

## Oppression Faced by Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003)

Muhammad Hary Rusli<sup>a,1\*</sup>, Eni Nur Aeni<sup>b,2</sup>, Tribuana Sari<sup>c,3</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto

<sup>b</sup> Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto

<sup>c</sup> Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto

<sup>1</sup> muhammad.rusli@mhs.unsoed.ac.id; <sup>2</sup> eni.nuraeni@unsoed.ac.id; <sup>3</sup> tribuana.sari@unsoed.ac.id

\* korespondensi penulis

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bentuk-bentuk penindasan yang terjadi terhadap tokoh utama bernama Kambili dalam novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Sumber data penelitian ini dikumpulkan dari novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) karya Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie dan data penelitian ini adalah bukti penindasan terhadap Kambili. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan teori Iris Marion Young tentang penindasan dan teori Patriarki Sylvia Walby. Dalam teori Iris Marion Young, penindasan terbagi menjadi eksploitasi, marginalisasi, ketidakberdayaan, imperialisme budaya, dan kekerasan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman Kambili dalam penindasan terwujud dalam bentuk penindasan bahasa dan budaya, ketidakberdayaan dalam pengambilan keputusan, dan kekerasan fisik dan psikologis. Selain itu, tekanan yang dihadapi Kambili juga dilanggengkan oleh ayahnya sendiri yang menganut praktik patriarki yang berdampak pada kurangnya suara Kambili.

Kata kunci: patriarki, penindasan, wanita

### ABSTRACT

This research intended to show the forms of oppression experienced by Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) novel. This novel talks about how Kambili, as the main character, encounters oppression from her father who adheres to patriarchal ideology within the household. To analyze this issue, this research used a qualitative method. Moreover, this research applied Iris Marion Young's theory of Oppression and Sylvia Walby's theory of Patriarchy to analyze the reason behind the father's patriarchal ideology and oppressive acts. Iris Marion Young divides oppression into five types namely exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. The result of this study showed that Kambili only experiences three types of oppression out of the five types proposed by Young's theory. Kambili's experiences of oppression manifested in form of language and cultural oppression, powerlessness in decision-making, and physical and psychological violence. It was found that the oppression experienced by Kambili was due to the patriarchal value and religious justification examined by her father. In addition, the oppression experienced by Kambili affected her lack of confidence and voice as she was terrified by the punishment from her authoritarian father.

Keywords: patriarchy, oppression, woman

Copyright ©2022 All Right Reserved

### INTRODUCTION

Oppression is defined as a social issue that can be found and occurred in all circles of society, especially in powerless social groups or individuals. Normally, political, economic, cultural, or social degradation is the main factor experienced by these groups since they belong to groups resulting from structures of domination and subordination, along with the ideology of superiority and inferiority that is the root of patriarchy

(Charlton, 1998: 8). In a nutshell, oppression can be seen as a situation when someone reduces another person's potential to be fully human or makes another person less human. Oppression can result in the choices or policies of a few people that cause the embedded norms, habits, and symbols to become unquestioned norms in society.

Oppression has been widely studied in terms of gender or women's oppression since men can be said to have had greater

dominance throughout history, placing women as objects or men's possessions. (Mafakhir, 2016:12). Within the scope of patriarchy, the position held by men as the head of the family, influences them to have the freedom to dominate their wives and children at their will. Men, husbands, think that they are the superior gender and has the right to do anything including acts of obscenity and domestic violence. As a result of higher or superior thinking, they consider it a natural way to discipline their wives and arrange things to go their way. As they feel their virility is being challenged, they see violence as an appropriate way for men to exercise dominance and control (Anderson, 1997:658). The novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, illustrates this topic clearly.

The novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) is set in Enugu, a city in post-colonial Nigeria in the late twentieth century. It speaks of family members who have been treated unfairly as a consequence of the misinterpretation of the family head's religion. The novel is told through the eyes of the main character named Kambili Achike, a fifteen-year-old girl who grows up from a painfully shy teenager who lives through her father's domination, into a confident young woman. Kambili is considered arrogant at school for fear of troubling her father. In addition, Papa (a nickname for Kambili's father Eugene Achike) uses violence to impose his own type of oppression on his family because it constructs the characteristics of a 15-year-old girl. Kambili's growing-up experiences included learning to separate her own religion from her father's radical views. The journey taught her to face adulthood with confidence, a journey that proved to be more difficult than anyone could have imagined. Furthermore, her journey led her to her ability to manage her social and economic structures for her own good and free herself from violent anarchy in the name of beliefs perpetuated by her own biological father, Eugene Achike.

According to Frye (1983), one of the main claims of feminism is that women are oppressed. Because of the patriarchal system, oppression occurs. The oppression of women

has caused concern around the world, especially in industrialized countries known for their great respect for human rights. Domestic bullying (violence) occurs in every four homes, according to a study conducted in the UK and North America, and one in every 10 women experiences bullying from their partner. To understand the oppression that occurs within the scope of the private patriarchy (domestic) *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), this study will distinguish the oppression into Young's five faces of oppression. Young (1990) in his book *Justice and the Politics of Differences* mentions that there are five types of oppression: violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism

Earlier before this research, many previous studies have discussed the oppression issue in African authors' works. The first previous study comes from Ovriza Dien Kartika (2017) research entitled "Racial Oppression against African American Slaves in Harriette Gillem Robinet's *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule*". Many kinds of oppression occur in this story such as powerlessness and marginalization. In the end, it reinforced the superiority of whites as the powerful oppressors and the inferiority of blacks as the oppressed group. The second study comes from Swi Idayati Simanjuntak (2015) in her research entitled "Oppression and Racism toward Black Americans in '12 Years a Slave' Movie". The research analyzed the types of oppression faced by the main male characters named Platt and Patsey. The result shows that among 5 types of oppression, all of the types are found in this movie namely exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

Similarly, as the previous researches mentioned above, this current study uses the theory of oppression by Iris Marion Young in order to identify the type of oppression faced by the main character. However, what distinguishes this current research is the focus on the oppression in domestic households faced by Kambili. The oppression of the main character allows the reader to understand the essence of life's hardships. Moreover, the idea of patriarchal oppression

that seemed to be normalized in our society becomes the main adjustment that this research intends to change in order to treat women equally.

### METHOD

The descriptive qualitative approach was employed in this study's methodology. Endraswara (2011:5) mentions that a descriptive qualitative approach is one in which the study is described in words or pictures, rather than numbers. Furthermore, according to Kothari (2004: 3), qualitative research is concerned with qualitative phenomena. The purpose of this approach is to convey Kambili's experience of oppression as the main character in the novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). The researcher collected data by reading the novel several times, selecting the character to be evaluated, categorizing and determining the relevant data, and gathering supporting data from additional sources. The data will be analyzed utilizing Young's theory of oppression in the data analysis.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section intensely discusses Adhicie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) analysis regarding the oppression faced by the main character Kambili. When addressing women's oppression, it is conceivable to conclude that conditions of unfairness exist between men and women. The patriarchal system or patriarchal ideology is the source of the oppression. The patriarchal system favors males over women, particularly in terms of beliefs, demands, behaviors, and practices. In Kambili's situation, Kambili as a daughter of a respected man in African society has to deal with the oppression that occurred within her home. The oppression leads Kambili to suffer in developing herself and her voice. Albeit Young (2014) divided oppression into five types, this current study only found three types of oppression faced by Kambili: language and cultural imperialism, powerlessness in decision-making, and physical and psychological violence

#### a. Language and Cultural Oppression

Adhicie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) is a depiction of society in Enugu, Nigeria during

the late 80s or two decades after Nigeria's independence from British colonialism. In this novel, Kambili is described as a young woman who lives in a respectful family in Enugu. Her father has a big influence over the town and the church. However, her life was not as beautiful as it seems since her identity as an African has faded due to the internalization process of her father's European values. Kambili faced several cultural imperialisms in this novel since she was forced to follow her father's beliefs and western-based values. One example of cultural imperialism is when Kambili narrates that her father, Eugene Achikie, prohibits her and the other family member to speak their own language, Igbo. Below is the dialogue that shows the cultural imperialism

*"Jaja, have you not shared a drink with us, gbo? Have you no words in your mouth?" he asked, entirely in Igbo. A bad sign. He hardly spoke Igbo, and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English. (Adichie, 13)*

From the dialogue above, it can be inferred that Eugene Achikie, the head of the family member, forced the family member including Kambili to only speak English in public in order to sound more "civilized". This situation supports that the father has the power to ask people to do what he wants to do and apply that as a normal condition and a cultural norm within the household. The given quote gives the parallel with cultural imperialism as Kambili indirectly infers that English is the civilized language and Igbo is the uncivilized language. Thus, after Kambili saw her father was speaking in Igbo, she did not dare to speak Igbos in public as her brother did due to the fear of being uncivilized according to her papa's belief. This fear grew so strong in the 15 years old girl's mind and her father was taking advantage of this and implemented Kambili's obedience in speaking English until it became a normal culture in the house.

Moreover, the relation of cultural imperialism with the language used also happened when Papa Eugene saw an Igbo-singing priest during the mass. Below is the

quotation given by Kambili as the narrator of the story:

*"That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him," (Adichie, 29)*

Kambili vividly described the cultural imperialism of her own language perpetuated by her own father as she is prohibited to sing in the Igbo language during the mass. The above quote represents Papa Eugene's view of his own culture and how he sees the Igbo language and culture as "godless" and destructive as "mushrooms". This is in accordance with Young (1990) who stated that cultural imperialism victims are forced to follow the dominant view as "the other" experiences stereotypes and at the same time is rendered invisible.

Another cultural imperialism faced by Kambili also happened outside the private sphere. Kambili faced cultural imperialism at her school, an exclusive and luxurious catholic school for young women in Enugu, Daughters of the Immaculate Heart. There, Kambili stated that she is obligated to speak English, and worst, she and the Enugu community are prohibited to sing the national anthem of Nigeria. This idea is can be seen when Kambili mentioned, *"Only the Nigerian Reverend Sisters sang, teeth flashing against their dark skins. The white Reverend Sisters stood with arms folded (Adichie 48)."* Overall, cultural imperialism happened to bring disastrous implications to Kambili's identity because the dominant groups; Papa and his orthodox Roman Catholic Church portrayed their own experience as representations of their society. Once this occurs, dominant groups frequently lead non-dominant groups to believe that everything that exists belongs to universality, which is a stereotype manufactured or generated by the dominant group themselves.

#### **b. Powerlessness in Decision Making**

In the novel *Purple Hibiscus (2003)* there are many conditions concerning the powerlessness issue. The novel depicts how Kambili is silenced by his father as she has a fear of disappointing her father due to the

consequences she might get. Kambili's father justifies his acts by citing his religious views, and he administers chastisement as if he is God or an ancient all-powerful ruler. According to Young, powerlessness seems to be a hopeless state in which one side is disrespected by the other but lacks the ability to fight back or obtain fairness. A few of the underlying injustices linked with powerlessness include the inability to develop one's capabilities, a lack of decision-making capacity, and being subjected to contemptuous behavior as a result of one's lower standing. The examples of powerlessness shown in *Purple Hibiscus (2003)* are described on evidence below:

*"I did not think I did not even think to think, what Mama needed to be forgiven for" (Adichie 35-36)*

The context of this monologue is when Papa has punished Mama Beatrice for refusing to visit their priest since she had morning sickness, he instructs his children to perform sixteen novenas for Mama might be forgiven for her transgression. As a result, the sentence above demonstrates how conditioned Kambili is as a result of her upbringing. She believes whatever her father says and anticipates violence as if it were the ordinary since she is terrified by her father's tremendous authority.

Moreover, this is also supported by the time when Kambili and her brother Jaja were having dinner alone right after the accident.

*"We did not talk about Mama. Instead, we talked about the three men who were publicly executed two days before, for drug trafficking" (Adichie, 33)*

In these cases, silence serves as both an oppressor and a victim of oppression. Eugene's mistreatment of his family is one of the key reasons for this persecution. This is in accordance with Young's (1990) statement which states that the powerless do not have the authority and status to fight and remain silent which is rooted in the fear of domination. Kambili recognized that her mother was not guilty at all yet she found herself powerless in enduring the oppression from her father.

"Sentralisasi Peran Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia Menuju Masyarakat Berliterasi"

22 Oktober 2022, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman

Hal 280-286

Furthermore, the power of Papa Eugene leads nobody in the family talks about the abuse that occurs within the home. However, Kambili is surprised to learn that Jaja has told their aunt Ifeoma about the reason why he lost his little finger when he was little.

*Had Jaja forgotten that we never told, that there was so much that we never told? When people asked, he always said his finger was "something" that had happened at home. That way, it was not a lie and it let them imagine some accident, perhaps involving a heavy door. I wanted to ask Jaja why he had told Aunty Ifeoma, but I knew there was no need to, that this was one question he did not know the answer to. (Adichie, 154)*

As the father controlling their every step, constantly arranging their daily rundown and imposing his rigid religious practice, Kambili learned through the years that to confront with silence is the safest and strongest way to deal with her personal pain. She must stay strong and unmoved by the hardship they must undergo. Kambili recognizes that she must obey Papa Eugene's demands since she regards Papa as the family's respected head.

### c. Physical and Psychological Violence

The third oppression faced by Kambili is violent acts. In this book, Kambili's family is shown as being under threat, with the home being completely taken over and entirely governed by Papa Eugene. Young (1990) has clarified violence as the most explicit and obvious manifestation of women's oppression in this context. Physical or verbal violence depicts acts of hostility and attacks on a person's freedom or dignity that can be carried out by individuals or groups of people typically connected to their power.

The violence faced by Kambili is linked with the concept of private patriarchy as her father overcontrols and subjugates the family members to his wishes and demand. This is supported by Walby (1990:20), as she describes private patriarchy as a 'system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women in their own household'.

#### C.1. Physical Violence Faced by Kambili

Kambili has been subjected to two types of physical violence: one that is spontaneous and angry, and the other that is premeditated and calculated. Papa Eugene's furious violence is not considered a torture method in the sense that it is described in Foucault's Discipline and Punish (Foucault, 1977), as to be classified as torture, the punishment must "rain upon the body indiscriminately or evenly; it is prepared according to specified regulations" (Foucault, 1977:34). Even though this type of rage-filled violence is not specifically addressed in Foucault's theory, it is essential for comprehending Papa Eugene's character, the family's position, and the unexpected violence that contributes significantly to Kambili's lack of expression.

Kambili as the youngest child in her house faced several tortures by her father just because she has done something that her father considered sinful. This example can be seen under the following data:

*"Papa did not sway often. His swaying was like shaking a bottle of Coke that burst into violent foam when you opened it" (Adichie, 210).*

The context of the data above is when Kambili is caught bringing her grandfather's picture to the house. In the story, Papa's father is a man whom Papa has no contact with and whom Kambili is not allowed to see either just because he believes different religion. Due to this physical abuse, Papa Eugene almost kills Kambili since the "swaying" were too much for a little girl to bear and led her to faint.

Another example of violent rages perpetuated by Papa Eugene is when Kambili eats cereals before the Mass due to her painful period cramps. Kambili asked her mother about the pain she faced and later is asked to eat some food before the Mass started. However, her father did not accept that reason and became angry with Kambili. He later shouted and beat Kambili with a heavy belt. This description can be seen from the data below:

*"He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather-covered buckle..."*

Kambili describes the belt as a heavy belt that allows her body to be bruised. Here, Kambili accepted the pain she endures as she feels sinful because she disobeyed her father's regulation. Her father shouted that she has to prioritize the Mass since it is holy and more important than her 'hunger'.

Aside from his violent rages, Papa Eugene's physical aggression against Kambili is more premeditated and torturous in character. For an instance, he punishes both Kambili and Jaja for visiting their grandpa at aunt Ifeoma's residence without informing their father. Torture, according to Young, is a strategy, not an "extreme display of unrestrained wrath" (1990; 33-34). To qualify as torture, the punishment must meet three conditions, according to her: it must cause pain, the agony must be controlled, and the torture must leave a mark on the victim. Papa Eugene meets these requirements when he cruelly punishes his children for spending time with their grandfather by dumping boiling water on their bare feet. Kambili's suffering is so intense that she initially feels no discomfort as Papa Eugene carefully pours a pot of hot water over her feet, lowering the pain intensity. The scorching water badly burns her skin, leaving her with permanent scars. When Papa Eugene is done punishing Kambili, he informs her, "That is what you do to yourself when you wander into sin." "You've burned your feet" (Adichie, 194-95).

## **C.2. Psychological Violence Faced by Kambili**

In Kambili's case, she also suffers from psychological violence. In this novel, Kambili is regarded as a prisoner in her own house, and she is constantly monitored by her father and other people who report to him. This comment confirms Kambili's father's psychological abuse because she lives in a spacious house in a good neighborhood but is rarely let outside on herself. She can't even see the street from her house due to the towering walls that surround the property. It may be seen in the data below:

*"The compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires, were so high I could not see the cars driving past on our street" (Adichie, 9).*

The data above shows how Kambili and her family member are treated by the authoritarian control of her father. Kambili is forced to follow the rule as it was a normal rule in society and eventually affects her mindset at such a very young age. Kambili was considered a very shy girl and avoided any social activity due to the restrictions from her father.

Furthermore, Papa requires assistance and is aided by Kevin, the family's driver who spies on the rest of the family in order to carry out his monitoring. Even slight inconsistencies in the children's schedules, such as leaving the school building a few minutes late, are reported to his boss. Kevin parks the car outside the school gates, and Kambili hurries to the car right after her last lesson every day so that Kevin doesn't tell her father she was late. This makes her an outsider among the other females at school since she avoids even casual conversation with them.

*"Maybe after school, you should stop running off like that and walk with us to the gate. Why do you always run, anyway" (Adichie, 51)*

Her schoolmates are unaware that she departs so swiftly every day because of fear of being penalized; they believe she is snooty and does not appreciate their friendship. Instead, Kambili has been affected by all the restrictions since she feels guilty to disobey her father even though he is not around her. The emotional abuse that she encounters leads her to seek perfection in her father's desire. This corresponds to the characteristic of psychological violence, it entails trauma to the victim produced by acts, threats of acts, or coercive techniques (Zuhriyyah, 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

Kambili as the main character in the novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) experienced systematic oppression within the patriarchal private sphere specifically in a domestic household. Based on Young's theory of five oppressions, it was found that Kambili experienced three kinds oppression, namely language and cultural oppression, powerlessness in decision-making, and physical and psychological violence. Kambili was forced to speak the language by her

"Sentralisasi Peran Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia Menuju Masyarakat Berliterasi"

22 Oktober 2022, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman

Hal 280-286

father who was influenced by western culture in which he prioritized English as an astonishing language. In addition, Kambili also experienced powerlessness in decision-making since throughout the novel, Kambili narrates how she wanted to do things differently in the first place. However, her father always controls her as a dictator. Lastly, Kambili also deals with physical and psychological violence from her father. As Kambili was completely powerless as a young woman, her father took justification for this condition to do his physical violence acts. Moreover, her father also manipulated Kambili which is resulting in Kambili's over-fear of her father's punishment and how she behaves and socializes. Thus, it can be inferred that Kambili is oppressed and is positioned to be inferior and subordinate to her papa because he uplifts patriarchal ideology. As he is the head of the family member, he executed every way to discipline Kambili and used his religion, position, and power as justification to do immoral things.

## REFERENCES

- Adichie, C. N. (2005). *Purple Hibiscus*. Fourth Estate.
- Anderson, K. L. (1997). Gender, Status, and Domestic Violence: An Integration of Feminist and Family Violence Approaches. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59(3), 655–669. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353952>
- Charlton, J. I. (1998). Nothing about us without us disability oppression and empowerment. Berkeley: University of California Press, 8-12.
- Endraswara, S. (2011). *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*. Yogyakarta: CAPSGregory.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Frye, M. (1983). *The politics of reality: Essays in feminist theory*.
- Kartika, O. D. (2017). Racial Oppression against African American Slaves in Harriette Gillem Robinet's Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule. Thesis.
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology. Methods and Techniques. Second Edition*, New Delhi: New Age International Publisher.
- Mafakhir, T. (2006). The Struggle of Zarri Bano Gains Against Patriarchy in Qaisra Shahraz's The Holy Woman. Thesis. Malang : Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim. English Language and Letters Department.
- Simanjuntak, S. I. (2015). Oppression and Racism Toward Black American in '12 Years a Slave' Movie. Thesis.
- UN World Health Organization. (2021). *World report on violence and health*. ISBN 92 4 154561 5, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/54aa8f744.html> [accessed 21 September 2021]
- Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell.
- Young, I. M. (2014). *Five Faces of Oppression*. 2014 State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 40-57.
- Zuhriyah, E.F. (2012). *Violence against Women in Deborah Rodriguez's Kabul Beauty School*. Thesis. State Islamic University Malang.