INTERFACE OF RELIGIOUS FANATICISM AND TOLERANCE: A READING OF
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S PURPLE HIBISCUS

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Abstract
The paper, using chimamanda ngozi adichie purple hibiscus as a case study, reviews religious fanaticism and tolerance, as they could co-exist in the society. While attempting a conceptual overview of religion, it stresses the negative effects of religious fanaticism with the view to encourage tolerance amongst all faith(s) practitioners in Nigeria, and by extension considers tolerance as the real antidote against religious problems and disturbance in a secular nation like our nation, Nigeria. A situation where practitioners of various faiths in the country will learn to eschew religious bigotry and chasm in order to encourage and promote peaceful co-existence that the nation needs to forge ahead as an emerging democratic nation.

Introduction
It is very pertinent, from the outset, to make it clear that this paper is not meant to be a theoretical study of fanaticism and tolerance as they affect all religions. Going by the demand of its title, it is just an attempt to appreciate an Africa literary text (fiction by classification) considered to have raised some issues in religious extremism and peaceful co-existence.

Religions
It is very difficult today, to have an acceptable definition of religion. It is such a sensitive phenomenon, which stands for different things for different people. However, in all the popular definitions of religion, there is a familiar common acceptance of the fact that it is a system which relates man to his ultimate value, be it God or something else and such that involves creed and communion. Other things associated with religion are beliefs about God or gods, nature and the supernatural. Going by the above, it is easier to know the reason for religious multiplicity or pluralism world over. Religion is as diverse as people's beliefs, culture and values are diverse. Even within an identified religion, doctrinal base could be multiple. African religion manifests this multiple doctrinal diversity because primarily it is anchored on African culture. The culture of a people embodies their beliefs, philosophies, values, ethics, mores, history, knowledge, morality, word-views, customs, music, drama, social and political systems. African traditional belief can be divided into five functional segments: namely, beliefs in God, divinities, ancestors, spirit, magic and medicine. The above listed components of faith form the kernel of traditional religion. Every true African, at least by virtue of environmental, cultural activities and genealogical connections and contacts, is said to be familiar not only with African mode of belief, but its doctrinal range and multiplicity.

Christianity, has its roots in the Jewish historical doctrine of Yahweh. It is a religion that extols monotheism as it is seen throughout the two testaments of the Bible - the Old Testament and the new one. The most dominant aspect of the religion - Christology, encapsulates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of a fact, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ especially the significant event of resurrection, became the cardinal doctrinal foundation on which Christian religion is grafted. Christianity equally recognizes the concept of Trinity. That means the idea of God, the father, his son Jesus Christ and the Holy spirit coming together as one and functioning as one but in spite of common acceptance of Jesus Christ as the arrow head of Christianity, and the Trinity as the tripod stand upon which the religion is built, its doctrines are still diverse according to cultures and beliefs. The Islamic religion contends the idea of divine partnership of the triune, it does not recognize the concept of Trinity and believes in only one God as revealed by his Prophet, Muhammed. However, within the Islamic faith, there are various doctrinal groups and units all functioning as branches of the same faith.

Religious Differences, Fanaticism and Tolerance
Generally speaking, the differences in religious beliefs are traceable to the phenomenon of diverse cultural backgrounds that engender them. Every major religion has its own cultural colouring. For example, the Christian religion derives its cultural colouring. For example, the Christian religion derives its cultural bias from the Jewish traditions; a modification of Judaism.
While African traditional religion, as earlier said, has its roots in African belief-order and in the case of Islamic religion, its cultural fabric is essentially Arabic. Attitude is another factor that affects issues of religion. Inter-religious relationship is largely determined by attitude factor. Given the complex and unpredictable nature of human psychological makeup, (inclination, emotion, motivation, sentiment) and their spiritual peculiarities (inspiration, orientation and vision) it is least surprising that they sometimes swing to the extreme on the delicate scale of mood guiding human altitude. Thus, in most human endeavours, especially, the one that have to do with emotion, conviction, attitude, inclination, bias, religion, ideology and opinion extremism or fanaticism could be experienced.

On the other hand, tolerance is the ability to rationally handle a strange, unfamiliar situation (mostly unpleasant situations) without losing one's ability to put under control sentiment and other extreme reactions. Tolerance can equally be seen as the ability to accommodate other people's peculiarities and nuances. Equally, tolerance could be culturally sensitive or friendly. In fact, it is the much-needed positive principle of "compromise" and "accommodation" in the delicate world of relationship amongst peoples of divergent cultures, and religious different behavioural patterns, ideas, belief-systems, diverse living-patterns, distinct ideological and political persuasions.

**Purple Hibiscus**

*Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a novel with the story of a wealthy Nigerian family whose head, Eugene, practised a brand of violent, cruel and fanatical Catholicism that could be easily isolated from what other characters in the novel practised. The novel also has-as a sub-plot of a tyrannical and almost fanatical brand of military rule that stifled the voice of independent opinion just like the imposition of fanatical Catholicism did to Eugene family. Very easily in the novel, Eugene's fanatical intolerance of the mistakes of people became noticeable. Due to his cruel religious upbringing, he exhibited religious high handedness in his relationship with others he considered not up and doing in keeping to religious rules. He almost lynched his son Jaja for not attending a communion. Eugene was intolerant of his father's religion. Of a fact, he literally disowned him on account of what he called his heathenism (paganism) and therefore kept skeletal contact with him by proxy. At a Christmas, in his home village, he warned his children not to eat and drink in his father's house as they were going to visit him:

Kambili and Jaja, you will go this afternoon to your grandfather's house and greet him. Kelvin will take you, remember, don't touch any food, don't drink anything, and as usual, you will slay not longer than fifteen minutes, fifteen minutes. (61)

As the children were leaving for Papa Nnukwu house; he further commented:

I don't like to send you to the home of a heathen, but God will protect you. (62)

Papa Nnukwu too, having known his son Eugene's mindset about him and his belief said on seeing Kambili and Jaja: I know your father will not let you eat here because I offer food to our ancestors. (66)

When the children arrived home, Eugene, as a follow-up to his instruction, questioned them further to ascertain that in the course of visiting their grandfather, they had not contaminated with his heathenism:

Kelvin said you stayed up to twenty five minutes with your grandfather; is that what I told you? What did you do there? Did you eat food sacrificed to idols? Did you desecrate your Christian tongues? (69)

And while speaking to the children, he caught a sight of a fellow who had come to wish him happy Christmas and just because, the fellow was not of catholic persuasion, he got angry with him:

What is he doing in my house? What is Anikwenwa doing in my house? What is Anikwenwa doing in my house? What is a worshipper of idol doing in my house? Leave my house! (70)

Later still, during the Christmas, when his children Kambili and Jaja and that of aunty Ifeoma
were to go on a short excursion or sight-seeing (although the real intention was to witness Muo festival in Aro) Eugene, though not privy to the real purpose of the journey-makers, thought they were just going for a sight-seeing as they had said, still warned (Aunty Ifeoma in addition):

I do not want my children near anything ungodly, if you drive past Muo keep your windows up. (78)

Even after the Christmas at the village, instances of Eugene's religious wickedness and fanaticism continued to manifest. He descended on is daughter and beat her mercilessly for eating before the Eucharist. Not minding the explanation of his wife about Kambili's menstruation that made her to have cramps hence her need to eat and take medicine. When Papa Nnukwu died, Eugene refused to participate in burying him. He did not want to get spiritually contaminated burying a heathen. So, he preferred sending money to Aunty Ifeoma who undertook the funeral rites. He would later, in most bestial manner, want to drum some fanatical spiritual lessons into Kambili's consciousness by soaking her feel in hot water for refusing to inform him that the heathen, Papa Nnukwu, was with them, at the later part of his life, at Nsukka, where they had gone for holiday. Again, when he discovered that, Kambili kept the paint - caricature of Papa Nnukwu and brought it to Eugene as a souvenir of Papa Nnukwu memories, he beat Kambili until he was hospitalized for days. The wife too, did not escape her husband's inhuman religious highhandedness; she was beaten to a pulp for contravening an alleged religious offence. In fact, unknown to Eugene, the wife lost a six-week pregnancy in the process. Little wonder when Eugene was gradually poisoned to death by his very wife, the children could not but give a tacit agreement in support of what they must have read as a good riddance to fanatical religious bigotry!

Closely pitched against the theme of religious fanaticism, cruelty and intolerance in *Purple Hibiscus* are the themes of freedom of belief, tolerance and cultural - sensitivity. Unlike Eugene's style of Catholicism, Aunty Ifeoma's normal Catholicism brimmed with confidence, friendliness, kindness, love, happiness, and freedom. Aunty Ifeoma's liberal disposition to religion and other issues of life produced in her home a robust and respected culture of independent assessment. Her house, for Kambili, was like an escape route to cultural emancipation and unrepressed freedom of expression as against the stifling and rigid religious atmosphere that harassed discretion and initiatives to submission in Eugene's house. It was through Aunty Ifeoma that the little Kambili knew that Papa Nnukwu, in the real sense, was not a heathen or pagan but a practitioner of African traditional religion. She corrected Kambili's misinformed impression of Papa Nnukwu's religion this way:

Your Papa Nnukwu is not a pagan, Kambili, he is a traditionalist. (81)

It was the same Aunty Ifeoma who had earlier taken Kambili and Jaja on a cultural excursion to Aro to witness the Muo festival. And in the trip, Papa Nnukwu came in handy as a repository and custodian of culture, to educate especially the duo - Kambili and Jaja the more, on festivals, customs and culture of their people. Kambili's cultural consciousness otherwise repressed for donkey years grew in Aunty Ifeoma's house in Nsukka, Amaka, Aunty Ifeoma's daughter, somebody of almost Kambili's age, helped in developing Kambiii's erstwhile stunted social and cultural sense of choice and appreciation by often challenging her on issues that bother on social and cultural consciousness:

I listen mostly to indigenous musicians. They are culturally conscious; they have something to say, Fela and Osadabe and Onyeka are my favourites. Oh I'm sure you probably don't know who they are, I'm sure you are into American pop like other teenagers. (118, emphasis mine)

While at Nsukka, prompted by Aunty Ifeoma, she was able to observe Papa Nnukwu's religion at close quarters. She saw in his belief, love, sincerity, and normal faith that was almost child-like in its innocence, appeal and approach, against the inhuman and morbidly "mechanical" self-acquired (not even church-encouraged) religious fanaticism of Eugene's Catholicism. She observed Papa Nnukwu so keenly, that, one day, encouraged by Aunty Ifeoma, she stole a look on him while performing his ITU-NZU Worship in the morning and she heard the old man confess in the manner below:

Chineke, and I thank you for this new morning. Chineke, I have killed no one, I have taken no one's land. I have not committed adultery. Chineke I have wished others
well. I have helped those who have nothing with the little that my hands can spare.
Chineke! Bless my son, Eugene, let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse
they have put on him. (168)

Kambili who had been observing could not but notice Papa Nnukwu's touching
large-heartedness regarding Eugene, his son, who had despised him and condemned him to hell fire as an
unimportant heathen. That he could pray in earnest, without acrimony., for such a son was a
conviction, too sure for Kambili in admitting that Papa Nnukwu's religion, though not C.hristianity
compliant, was like any of the other religions with sincere and pure motives.

If Aunty Ifeoma's Catholicism was tolerating and understanding, Father Amadi's type,
another important character in the novel could equally be seen as loving, supporting, helpful,.and
extremely accommodating. It was Father Amadi, in the first instance, when Papa Nnukwu was sick, that
made the journey to bring him to Nsukka possible by giving Aunty Ifeoma a gallon of fuel she could
not afford due to scarcity. They relationship between Father Amadi and Papa Nnukwu while at Nsukka
was a classical example of what inter-religious relationship should be. For instance, Father Amadi, in a
conversation with Aunty Ifeoma's family - prior to his trip for evangelism in Germany was overheard
by Papa Nnukwu while discussing the trip. In a tone of surprise, laden with love, tenderness and
concern, he asked Father Amadi:

    Is that so? Our sons now go to be missionaries in the white men's land.
(172)

Father Amadi answered too in the spirit of eloquent mutual respect and inter-religious
camaraderie:

    We go to the white man's land and black man's land Sir. (172, emphasis
mine)

And Papa Nnukwu still showing concern, replied:

    It is good my son. But you must never lie to them. Never teach them to
disregard their father. (172 emphasis mine)

So, Father Amadi loved the people he came across and his life exuded so much love and
tolerance that Kambili, apparently a stranger to such "Agapeic" display of love, fell childishly in love
with Father Amadi. At the end of the novel, it was clear that the instance of fabulous display of love,
understanding and tolerance amongst other characters in the novel as against Eugene's lone lunatic
religiosity, is a narrative-ploy by the author to isolate fanaticism and foreground religious intolerance as
evils that have to be avoided for peaceful co-existence in the county.

Conclusion
By our own reading, Chimamanda's *Purple Hibiscus* is a subtle literary recommendation of
tolerance for a nation that is constantly prone to religious fracas and unrest. Its thematic focus that
emphasis peaceful co-existence among faiths practitioners in Nigeria is a suggestion regarding the
way religious inter-religious relationship should go in a society with multiple religious practices.

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