

## MAPPING THE METANARRATION OF INFORMAL VIOLENT DISCOURSE IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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### Abstract

**T**he epistemology in interpreting the text world is the self-reflexive action of the socio-critics for the intellectual appraisal of active social functionalism. They interrogate the philosophical perspectivism of the social phenomena in the text, which includes dissent, conflict and struggle. It is a social conflict that is fought between discursive falsism and sociocultural flexibility. The text is the exaggerated reality of an extreme belief system, in the post-colonial imprisonment of Papa (Eugene) in his positionality of the new culture and ideology. The paper interrogates the metacommunication in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, where the protagonist represents in the context of anthropological metaphor that is the alpha male, who exerts physical, mental and lexical abuse on the other participants. Being the centre and others; margin, he assumes the semiotic position of socio-lexical disequilibrium and intellectual arrogance, in the phenomenal discourse that enveloped the storyline. Narrative semiotics is a method for analysing texts within the frame of the metacommunicative domain to reconstruct the narrative structure and the meaning-bearing deep structure of texts. It is the potency for the extrapolation of meaning and/or deduction in the narrative analysis. The superlative phenomenon of the use of lexical oddity and the social misdemeanour of the protagonist in the text awaken the instinct of the others for self-defence to the extreme measure, and also to the truth of being free. These are the stimulants for violent reactions and the response is enormous.

**Keywords: Metanarration, Metacommunication, Epistemic, Narrative Semiotics, Discourse**

### Introduction

We tend to create our objectified perception of our microscopic world which influences the biggest picture and representation of the microcosm. We are therefore compelled to impress it on the people we can control or who seem inferior to us. More so, if we consciously employ our intellectual ability to understand and perceive the prevailing world around us, by being able to access reality in order to

not assuming the position of centre and others as margin. Only then, we can achieve our optimal desire in our set out goal, for the existential or mutual accommodation of one another. These perceptions along with our intelligence and ability aid us in solving problems and understanding of the philosophy of our world, as being flexible and creative in its perspective, and in action, are what made us rational and successful as higher beings. But sometimes, certain elements of the way we structure our experiences turn out to actually force upon us to behave idiosyncratically, which is unacceptable to common sense assessment. Consequently, these limitations often subject us to perceive things that are just non-existent; they only exist in our subconscious domain, so they became objectified, thus creating a world of dissent, conflict and struggle.

So, when we interpret the epistemic values of the world, we should see them from the psycho-philosophical prism and ideology within the framework of the common values of prevailing social phenomenon. The prevailing discourse is very significant in the value orientation and ideological transfer to the large social participants, by the construction of knowledge through managing the communication between the interactants that come from the same discourse family or community, who may be interested in sharing ideological, cultural and academic practices (Huang Cao, 2795). The text recruited the resources of metanarrative to create extreme consciousness by varied belief systems that bind the participants together. This enables the writer to organise the discourse that is the story, to engage the audience and signals her latent expressive positionality in the storyline of the text. More often our supposed epistemic awareness, the phenomenology within the individual confined precept of its interpretation beclouds one with self-reflexive and self-referential knowing. Knowing is influenced by universal philosophy or community discourse where the knowledge generates its principles and existence. Thus, any deviation from the community discourse precept is deviant and therefore contravenes the principle of the acceptableness of the local order in that given social construct of the participants.

This text provokes some certain reflections in the philosophy of language which are considered in its relationship to human consciousness where language is conceptualized as having bipolar levels. They include phenomenon which conceptualises language as the primary realisation of consciousness, thus giving major insight into its nature, and meta-phenomenon which is the powerhouse of human intellectual endeavour: this is all about constructing theories, even theories that are premised on the evolution of consciousness. Theorizing is a part of the history of consciousness and also a form of human intellectual endeavour. And its evolutionary continuum is influenced by some sort of dynamic such as the “successive refinement of categorization, from generalisation through abstraction to metaphor, and characterized by a particular moment in the history of culture (some more rapid, some more long-drawn-out) as cosmologies – theories of the human condition are steadily built up” (Halliday, 391-392). Halliday asserts further that these cosmologies usually vary with important changes in the socio-economic conditions of settled people, who have varied theories of the world from those of unsettled, “hunting-gathering cultures, and within settlement, theories change as technology changes; mythic, religious and scientific cosmologies represent the theory-binding aspect of consciousness associated with” the individual person (Halliday, 392).

### **Epistemic Lexicality of Discourse Value**

“We do not perceive the world around us as such”, but rather, through seeing, we 'clip' it into shape of ourselves” (Socffener and Raad, 266). So, our existence is dependent on our conventionalized social contract, that is, we agreed to live in our everyday world side by side with all the participants. This will enable us to operate with a shield of the social reality we experience as normal; thus, we are not stimulated to interrogate further its essence, despite being aware that it is man-made and conventionally designed. However, it behoves us to redefine this reality, within the context of design ethnography, not simply as we assume or know, but as constructed contingent. Essentially, therefore,

we are bound to bare those blind spots, and decompose the reality that we classify on the basis of received knowledge in a phenomenological way, which is epistemologically relevant. We must deliberately alienate ourselves from self-epistemic value, which is idiosyncratic knowledge which emanates from our consciousness, “in other to seek connections of meaning in it” (Muller, 7).

In spite of the inherent imperfection found naturally in language, and the obscurity and confusion that is so endemic to be avoided in the use of lexical items, there are many “wilful faults and neglects”, which the users are found liable in the manner of the communicability of their epistemic values. These lexical idiosyncrasies “render these signs less clear and distinct in their signification, than naturally they need to be” (Locke, 437). In this event, the first and perceptible abuse, that is lexically, is without clear and distinct ideas meant to convey or it is worse, showing signs without anything signified. These words are empty because they do not bear the intended fruit so they are of no effect or epistemic awakening. They do not produce the required perlocutionary force or effect because of the deviant lexicality in the diction. Words must bear social knowledge before they become significant items in the appropriated social environment in their appropriated use (Locke, 437).

Men have been exposed to the lexical acquisition or learning from the cradle, which they easily got and retained consciously and thus, they frame the consequent ideas which are consequent upon experiential and intuitive knowledge. All these epistemic variables are either annexed or are found in things that are thought that men stand for which hold sway all their lives, without considering the pains necessary to settle in their consciousness the determined conventions or ideas:

They use their words for such unsteady and confused notions as they have, contenting themselves with the same words other people use; as if their very sound necessarily carried with it constantly the same meaning. this, thou men make a shift within the ordinary occurrences of life, where they find it necessary to be understood, and therefore they make signs till they are so :yet this insignificancy in their words, when they come to reason concerning their tenets or interest manifestly filled their discourse with abundance of empty unintelligible noise and jargon, especially in moral matters, where the words for the most part, standing for arbitrary and numerous collections of ideas, not regularly and permanently united in nature....(Locke, 438)

### **Chronotopic Context in Discourse**

Every action or thought has its idiosyncratic influences from the social phenomena which are acceptable or unacceptable within the contemporary proposition of the ideology. It is a phrase which diminishes through time by the resource of social evolution. Time is a universal essence which finds its expression in several ways, in different languages. So, there is always a metaphoric representation of time in the lexical features of the discourse of the apparent or real time. However, like direction time as an abstraction cannot be objectified via semiotic representation of the real world. In fact, the conceptualization of time is closely tied to spatial direction, which is the setting or the discourse or utterances. In addition, time must resonate with the dictates of the present space (setting) and be in tune with the direction of where the spatial pendulum is swinging to. "Applying this analysis, an English conceptualization of time of time is as an object or person moving in space, as a resource with a spatial existence, or as space itself" (Holme, 24). In the event structure hierarchy which was put forward by Lakoff and Johnson, they defined this hierarchy as a fundamental metaphor like time is space, which implies that the vehicle of metaphor is space, and this lends its structure to the topic time. Thus, whenever any event happens in space, the event will unfold within the parameters developed by the structure of space (Holme, 24).

### **Meta-narration of a Text**

Meta-narration and meta-fiction are inseparable concepts in narratology. They designate self-reflexive utterances, that is, by responding to the discourse rather than to the story. Both concepts and terms are based on the model of the meta-language, which accounts for 'a system of language positioned on a level above the ordinary use of words for referential purpose' (Fludernik, 15). The umbrella terms have one thing in common that is their self-reflexive or self-referential character. Although they are related and they are used interchangeably, but they differ greatly, though their differences tend to be ignored in several typologies. Meta-narration highlights the narrator's reflections on the act or narration process, while meta-fiction is referred to as the responses on the fictionality and the constructedness of the narrative.

Meta-narrative responses are referred to as the act or process of narration that do not have fictional nature. On the contrary, meta-fiction only appears in the context of fiction. However, different kinds of meta-narration can appear in many non-fictional narrative genres and media. Meta-narrative discourse does affect negatively the aesthetic illusion (Wolf Illusion (Aesthetic)), but it can stimulate substantially the illusion of authenticity which a narrative is meant to create. Neumann and Nunning put forward that, "It is precisely the concept of narratorial, illusionism, suggesting the presence of a speaker or narrator, that illustrates that meta-narrative expressions can serve to create a different type of illusion by accentuating the act of narration, thus triggering a different strategy of naturalization"(346).

It shows a variety of textual functions (Prince, 51), but on the other hand, Genette suggests that it cannot be restricted to the narrator's directing functions, that is, those references that thematise the internal organization of the text. 'Rather, all comments which address aspects of narration in a self-reflexive manner as well as narrator's references his or her communication with the narrative on the discourse level can be subsumed under the term" (261-262).

### **Systematic 'Violence' on Women**

In our society, patriarchy is a historical convention that seems that to meet out discrimination and injustice developed in institutions, cultures, laws, ideologies and practices. Moreover, these dominant articles of social things, laws, cultures and ideology, institutions and practices in society are chiefly founded on the social consciousness and experimental knowledge of men not women. Patriarchal over lordship is a semblance of dictatorship, controls and influences socio-psychological reality, of which the notion of male superiority overwhelms and pervades socialization processes from homes, schools, workplaces, and worship centres. Women and men are stereotypically socialized within rigid gender role differentiations and expectations "(Ogidi and Ejiogu, 259). Some social institutions such as family, law etc. stoke ambers of these biases in norms, rules and laws. Historically, women are regulated to the background culturally, politically and economically by these institutionalized biases. These conventional biases are seen as systems of operation and injustice which directly or indirectly incite disillusionment, disenchantment and disaffection, and thus "creates disputes, which permeate all human interactions and sustain and escalate other conflicts in the wider society" (Ogidi and Ejiogu, 259).

The socio-biological differences between men and women usually lead to the understanding of conflict in different ways which thus, produce several approaches to conflict resolution. However, there is a feeling of vulnerability among women, especially in relation to men, and this feeling is particularly salient in conflict situations, since there is a likelihood of aggression and violence. Women are more likely to feel vulnerable in conflicts with men than in conflicts with other women,

and are more likely to talk about being afraid of normal conflict and of being the victim of aggression or violence. Concerns about children, identity and status are among factors that contribute to women's vulnerability in times of conflicts (Ogidi and Ejiogu, 261).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper employs the textual analytical tools of narrative semiotics in the analysis. According to Barthes:

Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety or genre, themselves distributed among different substances... able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixing of all these substances, narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale and novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime painting (think of Carpaccio's St Ursula), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation (79). From the foregoing, Barthes highlights the plurality of narrative genres, but he failed to point out somewhat bewildering plurality of approaches to the study of narrative. Narrative has been thematised, since the early twentieth century, in folklore, semiotics and literary theory (Baynham, 69-70).

Narrative Semiotics is pervasive in most of the social interactional context of the genre. Story-telling is the bedrock that leverages us to the way. We structure, account for and exhibit our understanding or experience of our human living. Thornborrow states "therefore analysing narrative as a genre, or particular form of talk activity has become one of the central areas on inquiry within the broad field in discourse analysis" (51). Narrative Semiotics has been deployed from different lense across the domain of humanities, using a host of analytical principles and methodologies, which are dependent on the priorities of the discipline and the research foci. Narrative semiotic principle methods cover fictional, text-based, 'news' narratives, 'big' stories, sometimes called social, macro- or 'meta-narratives', these usually emerge as conceptual frameworks within the confines of social and cultural studies. However, the first thing narrative semiotics does is to –'establish a framework for identifying narrative discourse', which is to say that we need to be able to describe a story formally, before addressing the issue of what storytelling means and how it functions across different contexts for talk" (Thornborrow, 51).

### **Analysis**

The paper engages here on the textual analysis of the text, in order to extrapolate from the text, subtextual implicatures, which the text presumes to represent.

...Papa looked around the room quickly, as if searching for proof that something had fallen from the high ceiling, something he had never thought would fall. He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, towards Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass...it cracked the top shelf...landed on their many pieces. Jaja did not move. Papa swayed from side to side (15).

The above was an overreaction of the character Eugene (Papa) when his son (Jaja) responded to his question on the reason he didn't take Holy Communion in the church. Here, from Kambili who was the narrator, it is gathered that Jaja no longer bath an eyelid at whatever Papa will do, even the mother didn't even behave as if anything happened because they are used to and tired of Eugene's extreme but wicked cautions.

...I did not know she had been trying to have a baby since the last miscarriage almost six years ago. I could not even think of her and Papa together, on the bed they shared, custom-made and wider than the conventional king-size. When I thought of affection between them, I thought of them exchanging the sign of peace of Mass... (29).

The above is like a foregrounding telling the reader how strict Eugene even to how he treats his wife to the extent that the narrator, Kambili never thought of any affection like love-making that led to her

mom's pregnancy will exist between her dad and mom except the one she sees in the church during exchanging of the sign of peace.

...Jaja closed his eyes for a while and then opened them. "We will take care of the baby; we will protect him". I knew that Jaja meant from Papa... (31). Jaja talked about protecting a baby that is yet to be born, by Mama from the harsh treatment of Papa, this statement alone on protection shows the cruel abuse from their father Eugene which they are not enjoying.

...Papa did not pencil in TV time on our schedules. (87)

This is the response of Kambili to Auntie Ifeoma's daughter, Amaka when she wanted to know why they don't watch satellites. Kambili's father was an extremist to the extent that he is so strict with "schedules", in Kambili's house, one doesn't do what is not in the schedule or else punishment.

...Back home that night, Papa told Mama that it was sinful. You did not bow to another human being. It was an ungodly tradition, bowing to an Igwe. So, a few days later, when we went to see the bishop at Awka, I did not kneel to kiss his ring. I wanted to make Papa proud but Papa yanked my ear in the car and said I did not have the spirit of discernment ... (101-102).

In the above extract, the narrator Kambili portrayed her as someone who is beyond satisfaction, someone whose reaction can't be predicted thus he rebuked his wife for offering herself to be patted by the traditional ruler as a of respect and greeting, but rebuked Kambili for not kissing the ring of the bishop; explaining that bishop was a man of God while Igwe was a mere traditional ruler.

...But you know Eugene quarrels with the truths that he does not like. Our father is dying, do you hear me? Dying. He is an old man, how much longer does he have, *gbo?* Yet Eugene will not let him into this house, will not even greet him. *Ojoka* (103-104).

From the above, Eugene's sister, Auntie Ifeoma, who is also unhappy about Eugene's cruel abuses on their father, whom he demonises because he is a traditional worshipper. And thus, he refuses to take care of him (Papa Nnukwu), even to the extent of not allowing him into his house, due to his religious inclination.

...He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, ... I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back... Papa was like a Fulani nomad-although he did not have their spare , tall body as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja , and me ... (110)

Just because Kambili took cornflakes before Holy Communion to enable her to take paracetamol for her menstrual cramps that made him beat them even his wife with a belt. Eugene is a pure extremist with a puritanical complex that overwhelms his attitudes to life.... I had never thought about the university, where I would go or what I would study. When the time came, Papa would decide (138).

The phrase 'Papa will decide' has always being the phrase used by Kambili; she always finds it difficult to make her decision. The fear of always being beaten by their father makes her to always shy away from making decisions. The above was in auntie Ifeoma house where she was asked the university she will attend, Amaka auntie Ifeoma daughter , her age mate was able to voice her choice of the university but Kambili will rather wait for her father's choice not really because she love the dad but because the fear of being beaten.

"What happened to your little finger?" Chima asked. Jaja looked down, too, as if he were just then noticing the gnarled finger, deformed like a dried stick... When he was ten, he had missed two

questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his first Holy Communion class. Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears, came out supporting his left hand with his right hand, and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Papa was crying, too, as he carried Jaja in his arms like a baby all the way to the car. Later, Jaja told me that Papa had avoided his right hand because it is the hand, he writes with (153).

The above is pure violence, Eugene maimed his son's little finger just because he missed two questions in his catechism test. He always regrets what he does he (Eugene) even cried, when he mistakenly chop off his son's finger out of anger. More so, when he flogged his wife and kids with belt, just because Kambili fail to take her tablets; he regretted equally flogging them. He later he told them sorry after wounding them... I was familiar with fear, yet each time I felt it, it was never the same as the other times, as though it came in different flavours and colours (203).

In the above excerpt, Kambili was confessing that she was familiar with fear, which means that there is never any chance of freedom in her house, all is about violence.

...Get up! Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meta and thorny bones.... The kicking increased in tempo.... The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, and my legs. kicking. kicking. Kicking. Perhaps, it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. I could hear swoosh in the air. A low voice was saying, 'please, biko, please.' More stings, more slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet (216- 217).

The above is typical violence because she was caught with a native chalk from her dead grand-dad; Eugene beat his daughter to the point of collapsing, despite his wife's pleas. "... This cannot go on, nwunye m," Auntie Ifeoma said. "When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (219). Even Eugene's sister Auntie Ifeoma is against his actions thus he told his wife to do something about what's happening in her house before it gets out of hand.

### **Conclusion**

The setting of informal violence is in the family home, it is the same as domestic violence, and the writers chose to diminish the valency of the concept. It is a truism that children and women are prone to suffer untold physical and psychological trauma from their deviant father or husband. The psycho-social effects of this violence have 'spiral' destructive consequences which hurt the victims throughout their lives. As we said, in the previous paragraph, it is a generational or historical convention, where degradation and humiliation are meted to women as convention or norms. Nobody raises an eyebrow, so women suffer in silence, because is constructed in that manner. Worse still, they are regarded as the property acquired and managed by men who are empowered by the patriarchal philosophy of society to lend force to this, Odinye and Okey-Umeh state that marriage provided a firm ground for the manipulation, humiliation and violation of women's freedom and self-worth. Thus, women perpetually remain slaves to their husbands who do not consider their feelings and opinions in matters concerning them (81). This pervading ideology has been entrenched in the psyche of that society. Similarly, Imbua explains different types of servile marriage, where a woman is treated like a servant. And she does not have the right to a marriage proposal and forcefully or conventionally ceded her right to her parents or guardian, so, however, her fate is being decided, she is not part of it. In most cases, husbands in servile form of marriage consider their wives as their property over whose productive and reproductive powers he exercises absolute control (14)

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