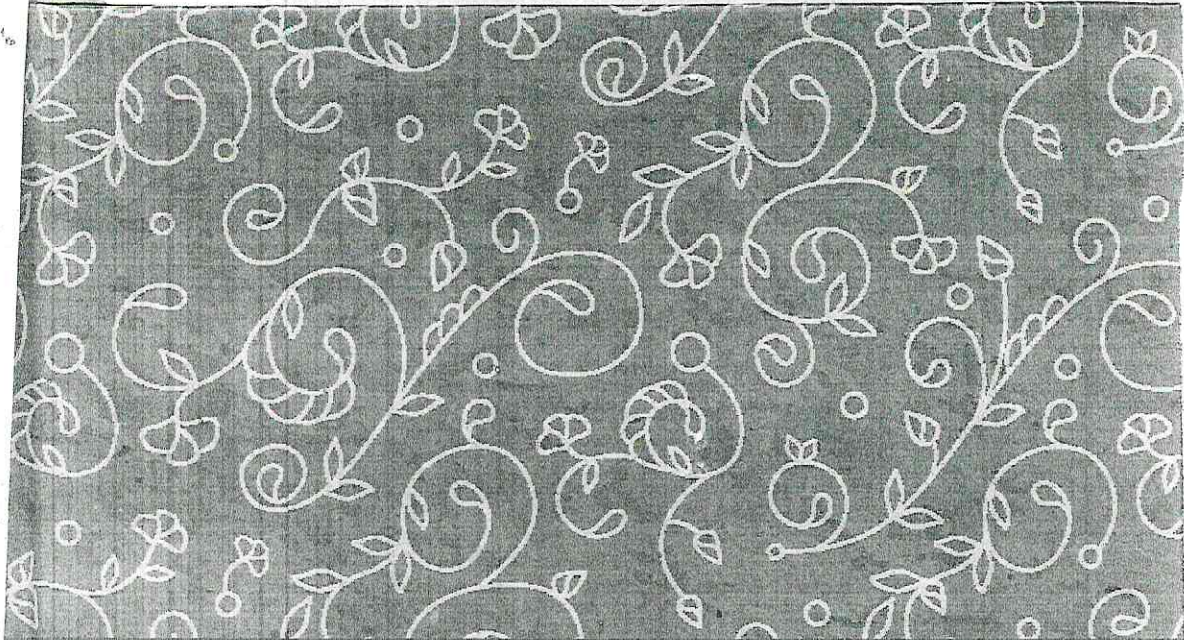


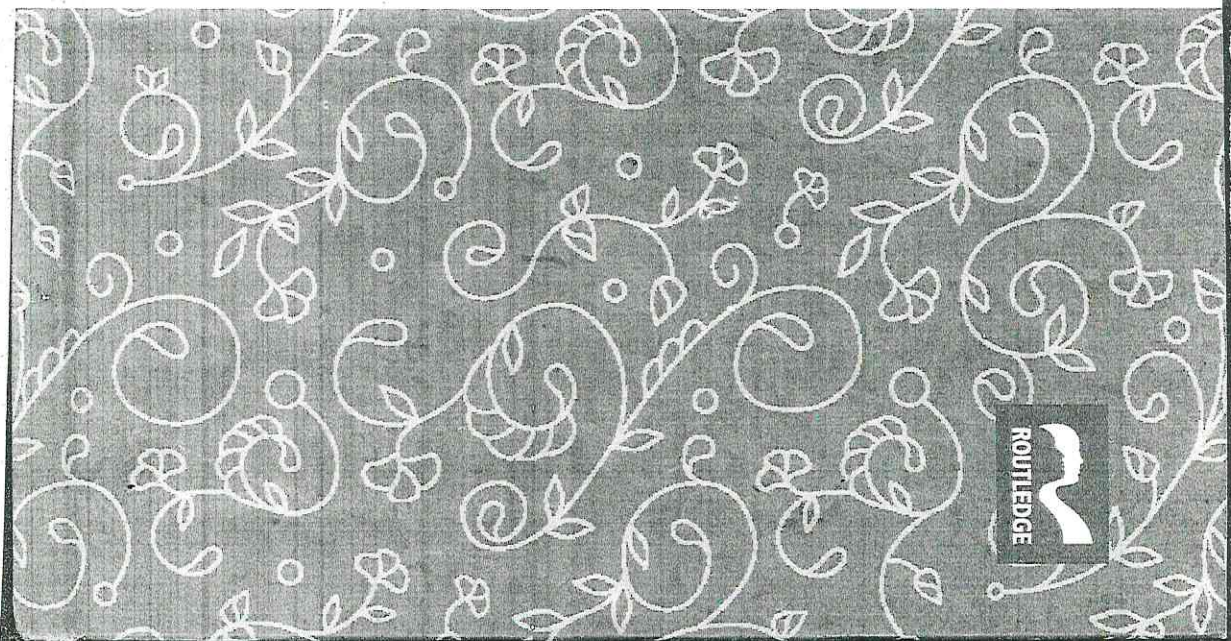


Routledge African Studies

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA AND ITS DIASPORA

Edited by

Akinloyè Òjó, Ibigbolade S. Aderibigbe and
Felisters Jepchirchir Kiprono



ROUTLEDGE



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2 Violence against women in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

An African feminist insight

Charles A. Bodunde and Foluke R. Aliyu-Ibrahim

Introduction

The definition of violence against women in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by the United Nations General Assembly is broad and significant, as it not only encapsulates the resultant effect that such violence can have on the woman but also expands such acts of violence to all aspects of life whether in the public or private sphere of the woman (see Article One of this Declaration).

One of the distinguishing features between the works of the first generation of Nigerian female writers (such as Flora Nwapa and Betty Emecheta), and those of their later counterparts (such as Tess Onwueme, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) as identified by Aliyu (2013: 10) is that early Nigerian female writers tended to focus largely on the sociocultural challenges facing the woman. Later Nigerian female writers, however, show a consciousness, and an interrogation, of not only their social conditions but also the economic and political environments in which both genders operate. Thus while violence against women in the works of earlier Nigerian female writers would be perceived mainly as occurring in the private sphere, recent female writers conceive violence as transpiring in both the private and public spheres. Also, such acts of violence are shown as detrimental not only to the woman but also the man. This chapter examines the presentation of violence against women in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) and how such acts affect both genders.

Theoretical framework

Rather than Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism" (1994: 230), Catherine Acholonu's "Motherism" (1995: 111), Mary Egun Kolawole's "Womanism" (1997: 26-27), or Obioma Nnaemeka's "Nego-Feminism" (2003: 376-78) which are arguably the most prevalent of Afro-centric notions of feminism, Foluke Aliyu (2013) proposes "African Feminisms" as an alternative concept in the analysis of African texts that have feminist intents. The main

thrust of African Feminisms is that the feminist theory to be adopted in the analysis of text with a feminist purpose should be determined by the culture(s) identified in the world of the text. While this is not of immediate significance to the purpose of this chapter, it is some of the other features of African Feminisms that are of direct relevance.

These features include the perception that the structures and systems that are oppressive of the women include those within culture and other socioeconomic and political structures. Hence, another feature of African Feminisms is the incorporation of other struggles into feminism. Also, African Feminisms conceive of these structures as being manipulated by both women and men. This agrees with the observation of the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women that violence can be perpetrated by both genders as well as the government. Furthermore, African Feminisms envisions that embedded in the culture are structures and systems that permit these oppressions to be challenged and bring about the needed solutions (Aliyu 2013: 86–89).

Violence in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

The perpetrators of violence in *Purple Hibiscus* (2004—subsequent references to this publication in this section are by page numbers only and are in parentheses) include Eugene, Beatrice, colonialist Britain, the postcolonial military government, and neocolonialism.

Physical and psychological violence are the ways through which Eugene—a strict Catholic—controls his family, made up of his wife Beatrice, his daughter Kambili, who is also the narrator, and his son Jaja (pp. 23, 32–34, 51, 193, 102, 248). Eugene's treatment of his makes them fear him so much so that silence reigns in the house, and only those things which will please Eugene are uttered. The children become shy and reticent about forming friendships with other children (pp. 48–49, 79, 117). Kambili, the narrator, likens the pressure her father puts on her for insisting that she be first in her class to “balancing a sack of gravel on my head every day at school and not being allowed to steady it with my hand” (p. 52). Their mother, Beatrice, takes solace in polishing the glass *étagère* and figurines in the dining room whenever her husband beats her (pp. 10–11). Adichie presents Auntie Ifeoma's handling of her children, and indeed, of the larger extended family—comprised of her brother Eugene and his own family, their father Papa-Nnukwu, and Auntie Ifeoma's dead husband's family—as the ideal way of treating one's family. Auntie Ifeoma uses the carrot-and-stick approach with all of them (pp. 74–75, 77, 82–83, 95–98, 120, 122, 142, 152, 245).

Beatrice is presented as meek and docile in the face of the abuses that she and her children face in the hands of Eugene. Her recourse to the glass *étagère* when her husband beats her calls to mind Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1945: 1718, 1723) where Laura uses her collection of glass figurines to escape from the realities of her life. Whenever Kambili notices

that the glass figurines have been polished, it means their mother has been physically battered by their father (pp. 190–93).

Beatrice resorts to killing her husband slowly by administering poison in his tea. Such an act would be considered extrajudicial in many cultures, including African culture. This is more so as there are alternatives she could have taken; alternatives that would not have wrought so much psychological pain on her and her children. Adichie thus attempts to delink motherhood with victimhood. Beatrice's motherhood is questioned because she refuses to leave when her life and those of her children are put in danger by an abusive father. Auntie Ifeoma attempts to sensitize her into leaving her husband (pp. 75, 214, 223, 249). Beatrice hinges her refusal to heed Auntie Ifeoma's advice on her appreciation of her husband's own refusal to marry other wives, who could bear him more children. This is despite the fact that Eugene's abusive ways are responsible for the forced abortions that prevent her from having more children, while also exposing her children to physical and mental harm and danger. In fact, the poisoning of her husband leads to Jaja spending years in prison, an experience, Kambili observes, that inflicts physical and psychological trauma on him and, by extension, on the family as a whole. Indeed, the change in him makes her doubt if there ever was a bond between them (pp. 304–5).

That the path of violence that Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* toes as the resolution of their problem is abhorred is evidenced by the fact that she changes for the worse when Jaja is imprisoned for the crime she commits (pp. 295–96). Equally important, for an act to be deemed heroic, it would need to be recognized and accepted as such by other people such that the qualities that are inherent in the person that carried out the act are viewed as admirable and worthy of being emulated. As evidenced in the novel, this is not applicable to Beatrice's act of killing her husband as no one believes she did it. Even her act of defiance against the tradition is not disapproved of in any manner (p. 296).

In regards to colonialist Britain, evangelism was the major excuse used by the white man for coming to, and eventually colonizing, Africa. Adichie, however, presents this historical fact as possessing the power of wreaking violence on some of the colonized people. In an interview, Adichie says, "I am also interested in colonized religion, how people like me can profess and preach a respect of their indigenous culture and yet cling tenaciously to a religion that considers most of that indigenous culture evil" (Adichie 2003: 2). Adichie interrogates the evangelizing/civilizing mission of the Western world in her text. She does this by juxtaposing the religious fanaticism of Eugene with the tolerance of his sister, Auntie Ifeoma. Eugene is presented as being so fanatic about Catholicism that he does not associate himself with his father or any of his friends, whom he sees as heathens (pp. 61, 70). He thus unleashes psychological violence on the old man. Even after allowing his children to visit their grandfather, he forbids them from accepting food or drink from him. If he has to give Papa-Nnukwu money, it is usually

"a slim wad of cash" which Kambili describes as "impersonal, paltry amounts of money" (p. 67). This treatment of Papa-Nnukwu by Eugene, his son, is contrasted with the respectful love that he (Eugene) shows his wife's father. Kambili, in her satirical tone, makes the reader understand that this is because her maternal grandfather is not only a knight of St. John, he also speaks English, albeit with a heavy Igbo accent (p. 67).

Kambili's father's fanaticism causes him to physically abuse his wife and children whenever they deliberately or inadvertently do not partake in any of the rituals of Catholicism (pp. 3, 10, 33, 102, 145, 193-94, 209-211, 248). This is reminiscent of the way he was "converted." Adichie's attitude toward the manner in which some of the missionaries carried out their evangelizing assignment is evident in Obiora's statement about the inextricable link between religion and oppression, which he symbolically captures in the metaphor of the making of "okpa" (p. 172). In striving to impose his religious belief on the black "heathen," it was not uncommon for the white evangelist to resort to violence. Eugene attempts to justify the punishment he has just meted to his children with the violent reprimand he receives from the Reverend Father he lived with when he finds him masturbating (p. 196).

Thus Adichie, while not condoning Eugene's behavior toward his family, seems, however, to give insight into the reasons for Eugene's violence against the members of his family. Again, Auntie Ifeoma's ease as a Catholic with her treatment of her father, Papa-Nnukwu, presents a contrast to Eugene's fanaticism. Indeed, Papa-Nnukwu's tolerance of the way his son treats him is admirable.

The story of *Purple Hibiscus* begins with a change in postcolonial political leadership: from civilian rule to a military one. Adichie borrows from historical events and incidents from Nigeria in her narrative. However, just as is seen in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968: 140-146), the coup does not change anything. In fact, the situation gets even worse. With the new government, the country witnesses dysfunctional, cynical, and corrupt leadership (pp. 37, 44, 111). This leads to inflation (p. 17), unemployment (pp. 75-76), and a breakdown of infrastructure (pp. 76, 129, 223, 246). Added to these challenges being faced by the people is the physical brutalization of the people by soldiers (pp. 27, 44).

Adichie transposes Eugene's abuse of his family to a larger scale as the narrative deals with certain historical moments of bad, corrupt, and tyrannical leaders in the country of Nigeria. This link is symbolically captured in Kambili's identification with the woman being physically abused by soldiers in the market: "...I thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I had not seen her face, but I felt that I knew her, that I had always known her" (p. 44). When the people react against the bad governance, the military government responds by persecuting, arresting, and killing (p. 200) perceived enemies. Eugene and Auntie Ifeoma are the two major characters that Adichie uses to challenge the military government. Eugene is made to go through the psychological agony of having to go underground

to publish his newspaper, *The Standard* (p. 43), of having the offices and his home invaded and ransacked by soldiers (p. 146), and of having his workers, especially the editor of the newspaper, arrested and eventually killed (pp. 38, 146, 206), just as they had earlier killed the pro-democracy activist Nwankiti Ogechi (p. 199). This violent killing of the editor, Ade Coker, through a parcel bomb affects Kambili to the extent that she begins to have nightmares (p. 207).

The military government's persecution of Auntie Ifeoma is more direct and physically more violent than that of her brother Eugene (pp. 222–30). This incident makes Auntie Ifeoma finally decide to immigrate to the United States just like her other colleagues, who left out of frustration. In any case, before she can finalize arrangements to leave, her appointment as lecturer in the university is terminated (p. 261).

Adichie has a word of caution for those who seek "greener pastures" in the Western world, as they would have to undergo some form of psychological ordeal in the process. The case of Auntie Ifeoma shows that living in the diaspora is like being a second-class citizen (p. 244) and is not as pleasant as imagined. There is the difficulty involved before being issued a visa (p. 278); there is the challenge of racial discrimination (p. 244), and the 'brain' itself is not as appreciated, as is suggested in the term 'brain drain' (p. 244). This situation is worsened by the challenges of survival in a new country. When Auntie Ifeoma arrives in America, for instance, she has to have two different jobs (pp. 300–301). In her correspondence to her niece, Auntie Ifeoma ignores the present and dwells on the past and sends Jaja cassette tape recordings of the voices of her family (pp. 300–301). Adichie seems to indicate here that for Auntie Ifeoma, the past (i.e., life in Nigeria with its problems) is more glorious than the present (i.e., life in America). It would not be far-fetched, then, to conclude that life is no better for Auntie Ifeoma in America.

Violence in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

Violence in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008—subsequent references to this publication in this section are by page numbers only and are in parentheses) is perpetrated by both male and female, is both physical and psychological and occurs in both public and private spheres. It is largely presented as being linked to sociocultural and economic factors in postcolonial Nigeria.

The primary reason that Nneoma goes to Italy is to secure a job (p. 15) which she, naively, envisages is a teaching appointment in the United Kingdom though she is later told, at the airport, that they would have to get to Italy first (pp. 126–27). In Italy, she realizes that she has been trafficked and has to work as a prostitute; she is thus exposed to physical and mental violence from her different owners in both Italy and London (pp. 126–34, 156–59). Mental torture continues even on her deportation back home (pp. 53–54, 270–73).

Nneoma falls into the hands of traffickers because of poverty in her family. First, she is born into a poor family. Her father, Ogwuke, cannot rise above his station as clerk as he was not wealthy enough to register for the exams that could have led to a better professional career (p. 9). Again, life is no better for the family on Ogwuke's retirement, as the government does not pay his gratuity and pension (pp. 71, 87, 109-12). Ogwuke is thus frustrated and initially takes to alcohol to escape his worries (p. 71). This places pressure on his wife, Adaeze, who becomes virtually the only income earner for the family (p. 152). Ogwuke's economic situation is also responsible for the wrong choice of husband that Nneoma's sister, Hannah, makes. Hannah defies tradition and goes to live with the religious fanatic Prophet Elias out of frustration at her father's "complaints and pathetic groans over the non-payment of his gratuity" (p. 170). There, Hannah becomes a victim of violence as she, alongside the other wives of Prophet Elias, is whipped whenever she or any one of them angers him (pp. 171-72, 182).

Poverty is presented as being pervasive throughout the country. This is despite the change in government from military to civilian rule (pp. 35, 196-97, 207). This leads to chaos in the land as the producers and consumers of the different sectors of the economy react. This naturally results in both physical and psychological suffering by the people (pp. 101, 104, 122-23, 159, 161-72, 242, 252). The same economic reason also forces another character, Efe, into prostitution (pp. 98-100).

Such an economic situation as painted by Adimora-Ezeigbo suggests a failed government that is incapable of controlling and managing events. For instance, one wonders about the kind of government that permits people like Prophet Elias to carry out such violent religious activities and the equally violent reactions of the people of the community (pp. 219-26). The situation also has the potential of leading to moral decadence. This is evidenced in the psychological violence which Ofomata is made to go through as a result of the illegal financial demands made on him by some of his lecturers, Dr. Rafiu Komolafe and Mr. Ogamba (pp. 32-33, 106-108).

Psychological pressure is exerted on Nneoma by the economic situation of her family as she is perceived as their "only source of relief and hope for a better life" (p. 20). This hope is hinged on her impending marriage to Ofomata, who comes from a rich family. Despite being a happy match on both sides, one would question whether such a responsibility is not placing too much pressure on an eighteen-year-old girl. Culture is further implicated in Nneoma's decision to seek employment in the United Kingdom. Ofomata is destined to become the next *ozo nkwu*, a palm-tree trampler (p. 31). It is, however, a fate which Nneoma does not want for herself and her future husband (pp. 76-77). Nneoma's rejection makes Ofomata think that she finds him unworthy. Part of the struggle of Ofomata to improve himself makes him seek a university degree, where he is exposed to the threat of failure unless he accedes to the financial demands of some corrupt lecturers.

Cultural practices, added to the economic ones, are also responsible for the various types of violence which confront Nneoma and her family in the novel. Ezeozo, her uncle, exploits the custom that dictates that the first son inherit their dead father's property. Thus, Nneoma's father, Ogwuke, is forced to live in strained circumstances in his mother's tiny hut beside the main house which he built together with his brother, Ezeozo. Added to his deplorable economic condition, his brother's wife, Lebechi and her children, Ezike and Olanwa, constantly unleash physical and psychological violence on him and his family (pp. 43–47, 69–70, 118–19, 212–13).

Conclusion

Our examination of the presentation of violence in both novels has shown the interrelationship between violence in private and public lives and also between the perpetrators and victims of the various types of violence identified herein. For example, Adichie portrays the domestic violence inflicted on Beatrice and her children by Eugene as a consequence of the violence wrought on him by the evangelizing Reverend Father, an association that was necessitated by colonialism. Another connection is made between violence in public and private lives through Kambili's identification with the woman that she witnesses being beaten by soldiers. Again, those seeking to escape the violence of the military rule by relocating to the Western world are faced with other types of violence. A similar scenario occurs in *Trafficked*, where Adimora-Ezeigbo links the various factors that are responsible for both male and female characters to turn to physical and psychological violence.

This link is equally reflected in the plots of the two novels, which are tightly knitted together. For instance, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the abusive control of the protagonist's father comes to an end at about the same time that the regime of the military ruler terminates. Consequently, in both novels studied, the brutality of the activities of male and female characters in private and public lives cannot be divorced from the experiences of others (both male and female) as they negotiate these experiences.

Therefore, what the authors seem to be advocating in these two works is that violence against women should be viewed as a menace to society, as it affects both genders, and that any solution to this problem should be holistic and include how to address other developmental challenges currently bedeviling the nation.

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