of the sexes, now foregrounded by the feminist myth of gender equality in all spheres of life.

In Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, he outlines some of the Marxists approaches to the oppression of women and the inequalities within the family and household. For Engels, the patriarchal family emerged with the development of agriculture, where the males began to develop private property in animals, tools, and land, and attempted to control more of the surplus. In order to «ensure the legitimacy of their heirs" (31), and to control women's sexuality, men established dominance within the household and society, and established patrilineal lines of inheritance. This according to Engels results in the "world historical defeat of the female sex … and women were reduced to servitude and instruments for the production of children" (31), actions and thought patterns which feminists seek to correct. In spite of Papa Nnukwu's deep seated hurt at Eugene contempt of him in his long years, his abstracted mind still privileges the 'patrilineal linage' of son/father relationship over daughter/father's.

**Synopsis of the Novel**

Purple Hibiscus is set in Enugu and Nnsuka respectively, in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The central character Kambili Achike, a fifteen-year-old girl who unwittingly dots on her time-bomb father Eugene Achike otherwise called Papa. Papa is a fanatically staunch Catholic with a many-sided personality that can only be expressed in a chain of oppositions: an affluent businessman, a philanthropist to the churches and a stooge to the white Priest Rev. Father Benedict, but a tyrant to his family members; he disdains and neglects his father Papa Nnukwu for his "heathen" religious inclinations and also offers scant or no help to his only sister Aunty Ifeoma, a widow with three children, and a lecturer at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, presently without pay in several months, because long strike action embarked upon by the students. Eugene speaks up against the Nigerian military dictatorship with its attendant arbitrary arrests, detentions, extra-judicial killings and other vices in his "Standard Newspaper" yet he is a despot at home: he reduces his wife Beatrice (Mama) to a domestic slave and handles his children; Kambili and her brother Jaja by hand, by frequently brutalizing them physically, spiritually and psychologically, thereby viciously imposing his extremist religious obsessions on them. He organizes his family on an unbending time-table basis thus placing the household perpetual gruesome silence.

For a while, Kambili and Jaja escape their melancholic prison and sordid home in Enugu when they are removed by Aunty Ifeoma; Eugene's sister, to spend a few days in Nsukka with their cousins: Amaka, Obiora and Chima. Aunty Ifeoma, a widow, lives in a small apartment with her children, unlike Eugene's exotic mansion. Despite Aunty Ifeoma's financial challenges her home resounds with love, chatter and laughter,

distinct from Eugene's home where they are frequently assaulted and they remain up-tight and mope in grave-like silence; where "the silence is broken only by the whir of the ceiling fan as it sliced through the still air" (7), a home where the family's tongues are clipped to the roof of their mouths and love is only shared though sipping hot tea from Papa's tea-cup what he calls "A sip of love" (8). This relaxed atmosphere in Nuskka provides Kambili and Jaja with an alternative model to the climate of dread that pervades their paternal home. Above all, their brief stay in Nsukka gives them a new-found sense of peacefulness, symbolized by their aunt's experimental, hybrid purple hibiscus, "rare fragrant with the undertones of freedom" (16), which Jaja replicates in their home, so that they too can experience such love, freedom and harmony. At Nsukka, Kambili learns to love and share affection, she even falls in love with Father Amadi which awakens her sense of sexuality.

This atmosphere of liberty is only realized at the death of Papa. Now unable to cope with Eugene's colonial violence, Beatrice poisons him, and Jaja takes responsibility for the murder and ends up in prison, as he avers to place the responsibility of his home as on his shoulders as Obiora, his younger cousin does at Aunty Ifeoma's. In the meantime, Aunty Ifeoma and her family migrate to America after her appointment is unfairly terminated from the services of the University. The novel that spans a three year ends in a optimistic note as Jaja hardened but not broken is about to be released from prison, Mama who had deteriorated physically and psychologically shows signs of recovery. Kambili who once had speech impediments: as she chokes on her words, stammers, speaks in whispers and withdraws from everyone including children, becomes a confident young lady who now confidently maps out a future plan for the family that involves sun-shine, travels, and agriculture.

Many critics and reviewers have commented on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and these can be found in both newspapers and academic journals. Much has been written about the themes and motifs, the stylistic qualities of the author's literary output, Motherhood, Female Identity, Victimization of the Woman, Language use, etc. This paper takes a narrow look at Papa Nnukwu's statement: "You are a woman. You do not count" (83), and seeks to examine the relevance of the woman within the home and family, within the larger society: economically and literarily? For the discussion on this topic the paper will adopt the Feminist ideological bent, exacting more with reference to African Feminism.

Feminism, initially known as "women rights" movement has a plethora of meanings and persuasions across cultural lines but all in all, it is a movement and a literary theory by women and men acting and speaking and writing on women's rights in all spheres of life. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives as deeply politicized and reflective of a sexist structure of power in order to end discrimination. These writers seek to identify and correct the injustices in the status quo. The history of Feminism is divided into three phases. The First wave feminism which began in the 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century in United Kingdom and United States was concerned with the rights of women's suffrage (Abrams&Harpham:110-1). The second wave feminism is a period of feminist activity beginning in the early 1960s to 1980s which emphasizes cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. The third wave feminism began in early 1990s in response to perceived failures of the second wave, thus challenging what it deems second wave "essentialist" definition of femininity, which over-emphasized the experiences of the upper middle class white women (Bressler:104-5). A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave's ideology, it focuses on "micropolities," and challenged the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females (Wikipedia African Feminism: 6-8). Within the third wave feminism are other feminist movements among which are Radical feminism, Eco-Feminism, Amazon Feminism, African Feminism etc. African Feminism, among others, emphasizes the complementary relationship among women, men, children and the environment or nature. In "Introduction: Reading the Rainbow" Nnaemeka Obioma equips that "African Feminism is not reactive but rather proactive. It has a life of its own that is rooted in the African environment. Its uniqueness emanates from the cultural and philosophical specificity of its provenance" (Nnaemeka:9). This theory then becomes very apt for the examination of this topic, since it is not only concerned

with gender but includes class, race, politics ethnic relationship religious tolerance, colonialism and noe-colonialism, and Adichie's work emanates from African cultural milieu.

**Does a woman "count"? A look at Aunty Ifeoma**. In her bid to apprehend Papa Nnukwu's laments over Eugene's big house that can "fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate," as he lays the blame on the Missionary school training he allowed Eugene to attend; Aunty Ifeoma reminds him that she too attended a Missionary school. Papa Nnukwu impresses on her: "But you are a woman. You do not count" (83), to her utter amazement. As a widow and a lecturer without a salary over months - because of the mismanagement in the academic system - Aunty Ifeoma involves herself emotionally in caring for her three young children and her aged father, yet Papa Nnukwu's preference is Eugene his son, who disparages him. Commenting on the essence of feminism Laureta Ngcobo says: "it is a new significant re-orientation and re-examination of culture, language, morality and knowledge with particular emphasis on how these affect the woman, her perception of herself in relation to the dominant culture in her psycho-social environment" (2). For Papa Nnukwu the dominant culture identifies with Aunty Ifeoma's life in comparison to that of Eugene yet the evidence of cultural attitude toward her negates her involved roles in society. This establishes the experience of the woman in relation to her psychological and sociological environment.

**Does the woman count in the home and family life?** Parenting involves the nurturing, caring, and discipline of the child; it is a total commitment to the upbringing of the child or children. Since the death of Professor Ifediora Aunty Ifeoma's husband, the upkeep of the family rests squarely on her shoulders. So economically, she is responsible for her children's shelter, feeding, clothing and fees. Her children depend on her for psychological balance. She endeavours to be there to provide succor and to answer most of their challenging questions and this is true motherhood. Lauretta Ngcobo comments that: "Motherhood as an institution is a very powerful one in our societies. She single-handedly directs the children morally, socially and spiritually" (34), she further opines that "African motherhood is about children … there is a high premium placed on children …" (35). The importance of a mother cannot be over-exaggerated. A mother has the singular responsibility to groom the children's character morally and ensures that they conform to societal norms, that their physical and spiritual growth is not disrupted. In most African cultures, if the child fails in life, it is often associated with the failure of the mother.

Therefore, when Obiiora breaks the social norm as he rudely interrupts Aunty Ifeoma's discussion with her friend Chiaku, she did not only caution the boy immediately but reprimands him with a slap and also warms him against such unruly act: "I do not raise disrespectful children in this house. I will not tolerate this rubbish from you …" (245). On hearing the slaps, Amaka says to Kambili: "I always got the stick on my palm … and Obiora got his on his buttocks … I prefer the stick to her slaps, though because her hand is made of metal …" (245). As a mother Aunty Ifeoma has no sacred cow when it comes to discipline, in addition, she explains to the child why she has to flog him or her and what she expects so that the child will not fall a victim of the same circumstance. With great love and care, Aunty Ifeoma inculcates discipline into them but never maims them like Eugene does.

Eugene batters Jaja when he was ten-year-old, so much so that Jaja's finger looks gnarled "deformed like a dried stick … Papa had avoided his right hand because it the hand he writes with because Jaja missed two questions on his catechism tests and so was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class" (145), Kambili says. Jaja, at seventeen has aged so much that "some zigzagged lines grow across the forehead, and inside each line a dark-tension had crawled in" (11). Papa pours the hot water on Kambili and Jaja's feet in a bathtub for their unwittingly sleeping under the same roof with Papa Nnukwu in Nsukka (194). Jaja and Kambili witness Papa dangle their Mama on his shoulder "like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers brought in bulk at the Seme Border …" (33), and the blood of the unborn baby trickling and trailing away on staircase and on the floor, as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolor all the way downstairs. Mama's induced-miscarriage is only triggered off for being reluctant, therefore, less sycophantic at visiting Rev. Father Benedict af-

ter mass. Kambili is so psychologically traumatized that spillage of any red liquid reminds her of Mama's "blood on the stairs" (99).

Aunty Ifeoma also mentors the children in domestic up-keep. She instructs Amaka and Kambili on domestic chores; such as neat home-keeping and the cooking of different kinds of delicacies, and involves the both genders in the cleanliness of the home. In spite of Amaka sarcastic comments on Kambili for the latter's inability to function in any of household chores, Aunty Ifeoma lovingly integrates Kambili into performing these functions since she is socialized outside such domestic duties in her home. She instills courage and boldness into Kambili as she persuades her to talk back to Amaka whenever Amaka says nasty things to her. Kambili for once hears herself: "I don't know how to prepare the *orah* leaves, but you can show me" (134), Akachi Ezeigbo maintains in *Snail Sense Feminism* that the woman must balance between "the Western Individuality and African Communalism" (22). Kambili is very willing to liberate and discover herself and asset her individuality to learn and be part of the family. She talks back to Amaka, and from thence Amaka learns to respect her (170), and begins to relate with her more cordially. Jaja on the other hand, apart from taking turns in dish-washing joins Obiora in washing the car, fetching water from an outside tap and also in tending flowers in the garden. Whereas, Papa Eugene, even Mama shield their children from all household activities except making them robots to Papa's timetable.

Aunty Ifeoma inculcates cordiality in the children. When Amaka comments that "something is not right with them," - referring to Jaja and Kambili - she wonders aloud "Are you sure they're not abnormal, mom?" (141), again she insists "she behaves funny. Even Jaja is strange. Something is not right with them" (142); her mother reproofs her to treat her cousins with respect" (142). Kambili and Jaja are so beat-up with very low self-esteem, that they are idiotic in their presentations. In the presence of Amaka's friends Kambili cannot integrate in any meaningful conversations or react properly to simple questions, her "lips held stubbornly together" (141), because of the many years of melancholic stillness at home. Kambili seems incapable of holding a conversation; she stutters and grips hard at some fresh croton leaves pulling them off as some five-year-old children ask her questions about her school in Enugu (145).

Though Aunty Ifeoma has the same feeling as Amaka's about the mental state of her niece and nephew but as a mother she does not condemn them, rather she encourages Rev. Father Amadi, the young Catholic Priest and family friend, to take Kambili along whenever he goes for recreation. She also encourages Kambili to join her in gardening which is very rejuvenating and reintegrating. In the garden Kambili admires the "green and pink and yellow on the leaves. Like God playing with paint brushes" (143). The revitalizing power of the garden is highly pervasive, in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth the protagonist, only recovers from her psychosis when she involves in the farm work. She plants grooseberry trees and makes jam for the natives; she bonds with mother earth and nature when she places her hand on the ground as a sign of acceptance and belonging (206). "Women often have to combine the role of motherhood and fatherhood in bringing up the children … they themselves have to be strong to have on both roles loving protecting and counseling in turns" (Ngcobo 5). Here Aunty Ifeoma embodies both roles and gives her niece and nephew comfort, security and she provides the logistics and psychological support for them to face the future.

In spite of the financial challenges, Aunty Ifeoma home offers an atmosphere of freedom; laughter and songs flood and spring up around the walls and rooms, at meal time, prayer time and at all times. In spite of lack of: running water from the taps therefore, not enough water to flush toilets, the narrow worm-infested bathroom where everyone takes turns to have a bath with half-full buckets of water, food cooked with kerosene stove with its attendant smoke and smell, the ingredients for soup and stew pounded with mortar and piston, scanty meat fried with bleached palm oil, a spoon of dried milk dissolved in a jug of cold water for tea with okpa (steam-cook cowpea, otherwise used as snacks) for the whole family's breakfast; there is peace, joy and gladness in Aunty Ifeoma's small apartment. As against Eugene's suffocating fortress lavishly furnished, large and spacious, choice cuisines prepared in spotless kitchens, served with exquisite china wares4 laced with pink flowers at the edges for

different meals; a sick palace where everyone quakes and pretends normalcy in very abnormal situations.

Prior to their visit to Nnsuka, Kambili never smiles even when she so much wants to. The act of smiling was not familiar to her (177). She never laughs except in her dream world where she is startled. She confesses: "… although I was not sure what my laughter sounded like. It was cackling and throaty and enthusiastic like Aunty Ifeoma's." (88). "Laughter floated over my head" (120). With rapt attention Kambili and Jaja listen to the rhetorical words surge from everyone while at meal whereas, in at home they "spoke with a purpose … especially at the table" (120). The children are so intimidated that they communication with their eyes within their home and wherever they go to. With great satisfaction Aunty Ifeoma watches them, eating slowly, she looks like a football coach who had done a good job with her team and is "satisfied to stand next to the eighteen-yard box and watch" (120-1). As and accommodationist, her predisposition conforms to Chikwenye Ogunyemi's brand of Womanism which is steep in African communalism; a working together in an atmosphere of peace and mutual respect between men, women and children (23). Aunty Ifeoma affects and impacts on the children positively. Whereas, Eugene sits as the dragon in his lifeless castle; to determine the nature of reality and what is socially appropriate or normally accepted behavior for the household. He makes and enforces draconian decisions as the sole resource manager.

Kambili's admiration for her father Eugene, initially knows no limits, despite the atrocious treatments the latter inflicts on his family. She constantly yearns for her father's approval, and attaches profound importance to being a source of pride to him. Directly linked to this compulsion to please Eugene is the fact that, for a long time, Kambili embraces the thought that any standards which is not her father's is invalid. In this respect, Karen Bruce's opinion that "Kambili has internalized her father's authority to such an extent that it has become an unquestioned part of the way she experiences and interacts with the world" (9), at the out-set Eugene's value systems were Kambili's. Primarily she keeps her father's physical abuse shrouded in silence, but for once she agrees to his viciousness and in reply to Amaka's question. She agrees that her father assaults her: "He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen" (194). Eugene's kicks and stings Kambili with his metal shoes until "A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quite" (211), but she desperately clings to her root and culture; Papa Nnukwu's painted portrait. Under Aunty Ifeoma tutelage Kambili develops intellectually from an introverted, acquiescent girl into a more self-assured young woman, as she engages in the act of gardening, speaking, singing, and running, in so doing she regains her humanity. Kambili and Jaja like Aunty Ifeoma's children begin to develop their individual views about life, polities, religion and culture.

Aunty Ifeoma encourages the children in their talents. Amaka paints as a pass-time hobby, and she provides the right atmosphere for her to exercise in it. Amaka recognizes that "Kambili should be a sprinter" (294), as Father Amadi previously commended Kimbili: "You have good legs for running" (176). Kambili now relaxes and sings Igbo choruses with Father Amadi. "I lifted my voice until it was smooth and melodious like his" (239), she says. Aunty volunteers to find her a trainer thus encouraging and setting her before kings with her talents; talents that lay latent in her over the years without her knowledge or that of her parents. With the help of Rev. Father Amadi, Kambili's tongue which was so heavy that speech was a labour can now interact with others. She asks father Amadi "Why did you become a priest?" (179), she can now smile again and again (177), she now laughs though the laugher sounds strange as if listening to the recorded laughter of a stranger's being played back. She says" I was not sure I have ever heard myself laugh" ((179). She smiles, runs, laughs (180). She now knows what it means to love; her sexuality is revealed as she falls in love with Father Amadi, unfortunately. She values the use of Igbo language and songs both at church and at home. She feels affiliated to her culture. Whereas, at home Papa will not permit the use of vernacular since he perceives it as vulgar and in the process the children lose their sense of self and become rootless. Anyone who does not take pride in one's language has no pride in oneself and will easily be globalized. Ironically Papa accepts an Igbo title of *Omelora* (58), he

builds a castle in the village and habitually returns there every Christmas to associate with his people (*umunna*) and identifies closely with the traditional ruler *Igwe* (93).

Kambili and Jaja notice how their lives changed with the visit to Nsukka. They are awestruck at Aunty Ifeoma's garden especially at the experimental purple hibiscus "that began to lift the silence," the silence which encases the dreadful secrets of the family's long years of mistreatment. "This entwines the image of purple hibiscus with language, with finding a voice out of the silence. This voice is … the liberation of Kambili, who is silent, or stutters and whispers …" (Cooper:8). Jaja brings back some cuttings from these purple bushes and plants them in the garden in Enugu. The plants take root and flower. This signifies the changes in the relationships within the family as the children begin to seize initiatives, rebel against their father and transform their lives. Jaja gathers strength of character as he sees Obiora balance the challenges of his home on his shoulders (289). To Eugene's amazement, Jaja demends for the key to his room, he will not come down for family's meals and prayers, Mama takes food to him upstairs, on hearing of Aunty Ifeoma's termination of appointment, he simply informs his parents that he and Kambili must go to Nsukka. Jaja's defiance seems like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare fragrant with the undertones of freedom; a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do" (16). This is a STIWA tendency that seeks to transform, and loves to transplant the ideal.

**Does a woman count? In the care of parents:** Aunty Ifeoma is sensitively involved with the care of her father Papa Nnukwu; she diligently visits him at Christmas and during other festivities and involves him in family recreations. She picks him up as soon as she hears of his sickness in spite of the fuel scarcity, and since the hospital on campus is shut down because of the strike action, she pays a private medical practitioner to attend to him; she nurses him with the prescribed drugs and good and timely meals. Aunty Ifeoma and her children rally around Papa Nnukwu; Amaka prepares his choice meals, trims his finger nails. The children persuade him to tell them some folk-tales and stories thus rooting them in their culture and traditions. Womanism is a special culture that reminds men that without women's full involvement in the system, the man is incomplete in action as well as achievements (Ogini:18). Papa Nnukwu, before he peacefully falls asleep realized that the woman counts! His life would have been very miserable without Aunty Ifoema. As she sacrificially cares for her father, whereas, Eugene is outraged that his children are under the same roof with a heathen. Though Eugene sends in the money for his father's burial but he will not "participate in a pagan funeral" (188), and assumes that his father "has gone to face judgment" (190). Like Li in Zaiynab Alkali's *The Still Born*, who is called "the man of the house" (63), she takes the place of the first son at her father and grand-father's burials, Aunty Ifeoma likewise, assumes the role of the first son and gives her father a befitting burial according to the traditional rites. Flora Nwapa in "Woman and creative writing in Africa" rightly says that the woman writer cannot fail to score the woman's power in her home and society. She sees her economic importance both as mother, farmer and trader (629). As a womanistist she is invaluable to the family as a mother and an intellectual which is her stock in trade.

**Does a woman count literarily**? Aunty Ifeoma has good education and she is empowered. As a lecturer she has a good knowledge of the students in spite of the large students' population; when one of the female students opts for marriage in place of education - because of the prolonged strike action - and she comes along to invite Aunty Ifeoma to her wedding, she remembers that the student "was never particularly bright" (234). As a womanist she tries to dissuade some first year female students from early marriages to older and richer men who will enslave and exploit them at the end. But the young girls will not yield arguing that they are marrying for economic reasons since they may not have jobs after graduation (75).

Aunty Ifeoma has such high integrity that she becomes a threat to the University authority; she stands her grounds that she "is not paid to be loyal. When I speak the truth, it becomes disloyalty" (222). She is dreaded by the University authorities as a Unionist, which incidentally, she is not; she is only a lover of truth. At the height of her victimization, security operatives invade her

home for a search; she only allows them into her house after seeing their search warrant: "do you have any papers to show me? You cannot just walk into my house (235). As a Womanist in the face of this provocation she remains calm and puts her household under control; when Obiora tries to 'play the man' by accosting the security men, she admonishes him 'Obiora, Nodu ani" (sit down). (231). Aunty Ifeoma is not apologetic or pacifying, she does not go lobbying the school authorities on her false accusation. We share Nwapa's opinion that "the woman writer writes to make men aware of the woman's inherent vitality, independence of views, courage, self-confidence, and of course, her desire for gain, and high social status" (629), Adichie present Aunty Ifeoma with such vitality and zeal. When her appointment is maliciously terminated, she migrates with the family to the United States of American for better opportunities.

**Does a woman count in religious upbringing**? Aunty Ifeoma develops the children spiritually. The unfailing morning and evening prayers were always said along with praise songs. Her family intercedes for the university, for the lecturers, for the administration, for Nigeria and finally she prays that they "might find peace and laughter today" (126-7). Prayer before meals was short while, Eugene says prays for twenty minutes or more before meals. His hypocritical relationship with the church and not with the Word of God is orchestrated by Father Benedict praise of him. He praises Eugene as the biggest donor to Peter's pence and St Vincent de Paul, his payment for the cartons of communion wine, his purchase of the new ovens at the convent where the Reverend Sisters baked the host, his expenses for the new wing to St. Agnes Hospital (5), for these contributions, Father Benedict, the Rev. Sisters never question Eugene's frequency to the hospital with his maimed family members. Although Aunty Ifeoma is of the same Catholic faith like his brother, but she is liberal; her home is a nurturing environment for love, peace, joy and happiness as reflected in her life and the lives of the children.

Commenting on the appearance of Virgin Mary here and there and the attitude of the people flocking like migrating locusts to have a glimpse of her, Amaka asks Rev. Father Amadi if the Virgin Mary is now "the Political Virgin," a question Kambili and Jaja would not dare think of nor have the courage to ask before their father, for the fear of committing sacrilege and at the danger of losing some parts of their bodies to their father's religious delusion. Amaka will not take an English name at her baptism; she prefers an Igbo name, which in her opinion also glorifies God as well as the English names. She takes exception to the colonial imposition of English names from the white missionaries. Since the church frowns at her stance, she refuses the baptism, and hell is not let loose; her mother simply respects her opinion (272). Like her mother Amaka is a revolutionary and indvidualistic. Kambili recalls her baptism and knows that she was just a stooge; she could not have the gut to put up such an argument.

As Father Amadi prepares for his missionary journey abroad, Amaka comments: "the white missionaries brought their god … Which was the same colour as them, worshipped in their language and packaged in the boxes they made. Now that we take their god back to them, shouldn't we at least repackage it?" (267), while Obiora teases him: "From darkest Africa now come missionaries who will reconvert the West" (279). The children are encouraged to be sensitive, even in religious matters. "Womanism believes in the freedom and independence of women. It seeks meaningful relationships or unions between the black women, men and children" (Ogunyemi:65). Aunty Ifeoma is tolerant, she negotiates with the children in an atmosphere of give and take, and she compromises and balances. As a Womanist she is an accomodationist.

Eugene uses the Word of God as an arrow head for dismembering his family. He picks up the missal and flings it across the room toward Jaja. It misses Jaja completely, but it hits the glass étagères, "which Mama polished often. …or rather it landed on their many pieces. It lay there a huge leatherbound missal that contained the readings for all three cycles of the church year" (7). It is unfortunate that the instrument which Papa seems to protect and viciously foregrounds in his family is the same "book of reading for all three cycles of the church year" with which he uses to destroy, shatter and contort his entire family. As the missal landed on the "many pieces of the ceramic figurines of ballet dancers" so has Papa used his gospel to shred his family into

pits and pieces.

Eugene's abnormal sense of religion reduces his wife to a domestic slave and a mental wretch; yet the Christianity he professes enjoins him to love his wife as himself, and that his wife is his helpmate (Gen.2:28&1 Peter3:7). After he beats her up, instead of crying, she washes the little ballerinas in soapy water. Kambili notes that "only two weeks ago, when her swollen eye was still the black-purple color of an over-ripe avocado, she had rearranged them after she had polished them" (10-11). These figurines are Mama's coping ritual against the physical violence to which he subjects her. On the other hand, the shattered figurines liberate Mama from confiding in non-animate objects in her pains, humiliation and subjugation. She determines not to replace them and begins to confide in humans.

Mama recounts one of her brutal experiences at the hand of Papa to Aunty Ifeoma and the children: "I got back from the hospital today. … You know that small table where we keep the family Bible? He broke it on my belly. My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes (Hospital). My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it" (the pregnancy) (248). Eugene's demented mind is caught between the archaic African culture (which he outwardly rejects but spiritually imbibes) which permits wife battery and the true Christian doctrine which does not. "The tragedy of theology in Africa today is that cultural garbs have beclouded true scriptural beliefs and practices" (Gwamna:43), which in turn, tend to favour men in all things. As a result, Gwanmna further observes that "the African heritage of subordinating women has been implanted in Christian tradition in Africa (40), neither Father Benedict, the Rev. Sisters nor other Christians ever condemn Eugene vicious and ruthless attitude towards his family members as he constantly deposits their mutilated bodies at St. Agnes hospital.

Still on religious relevance, Papa Nnukwu, though a heathen and a traditionalist he "keeps his chi in the thatched shrine in his yard" (66), sacred, and far from desecration, he forbids Jaja and Kambili from going near it. He seems to be the last priest of this antiquated religion, with no followers yet he will not compromise his traditional worship not even at the expense at sharing in his son's wealth. In Papa Nnukwu's declaration of his innocence to the gods or his ancestors; he asks for blessing for his linage. He prays: "Chinike! Bless my son Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him" (168), whereas, Eugene prays God "to convert his father "and save him from the raging fires of hell" (150). From all the above, it is seen that Aunty Ifeoma's religious practice is more of praise and worship, intercession and thanksgiving.

**Does the woman count to the larger society?** Aunty Ifeoma renders as much help as she can to others. Mama Joe the hair stylist, acknowledges Aunty Ifeoma is a "good woman … I would be naked but for your aunty, who gives me her old clothes. I know she doesn't have that much, either. Trying so hard to raise those children well … A strong woman" (237), she tells Kambili. As a womanist Aunty Ifeoma is committed to covering the nakedness of a fellow woman.

Also, Aunty Ifeoma allays Aunty Chiaka's sarcasm and her unbecoming racist tendency against other nations. As Aunty Chiaka points accusing fingers at the United Kingdom and the United States of American for under-valuing Nigeria's professionals like doctors and lawyers, Aunty Ifeoma reminds of the cyclical effects of Nigeria tyrants and sit-in oppressors who will not give room to professionals with potentials to occupy any position of authority, thus there is a brain-drain especially in the academics (244-5).

On female bonding Aunty Ifeoma tries to connect with Mama, her sister-in-law as she dissuades her from going home with his violent and despotic brother who subjects her to physical and spiritual abuse. But with a fixed smile on her face, Mama meekly joins Papa back to Enugu with the children in spite of Aunty Ifeoma's protestations for her to stay a few more days at Enugu. Perplexed at Mama's insensitivity to her security, she asks Mama "Has a knot come loose in your head" (249), with glazed and a stiff stretch of her lips, Mama is expressionless. Kambili also observes that Mama "looked like a different woman … She looked possessed by a different demon" (250), Mama blames Papa's extreme hostility on Ade Coker's death (the Manager of his Standard Newspaper), thereby reducing the family's resources. Aunty Ifeoma recollects her very

cordial relationship with her late husband Ifediora, even "when the University did not pay salaries for months" (250). Mama is so mundane, so totally attached to Eugene's wealth; she will rather die than step out of his house. She recounts the number of women seeking Eugene's attention, and how some mothers yearn for him to impregnate their daughters even without marrying them. She wonders aloud on where she would go, if she leaves Eugene's house? (250). To this rhetorical question even young Kambili along with Aunty Ifeome shout: "And so?" (250). Mama simply dismisses the advice with words like: "You have come again with your university talk" (250-1). Mama is property trapped. Modupe Kolawole declares that "Womanism manifests and enhances African women's collective grouping and positive bonding as opposed to ideological bondage" (27), Aunty Ifeoma is a womanist, as she positively seeks to bond with other women. Contrary to Bell Hooks comments that "privileged feminists have largely been unable to speak to, with and for diverse groups of women because e they either do not understand fully the inter-relatedness for sex, race and class oppression or refuse to take this inter-relatedness seriously" (14), Aunty Ifeoma is privileged through education but does not distance herself from the under-privileged.

Aunty Ifeoma defines herself against brother's wealth. For Eugene to fulfill his promise of buying her a car, he gives her many awkward conditions among which are that: she joins the Knights of St. John, sends Amaka to convent school and that she does away with her cosmetics and make-ups (95). She may have her long list of wants and needs but vows never to ask her brother "to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things" (95), thus she asserts her individuality against her brother Eugene so that he will not usurp her and her family under his deadly silence, dictatorship and violent escapees. Aunty Ifeoma is provocative, strong, defiant and an independent woman.

Aunty Ifeoma is focused and believes in herself. When Papa Nnukwu prays that his *chi* will intercede to the "high God, the *Chukwu*" so that *Chukwu* will send a good man to take care of Aunty Ifeoma and the children (83), Aunty Ifeoma would rather her father intercedes to *Chukwu* to hasten her promotion to senior lecturer (83), she prefers her individuality and rejects her identity being tangled with a man. Modupe Kolawole defines Womanism as "the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive ways" (24). This underscores the ancient situation of stereotypes where women seek their growth and wealth through men rather than through their efforts.

Womanist writers create "strong women confronting destructive traditions but coming to terms with the limits of individuality" (Kolawole:39). Adichie presents Aunty Ifeoma as womanist who is not limited by patriarchy in the nature of her father Papa Nnukwu, her brother Eugene, or the University authorities yet she conforms to the traditions of her people. She dutifully cares for her father and buries him according to the customs and in the traditions of his belief and of his people. She is what Akachi Ezeigbo describes in *Snail Sense Feminism* as "sensitive, resilient and dogged or determined" (28). Aunty Ifeoma is hard working, tenacious and patient; she is independent courageous and self-reliant. She empowers herself and also empowers others.

Conclusion:

The paper examines the relevance of the woman in this case Aunty Ifeoma in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* to set aside Papa Nnukwu's utterance: "But you are a woman. You do not count." In the home and family, the woman is indispensable; Aunty Ifeoma brings psychological balance to her children and she disciplines them with love and care, she encourages them in their talents, trains them to be useful citizens and inculcates cordiality in them. Her influence on her nephew and niece give them a new lease of life and they are able to socialize and integrate within the community as sensible individuals and not as social outcasts. She cleverly roots them into the Igbo culture through the use of the Igbo language and through the stories they hear from Papa Nnukwu while in Enugu. With love, openness, patience, and constructive criticism and exemplary interaction with the children, Aunty Ifeoma subtly counters Eugene's dogmatic religious codes that destroy, maim, debase and place the family in the politics of malign silence. Papa Nnukwu's life has value because of Aunty Ifeoma's presence in his life. Her self-actualization which is very important in the development

of the woman enables her to bond positively with other members of the society. Eugene fails woefully because he excludes Mama from his life. The paper concludes that without the woman's involvement in the affairs of the family, society, nation or continent, life will be comparable to a space void of life.

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