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# **Kenyatta University**

## **School of Humanities and Social Sciences**

### **Literature Department**

**Social Power Dynamism Within the Familial Spaces of Meja Mwangi's  
*The Last Plague* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus***

By

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**C50/CE/22732/2011**

**A Research Project Submitted to the Literature Department in Partial  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master  
of Arts of Kenyatta University**

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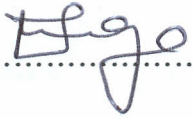
## Declaration

This project is my original work and has not been presented for any other award in any other university.

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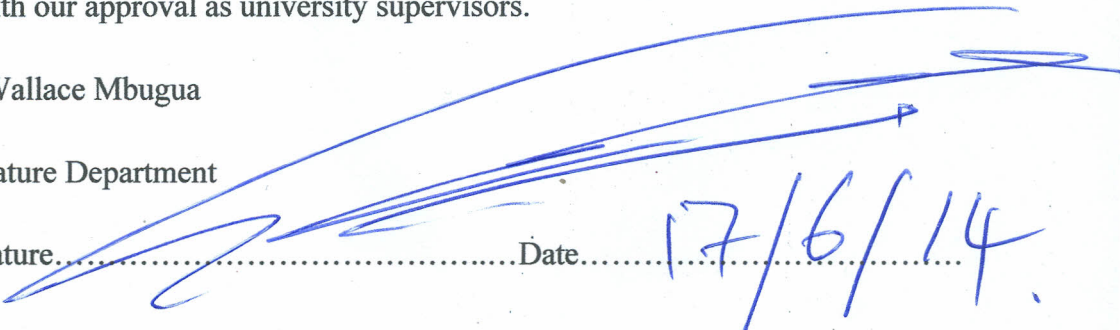
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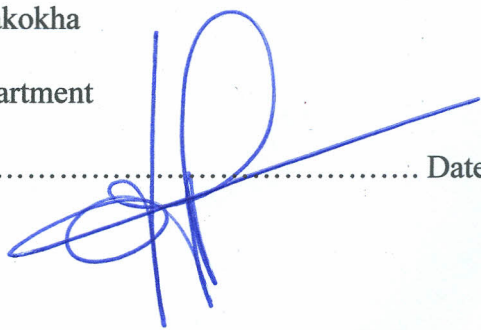
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## Dedication

To my beloved soul mate

Loise Wanjiku, this work I dedicate

The pages of this research, to my sons Murage and Ng'ang'a I consecrate

You form the living, breathing and irreplaceable human triangle that my life makes  
complete

With this work I pay homage to my dear sister, Jane Wairimu the late

You taught me to work hard so receive my tribute

Accept my academic salute!

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## Abstract

This study establishes the dynamics of social power among literary characters in the familial spaces of the fictional societies depicted by Meja Mwangi in his novel, *The Last Plague* (E.A.E.P. 2000) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* (Fourth Estate, 2004). The study is justified by the fact that a study on the interchanges of social power among characters in the two texts has not been done. The study is descriptive and analytical and employs the qualitative research design, which involves close reading of the two novels as well as other related material. The primary data collected has been subjectively analyzed to determine how and why social power possession and exercise changes from one character to another within family set ups. More data has also been collected through library reading on critical works on the two texts as well as scholarly commentary on social power and its dynamism in family relationships. The analysis on how and why different characters acquire and exercise social power over one another constitutes data that has been analyzed in a descriptive manner. It is hoped that the findings of this research will help the literary fraternity to understand how and why characters' social power possession keeps changing in the two novels. This research is of use to scholars of literature who have a slant towards East and West African novels. It is also of assistance to lay people who are interested in reading the two novels. A recommendation for further studies on the hiatus that has been left by this study has been made.

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## Operational Definition of Terms

- Coercive power** : Power that relies on threats of emotional or physical punishment  
(Lamanna & Riedmann, 1985: 352-53).
- Influencee/target** : The recipient or potential recipient of the influence
- Influencing agent / Influencer**: The person who is the source of the social influence.
- Informational power**: Power that relies on the effectiveness of the contents of what one party tells another (Raven & Rubin, 1976:407)
- “Mwangian Man”** : An archetypal male protagonist in Mwangi’s fiction (Killam, 1984:189).
- Referent power** : Power that is based on a first party’s need to emotionally or physically identify with a second party.
- Social influence** : A change in a person’s beliefs, attitudes, behaviour and emotions brought about by some other person or persons.
- Social power** : Potential influence or the ability of some influencing agent to affect some target (Raven & Rubin, 1976:402).

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the Study

If one compares the relationship between a parent and a child, a minister and his parishioner, a politician and an ordinary citizen, an older brother and his younger sibling or a teacher and a student, one realizes that such relationships are predicated on a common factor: that one party in the dyad has more social power than the other. Further, it can be taken for granted that in the above examples of dyads, the parties with more social power are those mentioned first. But is this always the case? Are there instances when a student might have more social power than his or her teacher, or a child might have more social power than his or her parent?

These are the kind of questions that this research seeks to answer. In this study, we explore how and why social power possession and exercise keeps shifting from one character to another within the family set ups in the societies depicted by Meja Mwangi and Ngozi Adichie in *The Last Plague* and *Purple Hibiscus* respectively.

In social sciences, every ability to do something can be conceived as being possession of power. Bretton (1973) sees power as being what enables individuals to act, reward, impress, influence, punish, wage war or mediate conflict situations. He states that power involves an extension of will or physical ability beyond an individual or group to effect certain goals in relation to other individuals or groups.

Interference with the power matrix results is a state of disequilibrium. Kabira and Masinjila (1995) write that power has to do with decision making and the ability for the power wielder to make others do what they (power holder) prefer. Power therefore

reveals itself when being exercised by characters and events in a fictional social set up are heavily dependent on the character who is the principle power holder.

Power has a wide conceptual reference but this study interrogates social power, one of the many forms of power. In the negotiation of social power, there exists a dichotomy where one party has the potential to change the other in some way. This is because it is rare to have a situation where social power is evenly distributed among the members of a social group (Secord & Backman, 1974).

The change of social power possession from one party to another necessarily involves agency. Raven & Rubín (1976) isolate six bases or agents on which social power moves: coercion, information, reference, expertise, legitimacy and reward. In this study, we have handled coercion, reference and information agencies.

We have looked at social power from its familial context, so that its interpretation is a specific kind of ability, the ability of a character to make other members of the family do what one wants. This is the kind of power that arises out of the fact that one may have the gift of gab, elicits trust because of possession of wisdom or integrity, holds a special office or is capable of dire effects on the lives of others. In the texts under study, characters are analyzed for social power possession and agency. This is deemed necessary because as Kold (1978:33) avers:

Individuals and organizations seek some form or degree of power. Some seek it as a value or an end by itself but more often, power is sought as an instrument to assist people acquire other values...

The thrust of this study is therefore to identify such characters in the two texts, to determine to what extent their social power is anchored on coercion, reference or

information, and to demonstrate how and why such character(s') power possession is not definitive.

A study on social power and its dynamism in literary works borrows heavily from sociological and cultural studies. Makokha (2011) opines that sociological studies are important in literature and that creativity and imagination as found in literature are sociological tools that members of a society use to ventilate about their cultural realities. The unit of the family, which provides the setting for the novels to be studied in this research, is the smallest social unit from which a society is formed. It is therefore necessary to show the nexus between socio-cultural studies and letters and also link the foregoing with Mwangi and Adichie.

Literature offers fictionalized accounts of happenings that are reflective of the realities in the wider society. Writers, being a part of the societies and cultures that they comment on, necessarily rely on socio-cultural institutions and concepts for their ideas. This is an argumentum that Laurensen & Swingewood (1972) develop in their studies on the sociology of literature. They avow that the first really systematic treatment of the relationship between literature and society belongs to the French philosopher and critic, Hippolyte Taine (1828-93), who was instrumental in the conception of the idea of literature as being socially conditioned. 17<sup>th</sup> century writers also understood literature as having a societal documentary value. Giovan Giambattista Vico (1668- 1744) for instance saw the social world as being largely the work of man, rather than of divine providence. He saw the social world's institutions and its forms of art as analyzable in material terms. Vico then related Homer's *Iliad* to happenings in the North-East of Greece, since it described the Trojan Wars.

Socio-cultural studies are concerned with such matters as ethnicity and race and their impact on resource distribution in the society. How people from different ethnic and racial divides interact in the society brings about social power relations. Baker (2012) reiterates that issues of ethnicity and race are also dealt with in literature. He notes that the current interest in studies in postcolonial literature traverses both cultural and literary studies. This is because the aspect of marginality of some ethnic groups or races as found in cultural studies is replicated in postcolonial studies if the latter studies are understood as representative of literature from people who were marginalized by the process of colonialism.

Issues to do with class and class stratification relate sociological studies and literature. Artists and writers use their skills to comment on how members of different classes relate in the society and in so doing, they reveal the inherent social power structure. Commenting on the connection between classism and literature, a scholar on literary concepts owns that:

Class is a theme that has been strongly reflected in contemporary literature, which has tended to reflect closely the political and social shifts of the period. In the 1950s, the expansion of the traditional working class into new areas and professions was manifested in the emergence of writers, dramatists and film-makers intent on representing the kind of experience with which literature, drama and film had not been generally concerned. This led to a proliferation of novels, such as John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) and David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960).... These novels foregrounded working-class life and delineated the changing class structure of Britain in the post-war period (Padley, 2006:16-17).

What we witness here is a vindication of the assertion that writers are social commentators who turn such matters as societal class stratification into literary material for edutainment and documentation of cultural changes in the society.

Sociological studies are concerned with quotidian realities in the society. In the same way, literary creativity relies on the daily happenings in the society. In this sense, social realities that surround artists are a *sine qua non* that gives impetus to creators of artistic productions to come up with art forms. Commenting on this issue, Jones (1968) writes that drama is a condensation of everyday life, whose many aspects- the visible and invisible, the tangible and the intangible- it attempts to manifest. He also owns that drama draws on all life for its raw material. His studies are therefore a further proof that sociological studies and literature are intertwined.

In the creation of a national culture, a topic that attracts sociological enquiry, artists are an important facet. East African writers have for instance been seen to be concerned with cultural revolution. For instance:

Rebecca Njau is preoccupied with injustice and the emancipation of women from burdensome traditional legacies; Ebrahim Hussein and Peninnah Muhando express the need for inter-tribal unity which will combat colonialism and oppression, and help maintain hard-worn independence; while Ngugi dwells on the evils of tribalism, the effects of cultural alienation, and the frustrated hopes of 'uhuru', or independence (Jones, 1968:85).

The above mentioned authors therefore attempt to mould their respective societies using art, just as other social policy makers would do. Such aspects of culture as are mentioned traverse both sociological and literary canons, of which this study typifies.

Having demonstrated that literary creations parallel sociological developments of which the family is a part and parcel, we now turn to Mwangi and Adichie and analyze their contributions as social commentators who articulate issues that affect the institution of the family.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria in 1977. She has authored three novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013). She also has a short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). We choose to study social power dynamism within the familial spaces of *Purple Hibiscus* taking cognizance of the fact that Adichie is passionate about the institution of the family. Ouma (2007) avers that Adichie is concerned with the family, religion and politics. These are matters that the author experienced in her own life when growing up in the university town of Nsukka. She has affinity and sensitivity for issues to do with the family, so much so that she chooses to authenticate her narrative in *Purple Hibiscus* through the objectivized voice of a child narrator. We therefore feel that the institution of the family as handled by Adichie is a rich ground for tracking how social power flows from one character to another.

Our other author of choice, Meja Mwangi, is a prolific urban fiction writer who had between 1973 and 1979 already written and published six novels. He comes from Nanyuki, where he attended school before matriculating in Kenyatta College, now Kenyatta University. Angus, Calder in Killam (1984) advances that Mwangi's gift for the narrative is "natural" because he began with tales that were orally narrated to him. Not having read much African literature like the university graduates of his time did, he adopted a "realist" style of writing, tackling themes to do with urban poor.

In an interview with Bernth Lindfors, Mwangi states that his writing of *Kill Me Quick* (1973) was driven by his observation of the plight that his friends went through after school as they searched for jobs in urban areas. A character such as Dusman in *Cockroach Dance* (1979) undergoes difficulties in the informal settlements of Nairobi.

The “Mwangian Man” is therefore a character who is uprooted from what would be considered to be the normal family pursuits (Killam, 1984). This protagonist of Mwangi’s fiction lives without a family, a fact that we read as being a form of disempowerment, due to poverty. The current study on the dynamism of social power in *The Last Plague* lends itself well with an analysis of the marginality of the “Mwangian Man” within the family.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In an African family, it is expected that there be a well established hierarchy of social power with perhaps the father being at the apex, followed by the mother while the children occupy the lower echelons in their order of seniority. Members of the extended family would be expected to relate cordially with the nuclear family but not have a lot of social power to influence such a family. However, this ideal scenario may at times change so that it is no longer clear what the hierarchy of social power in the family is. This is the situation that we encounter in our two chosen texts. The manner in which coercion, reference and information makes social power to move from one character to another in the fictional societies presented by Meja Mwangi in *The Last Plague* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* have not been analyzed. In the two novels, possession of social power keeps changing such that at one time, one character has more social power than another while later on, the situation is reversed.

### **1.3 Justification of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to trace why and how possession and exercise of coercive, referent and informational social power among characters in the fictional societies

presented in the two novels keeps changing. This study is justified by the fact that in the novels under study, no single character can be said to be the ultimate social power holder. Instead, even those characters who seemingly have minor roles control how the main ones think and act. This study therefore tracks how and why characters rely on the three bases of social power to keep outdoing each other.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study sought, as its main objective, to analyze the social power dynamics within the familial spaces of the selected texts. The specific objectives are to:

- a) Investigate and analyze how characters acquire and exercise coercive social power over other characters.
- b) Determine how characters acquire and use referent social power to emasculate those with coercive social power.
- c) Find out how characters acquire and exploit informational social power to neutralize the effects of coercive and/or referent social power that are exercised by other characters.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

- a) How do characters acquire and exercise coercive social power over other characters?
- b) How do characters acquire and use referent social power to emasculate those with coercive social power?

- c) How do characters acquire and exploit informational social power to neutralize the effects of coercive and/or referent social power in other characters?

## **1.6 Research Premises**

It is the assumptions of this research that:

- a) In the two novels, one group of characters acquires and exercises coercive social power over others.
- b) In the two novels, a second group of characters emasculates the first group through an exercise of referent social power.
- c) A third group of characters rely on informational social power to neutralize the effects of coercive and/or referent social power possessed by the first and/or second group(s).

## **1.7 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Coercive social power is a phenomenon that exists in families (El-Busaidy, 1958). While it can be presupposed that an individual who exercises this form of power on other individuals will be in complete control of them, the reality is that other forms of power exercised within the family unit can weaken the exercise of coercive power by a particular character. One such form of social power is referent power while the other one is informational power.

In this study, we demonstrate why and how those characters who possess and exercise referent social power surpass those who have coercive social power while those who have informational social power outdo either one or both of the first two groups.

Ultimately, this research sheds light on why in family institutions, each individual can exercise some form of social power over the others regardless of his or her status in the family. This is thought to be so because social power is not something that one individual can exercise at all times on all other individuals. Instead, it has been found that:

Power is always mediated by “social alignments” which are dynamic. Within this dynamism there exists continuous shifts as the subordinated agents seek ways of challenging the actions of the dominant agents... the subordinate agent is never absolutely disempowered, but only relatively so... just as the dominant agent’s actions are subject to the problematic of maintaining power by maintaining the allegiance of the aligned agent’s complicity in her disempowerment (Wartenburg cited in Olembo & Kebeya, 2013:97).

The implication of the foregoing is that the social power possessed by a dominant party is supported by factors that can change any time, leading to the disempowerment of the dominant party by the party that has undergone subjection. This study explores this ephemerality of social power exercise, hence the choice of the expression *power dynamism*.

The two novels have been chosen so as to be representative of both East and West African literature. In terms of authorship, the books were written in 2000 and 2004 and so have some currency. Adichie has received recognition for her fiction. Some of them include the Orange Broadband Prize for fiction in 2007, MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2008), BBC Short Story Competition joint winner, O. Henry Prize (2003) among other awards and nominations. She is therefore a writer of repute who warrants scholarly study. Meja Mwangi has similarly won many awards for his writing. His novels include *inter alia*, *Striving for the Wind* (1990), *Weapon of Hunger* (1989), *The Return of Shaka* (1989), *The Last Plague* and *Bushtrackers* (1979). Mwangi’s *The Last Plague*, our

study text, won the 2000 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature Award. Biographically, Adichie is a thirty-six-year-old female writer while Mwangi is a sixty-five-year-old male writer. The latter's writings date back to the early '70s while the former has been writing from around the year 2000. The choice of the two authors and books has therefore been made to provide an amalgam of literary qualities that provides two different vistas to social power exercise within the family.

### **1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Research**

This study is limited to the texts *The Last Plague* and *Purple Hibiscus*. These books were published in 2000 and 2004 respectively. This means that some ideas could have changed in the societies the authors drew their ideas from. Any such changes are not reflected in this study.

Social power is a concept that is used in discourses to do with human societies. The use of the term is extended to cover fictional societies, on the understanding that such fictitious societies are modeled on reality as elucidated earlier. Power is also a wide concept that attracts complex philosophical studies. We delineate this study to the narrow topic of the dynamism of social power as exercised within the family institution.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature review is divided into the introduction, the concept of social power in African families, a commentary on the three bases of social power this study is concerned with, Adichie and Mwangi's works, a review on *The Last Plague* and *Purple Hibiscus*, the theoretical framework to be used and the conclusion.

## 2.2 Social Power in African Families

Foucault looks at power in terms of relations between power players. According to Deleuze (1986), Foucault sees power as a relation between forces; or rather every relation between forces is a power relation. He notes that power relations work in two ways: a force that provokes or incites a consequence has an active affect while a force which is incited or provoked has a reactive affect. This means that both the originator of an action and the recipient of the action are in possession of power. In this study, the forces on whom the dynamism of power are studied are narrowed down to family members.

Within the family, an exercise of power oscillates around decision-making. Opong (1981) postulates that decision-making depends to a great extent on the relative power position of the spouses and their respective aspirations. This power position is interpretable as being vested in an individual's ability to alter the partner's behaviour to conform to the desired behaviour. The partner who can sway the other into conformity therefore gets the decision-making power. We develop this argument by looking at how social power possession, manifested through decision-making can also be vested in other members of the family, not just the marital partners.

Different members of the family possess and exercise social power depending on the roles ascribed to them by tradition. Kanyongo-Male & Onyango (1984) write that the father is normally the normative head while the mother is the emotional leader. Other social power domains include those of the supporter and the expert. Even if a man is unemployed, since he is the normative head, culture would still dictate that he be respected and revered by the other family members. The mother's position as the emotional leader is informed by her closeness to the children from birth and her quest to

keep a "happy home". The supporter, who can be the father, mother or both, provides resources to sustain the family while the expert is the one who has some kind of knowledge that the others do not. In this study, we probe the extent to which characters keep interchanging these different domains of social power.

It has been recognized that the ideal social power balance in the family as espoused by Kanyongo-Male and Onyango is not found in all instances. Ideally, the older generation in African families guide the younger generation, so that the youth are content to copy and internalize what their forebears have sanctioned as being the acceptable conduct. Okullu (1976) however says that in the contemporary African family, the youth are no longer content to be imbued with cultural values and knowledge from the older generation. They are instead eager to originate behaviour and norms that are unique to themselves. Tension arises when the older generation is not quick to accept that their children have their own values that are not necessarily in tandem with their parents' expectations. In this research, we concur with Okullu but open up discussions on why such young people might either gain or lose social power as they carve their own niches.

In the African context, the social position occupied by a family makes such a family to be adored and revered or abhorred and treated with suspicion. Makokha (2011), in his critique of Yvonne Adhiambo's *Weight of Whispers* (2003), follows the family of Boniface Kuseremane from Rwanda in the pre-genocide days to their flight into Kenya for exile. He writes that in the pre-war days, the Kuseremane name was enough to earn the family favours but later on in exile, the same name becomes the bane of their living. The social power possession with the Kuseremane family explodes as a result of ethnic and political tensions. In our study, we follow another such family that plummets from

the height of social power glory to the terrains of misery due to an implosion of social power wrought by intrinsic social power changes.

### **2.3 Coercive, Referent and Informational Social Power Bases.**

Coercive social power is exercised if one party feels that non-compliance with what the second party wants will earn him or her some punishment. French & Raven cited in Lamanna & Riedmann (1985) opine that such punishment might involve physical assault or something more subtle, such as withdrawal of favours, affection or sex. Raven & Rubin (1976) advance that coercive power is dependent on the influencing agent and so it is socially dependent. Compared to informational power, coercive power is weaker as it requires surveillance by the influencing agent so that the target can continue displaying the desired behaviour. When coercive power is used on a target, "...the target tends to dislike the influencing agent and feels negatively about the situation" (Rubin & Lewicki; Rubin, Lewicki & Dunn; Horai et al. cited in Raven & Rubin 1976:48). In this study, we go off on a slightly different tangent and demonstrate how a target of coercive social power renders such power ineffectual after allowing the spell of referent social power from another influencing agent to act upon him or her.

The effectiveness of the coercive power exercised on a subject varies; sometimes it is almost fully effective while in other instances, it is only marginally effective. Secord & Backman (1974) explain that this variation in the effectiveness of coercive power is informed by several factors: one of them is the range of behaviours for which one party can punish another. The second one is the strength of coercive power, which is a joint function of the magnitude of the punishment involved and the perceived probability that this punishment will actually be meted if the desired behaviour is not displayed. This

perceived probability of the punishment taking place is also determined by the extent to which the agent believes that he or she is under surveillance by the influencing agent and the past history of the influencing agent either carrying out the punishment or failing to do so in similar situations. Finally, the effectiveness of coercive power depends on how accurately the target gauges what behaviour is punishable by the influencing agent. Secord & Backman deal only with the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of coercive power exercise. In this study, we first catalogue how coercive social power effectively changes the influencee(s) before we deconstruct this effectiveness by introducing referent power as a contending force.

The use of coercive social power need not be accompanied by overt imperatives directed towards a subject. Careful removal of choices that are favourable to a target, to leave only the unfavourable ones, would constitute an exercise of coercive power. Okolo (2007) reads this as being the situation in the interaction of the court messenger with Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1974). The court messenger asserts his superiority to Ezeulu by stating that Winterbottom has put him (messenger) in charge of many of his affairs. Captain Winterbottom and the court messenger are in an ultimate position to exercise coercive power over Ezeulu and the other villagers as Okolo demonstrates but this research seeks to show how such unquestionable power in a character can be rendered ineffectual due to the presence of another character who has the more effective referent social power.

The reasons behind the superiority of referent social power over coercive social power have been studied by Secord & Backman. Referent social power is said to have been exercised if one party is drawn to think, appear or behave like a second party. They write

that referent power arises if the first party seeks emotional and sometimes physical identification with the second party. This is the kind of power normally associated with teenage peer groups.

According to Raven & Rubin, referent social power depends on the extent to which one party seeks to identify himself or herself with a second party. If the first party is attracted towards the second one then he or she will attempt to model their behaviour, thinking and even looks on the second party. Once referent power has taken root in an individual, the continued display of the desired behaviour is independent of the influencing agent's surveillance. Our current research zeros in on particular character traits in individuals that enable them to have referent social power.

The exercise of referent social power is manifested more in spousal relationships than in other types of social interactions. Lauer & Lauer (1997) acknowledge that in spousal interactions, one party seeks to identify with the second party. Such an individual admires his or her mate and desires to please him or her. The target under the spell of referent power gradually changes their behaviour and thinking to resemble the influencing agent. Referent power increases as the couple grows older. While Lauer & Lauer stress that their study on referent power is restricted to spousal relationships, the current study demonstrates that referent power can also exist among people in other types of interactions.

Unlike coercive social power that generally earns the influencing agent resentment from the influencee, referent power is accompanied by the approval of the influencing agent by the target. Olson & Defrain (2001) build on this argument by stating that the influencing

agent earns such approval from the target because the agent possesses what might be viewed as the qualities that the society cherishes or reveres. The agent has *inter alia* beauty, honesty, kindness or charisma. Influencing agents are therefore the role models in the society that other people strive (or are directed) to emulate. Our current research builds on Olson & Defrain's by demonstrating why those characteristics possessed by referent power agents are superior to those possessed by coercive power agents.

The exercise of referent social power sometimes leads to fraud. We say this because an influencer who learns what a target likes can easily purport to have those qualities that the target desires. Perlman & Cozby (1983) advance that since the target desires to be similar to the influencer, all the influencer has to do is demonstrate that he or she has those qualities that the target likes. This knowledge is put to use by parents and older siblings. A parent who wishes to steer his child towards good behaviour demonstrates that he possesses such good behaviour (which may not be necessarily true) so that his child can emulate him. Older siblings also do the same with their younger brothers and sisters. In this research, we develop this argumentum by further demonstrating that an influencer with non-existent qualities that he or she is nonetheless using to change the target is prone to being disempowered once the target falls under the spell of informational social power from another influencer.

Informational social power has been seen to be more effective than referent social power. One of the reasons why this is so is as shown above, referent power is prone to abuse. This is not so with informational power. Raven & Ruben explain that informational power leads to a permanent cognitive change in the influencee. After this change takes effect, it does not matter if the influencing agent's reputation changes or not. The mere content of

the information that the agent used to influence the target is independent of the personal characteristics of the agent. We have used literary characters to explain the processes involved in the changing of a target from what referent power made him or her to a new self, brought about by informational power.

Informational social power exercise is based on the effectiveness of the contents of what one party tells another. French & Raven cited in Lamanna & Riedmann (1985) write that informational power emerges from the second character's explanations to the first character, which make the first character to see the need to do or avoid doing something. Commenting on this reality, Perlman & Cozby (1983) write that informational power exploits the persistent human need to change something in one's life. An influencing agent therefore seeks to use persuasion to convince the target that a particular change is needed in the target's life. For the power to be exercised, the information given must not only be convincing but also relevant to the thoughts and values of the target. We develop this proposition by shedding light on how informational power agents access knowledge about their target's thoughts and values so that they can use that knowledge to change them.

Since informational social power depends on the contents of what one party tells another, it follows that words are the mainstay of informational power delivery. Strong, Devault, Sayad & Cohen (2001) opine that the agent carefully chooses words that he or she feels have enough import to cancel out what the agent might have believed in. In this study, we develop the above research by juxtaposing the words used by referent power agents with those of informational power agents to delineate those characteristics of the informational power agents' words that change the influencee.

## 2.4 Meja Mwangi and Ngozi Adichie's Works

Mwangi sprung into the literary scene with his Mau Mau narratives. Lindfors (1994) identifies *Carcass For Hounds* (1974) and *A Taste of Death* (1975) as being the two Mau Mau tales that Mwangi wrote under the influence of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. He later metamorphosed into an urban writer with novels like *Kill Me Quick* and *Going Down River Road*. These are the novels that made him earn the tag of "a popular fiction writer". While we do not intend to join the debate as to whether Mwangi is a "popular" or "serious" writer, our study offers a panoramic view of Mwangi's treatment of the sociological question of power dynamism within the family.

The departure of Mwangi from concerns with the "realist" mode of writing to a more symbolic and "allegorical" style is also part of his metamorphosis. Lars Johansson in Griffiths (2000) owns that this emergent Mwangi creates characters that embody tensions and contradictions inherent in the Kenyan society of the 1970s. In our study, we follow in Griffith's steps but digress to look at how the "Mwangian Man" represents tensions and contradictions inherent in the family as a result of the shifting faces of social power.

*Carcass for Hounds* and *A Taste of Death* by Meja Mwangi have been described as being examples of nationalist literature. Lindfors (1991) points out that this nationalist literature dealt with armed struggle during the clamour for independence. Our study borrows from Lindfors the aspect of struggling but in our case, it involves the struggle of the subordinated groups in the family as they seek to widen their dialogic spaces.

Mwangi has an affinity for highlighting the plight of the poor in Nairobi. Calder, Angus in Killam (1984) comments on how Mwangi, in his fourth novel, *Going Down River*

*Road*, chronicles the suffering of the hoi polloi. The “Mwangian Man” is depicted as a tough protagonist struggling to earn a living within the squalor of urban spaces. Makokha (2011) notes that such poverty ridden streets like River Road are the areas that Mwangi populates with his characters. In our current study, we look at how loss of social power, rather than economic power, marginalizes the “Mwangian Man”.

Mwangi does not just highlight the plight of men but that of women also. Teyie (1982) confirms this in his account of how Wini in *Going Down River Road* faces such financial hardships as to make her desert her baby in the care of Ben. This she does because she discovers that she is pregnant by another man. Our study investigates the use of referent power in relationships that makes an individual prefer one mate to another, a gap that has been left by Teyie.

Style is a peculiar aspect that identifies one writer<sup>9</sup> from another. Wegesa (1986) states that in Meja Mwangi’s *Kill Me Quick*, “...content cannot be separated from form”. He then looks at the concerns of *Kill Me Quick* vis-à-vis aspects of style such as use of short story structure and imagery. The main characters, Meja and Maina are dehumanized by those who wield economic power over them. In this study, we demonstrate that even those who have little economic power can use one or more of the three bases of social power to negotiate for relevance in the society.

Chimamanda Adichie is a feminist writer whose<sup>9</sup> female characters are modeled to challenge patriarchy in the society. Kivai (2010) expounds on this position in his study of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. He writes that Adebayo, a female character, takes on what would otherwise be seen to be a masculine emotional predisposition. Our study also marginally

touches on masculinity and femininity discourses to the extent that such discourses demonstrate which bases of social power are prevalent with men or women in family interactions.

Adichie belongs to a new generation of African writers who write with the passion and finesse of their first generation predecessors such as Chinua Achebe. Hewett (2005) states that Adichie is among the third generation Nigerian writers involved in the re-writing and re-mapping of traditions established by Chinua Achebe. She does this by cleverly borrowing elements of Achebe's phraseology, characterization and thematic strands and (re)inventing situations that fit the contemporary Nigeria. In her short story, *Light Skin*, she borrows Achebe's phrase "things fall apart" in order to give the story an element of familiarity with what readers have already encountered with Achebe. Though our study is not geared at comparing Achebe with Adichie, we have occasionally mentioned characters and situations that are reminiscent of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in as far as such characters and situations depict social power dynamism.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is a story that revolves around the lives of twins, Olanna and Kainene. Mabura (2008) compares the social lives of the two ladies and notes that Olanna is the beautiful one while Kainene is the business-minded one in the family, who takes on what would otherwise be the duties of a son. As a consequence of the disparity in the endowment of the two sisters, their relationship is less than cordial. We propose to examine in greater detail how possession of referent power attributes such as beauty might sometimes lead to such power changing from being positive referent power to negative referent power.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is partially set in war time Nigeria during the Biafran war that saw atrocities directed towards the Ibos. For this reason, Novak (2008:33) calls it a “trauma novel”. Some of the characters who are traumatized by witnessing gruesome murders being committed include Olanna and Richard. Ugwu, Olanna’s erstwhile house boy is conscripted into the army to fight. Our study diverges from Novak’s in two ways: we handle violence as an exercise of coercive social power within the family and also tackle trauma from the subtle but nonetheless puissant exercise by people who are supposed to be care givers or intimate partners in a family.

### **2.5 *The Last Plague and Purple Hibiscus***

H.I.V/AIDS forms the main theme of *The Last Plague*. Muriungi (2005:107-137) has analyzed the idea of a “total/real” man and the “proper” woman in *The Last Plague*. In her study, she explores the factors that lead the male characters in *The Last Plague* in engaging in risky sexual behaviour. She identifies the reasons as being steeped on the fallacious ideology that a “total/real” man is identifiable through his sexual prowess. This leads him to engage in risky sexual conduct. The “proper” woman is identified as being the one who subscribes to the cultural norms set up by men. Such a woman is also subservient to men, which makes her fail to question her spouse about his sexual excesses. Our study looks at matters of sexuality from within the encapsulation of coercive, referent and informational social power bases.

*The Last Plague* has been hailed as being an allegorical comparison of a physically ailing body and a society wallowing in the miasma of socio-economic degeneration (Muriungi in Ogude & Nyairo 2007). This is because scenes of environmental deterioration

accompany those of bodily suffering. In our study, we intertwine this allegorical nature of the narrative with heightening or decreasing social power in the characters.

The village of Crossroads in *The Last Plague* is slowly being obliterated by the AIDS scourge. Kruger (2004) writes that Janet Juma is one of the few people left who have the courage to fight against the disease by confronting the taboos that fuel the spread of the disease. Our study uses characters such as Janet to discuss informational and referent power, since such characters try to change the society through education and acting as role models.

HIV/AIDS is a socio-economic problem that afflicts the society. In her unpublished study titled *The Treatment of the Theme of HIV/AIDS in Meja Mwangi's The Last Plague*, Ndumba, Maureen proposes to analyze the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS on the society and how the pandemic is interpreted by men and women. Our current study also touches on the HIV/AIDS pandemic but in our case, we limit discourses on HIV/AIDS to its import in the characterization of those affected by it or are involved in its fight, rather than in its socio-economic ramifications.

As stated earlier, retrogressive traditional practices are the core causes of HIV/AIDS spread in Crossroads. Muriungi in Ogude & Nyairo (2007:283-84) stresses that "traditional" conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity are part of these retrograde beliefs. They are however not fixed categories and so they can change with time. In our study, we engage in a critical excavation of how different bases of social power are interwoven with traditional African practices.

The rise against patriarchy in *Purple Hibiscus* is the subject of interrogation by Kivai (2010). He writes that the women in the text have reneged against male domination so that they can create a better world for themselves. In the opening chapters of the story, Eugene assaults his wife and instills fear in his daughter Kambili. Goaded by Auntie Ifeoma, Beatrice later overcomes her timidity and slays Eugene. Our study augments Kivai (2010) by mapping out the channels that characters use to defeat other characters' coercive social power.

Dissatisfaction of women with the physical structures that typify male domination is a subject of study by Mabura (2008). In *Purple Hibiscus*, the imposing house of papa Achike in Enugu is described as Gothic, a castle that acts as the "major locus" for use by Achike in subjugating the women in his household. The mansion is therefore a gothic metonymy of doom that Kambili detests. We also explore the use of physical barriers in the exercise of coercive social power and further compare them with other spaces where freedom is part of exercise of informational or referent social power.

While there are many reasons why a family might break down, Hewett (2004) explains that in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's family breaks down due to the existence of a domineering father who seeks to control his family through religious dogma. This study explores further the extent to which other bases of social power other than the coercive one can either be used to strengthen or weaken the institution of the family.

Like alluded to earlier, Adichie's phraseology is a mental trigger to his audience that she is writing in the tradition of Achebe. Hewett (2004:79) writes that in *Purple Hibiscus*, the very first sentence welcomes the reader into the narrative through use of the readily

identifiable phrase “ things fall apart” She also writes that in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus*, the societal disintegration is engineered by fathers who are powerful but have tragic flaws. Our current study examines this concept of societal disintegration from the narrower field of the family.

The “falling apart” of “things” in *Purple Hibiscus* is restricted to Eugene and his world of Manichean dualism. Dawes (2005) posits that Eugene’s’ Catholicism is a metaphor for abuse, hypocrisy and deep pathology that he imposes on other characters. This is why members of his nuclear and extended family finally rebel against him. Our study sheds light on how the different characters employ the information and reference power bases to come together and present a combined onslaught against Eugene.

Papa Achike does not act with cruelty towards all characters. Khan (2005) advances that Achike is a respected member of the community and an active philanthropist. It is only when he is in his house that his violent streak comes out. In our study, we explain why he exercises referent power over the members of the community but tyrannizes his own family through an exercise of coercive power.

Papa Achike clearly epitomizes the concept of social power impermanence. Ouma (2007) postulates that his increasing violence is schizophrenic as he feels other forces are in competition with him in the exercise of power within the family. We chronicle the other forces in competition with Papa Eugene and other characters of his ilk in the exercise of social power within familial spaces.

## 2.7 Theoretical Framework

Deconstructive Criticism overarches this study and provides the interpretive grid for social power and its dynamism. Deconstruction as a literary criticism technique was pioneered by the Algerian born French philosopher, Jacques Derrida in 1966. Later on, Lacan and Paul de Man helped in its popularization. Lewis (2003) writes that Derrida seeks to shed light on the historical and linguistic assumptions which inform the formation of different types of cultural legitimacies that in turn give rise to certain dominant ideas in the society. The purpose of deconstruction is therefore to re-examine the dominant ideas, with a view of querying the legitimacy upon which such ideas are “constructed”. Once some aspersions have been cast about that legitimacy, the idea is unraveled or becomes “deconstructed”. In our study, we contend that possession of social power in the family is based on ideas that are culturally ascribed. It is these ideas that we seek to re-examine from a deconstructive perspective.

Language, meaning and cultural productions are predicated upon the principle of binary opposition. There is a belief that truth is constructed on the understanding that out of a set of two related concepts, one of them is superior (privileged) while the other one is inferior (subordinate). Leitch (2001) and Green & Le Bihan (1996) however write that the grounds upon which the first item is privileged over the second is dependent on the second one for its supposed superiority. The concept of “good” for instance would not be meaningful without the concept of “bad”. For this reason, binary oppositions depend on a non-existent distinguishability. We have used this self-defeating idea of binary oppositions to query the binary opposites of social power presence or absence in characters.

To “deconstruct” is therefore to take something apart, to undo its doing, in order to seek out the assumptions immanent in it. One of the core functions of deconstruction according to Baker (2012) involves the dismantling of hierarchical binary oppositions such as speech and writing, reality and appearance, nature and culture or reason and madness. Binary divisions are seen to perpetuate certain truths by privileging one part of a binary dyad and subordinating the other. A deconstructionist is therefore interested in probing the principles that underpin the elevation of one part of a binary over its supposed polar opposite. In our case, presence or absence of social power in characters forms one type of binary opposition while a critical excavation into the factors that incite the flow of social power from one character to another propels the study.

Another type of binary opposition whose foundations this research scrutinizes involves characters who have undergone some form of social subalternation vis-a-vis those who have orchestrated or ratified this subordination. While conducting this enquiry, we borrow from Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak’s discourses on the silencing of the subaltern. Applerouth & Edles (2011) explain that Spivak has made some contributions to deconstruction by looking at how groups shut out from dominant social institutions are misrepresented by their own members who have attained privileged positions. In our study, we apply Spivak’s discourses on this Gramscian notion of subalternation to illuminate those influencing agents whose influence towards their targets has elements of negativity.

Although deconstruction was inaugurated as a linguistic literary criticism technique, as a reaction to Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralism, Lewis (2003) notes that cultural studies practitioners have adopted Derrida’s methods for a more general analysis of

cultural phenomena. Some of these cultural phenomena include discourses on power and language as found in particular texts, institutions and social practices. Deconstruction therefore seeks to expose assumptions that lead to formation of certain typologies in textualizations. The word “text”, in our study has a dualistic meaning of both “the written word” as found on the pages of a book and “communication”, viz. the message that the authors communicate to the reader through their works. This thesis concurs with Padley (2006:155) who states that the deconstructionist definition of “text” encapsulates all forms of human discourse and communication, not merely the literary. In this regard, the socio-cultural phenomena of social power and its dynamism in the novels is a “text” that we have subjected to Derridian deconstruction.

Deconstruction is also used to study characters. Tyson (2006) says that since the very essence of human beings is shaped by language, then, in the same way that one can study language to get meaning, one can also study characters as texts. Since language is an unstable, ambiguous force field of competing ideologies, then characters are also unstable, ambiguous force fields of competing ideologies. Characters do not have a single, stable identity but fragmented and multiple identities that are made up at any one moment of conflicting beliefs, desires, fears, anxieties and intentions. In this study, we subject characters to textualism so as to query the fragmented nature of their social power possession.

According to deconstructionists, obvious or commonsensical texts interpretations are in reality ideological readings. These are readings shaped by cultural beliefs, with which we have acquired so much familiarity, that we tend to see them as the only correct interpretations. Writers and readers are therefore the ones who construct the meaning in

texts, by aligning the meanings with their cultural expectations. Deconstruction re-looks at these meanings by incorporating other socio-cultural expectations into a work of art.

Deconstruction shows that meaning in literary texts is dynamic, ambiguous and unstable, just like the language with which it is expressed. Tyson (2006:253) writes that "...meaning is therefore not a stable element but rather, it is created through the play and effects of words on the reader". The meaning that is created is not stable and capable of producing closure. Meaning is a result of how we distinguish one signifier from another (difference) plus a never ending deferral of meaning. Derrida uses the word *differance* for this combination of *defer* and *differ*. Texts are made up of a multiplicity of conflicting and overlapping meanings in a dynamic fluid relation to one another. Seemingly unrelated parts of a text can therefore be shown to be related. This dynamism of meaning is what makes the theory to lend itself well with our study on power dynamism.

In the interpretation of texts, the assumptions upon which one reaches a conclusion form the subject matter of deconstruction. Lamarque & Olsen (1996:334) note that a text "shows" the reader a view of reality and leaves him or her to agree or disagree with this view. The text does not therefore impose an already agreed upon conclusion for the reader to adopt. Texts can therefore be seen to have any number of contexts on which they should be understood. In our study, the dynamism of social power in the characters is contextualized so that the possibility as to who has social power at any given moment provides a discursive site for this study.

In the application of deconstruction, texts are explicated for a range of inherently contradictory meanings. Thus, as Gasche (1994:26) notes, deconstruction works on the

premise that a text has “autonomy and self-reflexivity” and that “a textual argument undermines itself when it is examined for its emergent meaning and its intended meaning”. Padley (2006) writes that deconstructive approach to textual interpretation undermines the New Criticism assertion that literary works contain a fixed and unified core of meaning. Deconstruction therefore anticipates and reveals the unreliable nature of language, the existence of textual uncertainties, undecidability and the impossibility of ascribing a final unambiguous meaning to a text.

Commenting on the idea of textual undecidability, Jack Reynolds in Reynolds & Roffe (2004:46) own that an “undecidable” is something that cannot conform to any polarity of a dichotomy, for instance “good” or “bad”. Existence of this equivocation in texts breaks open the meaning the author intended to impose upon the reader and exposes the text to alternative understandings that undermine the explicit authorial intrusion. In this regard, the process of writing becomes a practice of revealing the suppressed while suppressing the revealed, showing the covert, while hiding the overt.

This assertion is supported by Tyson (2006) who states that deconstruction demonstrates how experience is determined by ideologies of which a person is unaware of because such ideologies are built into language. He notes that Derrida saw language as not being a reliable tool of communication but instead a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experience in which ideologies program people without such people being aware of them. At the level of language, deconstruction challenges the structuralists’ belief that structures of meaning are stable.

Contributing to this topic, Williams (2001:113) adds that a text “does not totalize meaning”. Instead, a text is a locus of established philosophical, political and historical meanings through which we read and understand the world. Textualization then becomes a process of signification. In our study, we have used deconstruction to make enquiries into the contradictions and absence(s) of finality with regard to which characters have social power over others. The theory is therefore useful in disentangling the intersected philosophical, political and historical meanings immanent in our text.

Reading of a text so as to go beyond the obvious ideological interpretations is what Barry (2005:54) calls “reading against the grain of the text” or reading the text “against itself”. This deconstructive reading of a text is intended to uncover the unconscious rather than the conscious dimensions of a text. These are the elements that an overt reading of a text would fail to recognize. In our study, we have deconstructed the overt appearances of social power possession and unearthed the covert dimensions of social power possession in characters.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In this section, we have hemmed our study within the larger corpus of sociological enquiries into the question of power. We have then narrowed down our interest into social power within the African family set up, before identifying the sociological bases upon which social power rides. Deconstruction as a theoretical framework has supplied the philosophical underpinning of our investigation. The review has revealed that there is a dearth of studies dealing with the dynamism of social power among characters in our chosen texts. This is the paucity that this study addresses.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section describes strategies and procedures that the researcher has used while undertaking the study. It focuses on the research type, design, approach, method and technique (Kothari, 1985).

#### **3.2 Research Type**

We have used a descriptive and analytical research as this study involves fact finding in a social science discipline. Information gathered on our subject of enquiry forms the analytical base.

#### **3.3 Research Design**

Our subject of enquiry relates to a quality or a kind, so the design adopted is the qualitative design. Further, the design involves motivational research because we are probing why characters are involved in different activities.

#### **3.4 Research Approach**

We are involved in the subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour of literary characters and rely on our subjective insights and impressions. The approach to adopt is therefore the qualitative approach.

#### **3.5 Research Method**

Visiting of Kenyatta University Post-Modern Library and Literature Department Resource Center, Kenyatta University Nakuru Campus Library, Laikipia University

library as well as other accessible university libraries are the main research methods adopted. The Nakuru Kenya National Library services have also been sought. Information has been gathered through reading of primary texts, secondary texts and visiting relevant Internet sites. The research supervisors have also be consulted periodically for guidelines.

### **3.6 Research Technique**

Data has been collected using biro pens and highlighting pens and recorded on foolscaps. It has then been transferred to a computer for organization. A USB flash disc has been used to transfer the data to a computer-connected printer so as to come up with the final printed research project loose leaves, which have be taken to the Kenyatta University Post-Modern Library bindery for binding.

## Chapter Two: Coercive Social Power: A Boomerang in Motion.

### 2.0 General Introduction

Social power is a property of a relationship between two or more persons. The power of an influencing agent is a joint function of his capacity to influence the target relative to the cost the agent incurs. This means that the more the agent can influence the target at a minimal cost to himself, the more social power such an agent has over the influencee. An exercise of social power relies less on the agent's characteristics but more on the relationship between the agent and target and the place of that relationship in the context of the larger social structure (Secord & Backman, 1974).

The amount of social power that individuals are able to exercise over others depends on several factors. One of them is the resource. A resource is a property, conditional state, a possession, appearance, personality trait or attribute that the agent has and which enables him or her to influence the target. The next factor is dependency, that is, the influencee must desire the resource the agent has. The situation or context is also important as the dependency or need of a resource is more acute in some situations than in others especially in the absence of an alternative source of the desired resource (Secord & Backman ).

In this chapter, and in line with objective (a) of this study, we probe the processes through which characters acquire and exercise coercive social power over others. We have identified religion, viz. Christianity, traditional African beliefs and Islamic faith as contexts in which coercive social power is acquired. This chapter therefore gives the details on how characters' religious orientation becomes a means of exercising coercive

social power. In subsequent chapters and in line with the title of this chapter, we shall demonstrate why exercise of coercive social power is self-defeating especially when its target(s) falls under the spell of referent power from another influencing agent.

In our texts, we notice patterns of behaviour where individuals either emotionally or physically abuse others, justifying their actions on religious beliefs. In other instances unpremeditated actions and courses of conduct are rooted in religious beliefs but the characters involved in them are not privy to this fact. French and Raven cited in Lamanna & Riedmann (1985:352-53) describe coercive social power as “based on the fear by one party that the second one will punish him or her for non-compliance”. Such punishment can involve physical assault or other subtle behaviours such as withdrawal of favours, affection or sex. Ultimately, the fear of rejection by one party due to non-compliance with what the second party wants is what makes the second party to exercise coercive social power over the first.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we single out Papa Eugene Achike as being the one who persecutes his family members, friends and acquaintances by virtue of his stringent adherence to Catholicism. We note that his holier-than-thou attitude leaves no room for negotiation with other people on what he considers to be the right conduct. The main characters who suffer as a result of interacting with him are his wife, Beatrice, and his children, Kambili and Jaja. Other members of his extended family are also not spared his wrath when they are not seen to embrace values that he espouses, as a devout Catholic Church follower.

We notice that Papa Achike’s interpretation of Biblical scripture is literal, a fact that makes his association with those who have liberal views on Christianity strained. Ouma

(2007) sees Eugene's brand of Christianity as being an aspect of religious fundamentalism shaped by the socio-cultural and political realities that coloured Nigeria at the time the novel is set in. Though in the public sphere Papa Eugene uses his newspaper to open up dialogic spaces in the junta regime present in Nigeria at the novel's temporal setting, in his private life, he represses his family's expressiveness. This contradiction in the public and private representation has been summed up in the following words:

Papa Eugene is indeed in the public sphere a champion of the freedom and space for dialogue within the public political spaces. The biggest irony of course is that this fundamentalism that manifests itself in the public space as a seeker of truth and "triumphant entries" manifests itself within the familial space as a silencer (Ouma, 30).

Papa Eugene's demand for his family members to subscribe to Catholic values regardless of their own unique drives and desires makes them withdrawn and apathetic and so contributes to an exercise of coercion. Another character who also uses religious convictions to exercise coercive power on others is Father Benedict, the parish priest based at St. Agnes Catholic Church in Enugu.

In *The Last Plague*, we probe the extent to which Janet's grandmother, referred to in the text as Grandmother, uses traditional and cultural beliefs to coerce those she interacts with into interpreting the happenings in Crossroads her way. Her efforts are directed towards her granddaughter, Janet. Other characters who use religious beliefs to emotionally or physically intimidate those who interact with them are Pastor Batolomeo and Musa. The former is the pastor of the local church in Crossroads, while the latter, a Muslim, operates a tea house. Janet's father, Maalim Juma Maalim also displays a tendency to using coercion in dealing with his daughters. In this chapter, we investigate

how characters' actions and thoughts are altered by those who wield religion-based coercive social power over them while in subsequent chapters we shall probe the manner in which social power shifts to other characters.

## 2.1 Breaking in the Name of Protecting

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we contend that Eugene uses Catholicism as a platform to exercise coercive social power over members of his family as well as the other relatives, the church and community members that he interacts with. Right from the start of *Purple Hibiscus*, we encounter Eugene acting in a violent manner because his son Jaja has failed to go for communion. Eugene throws the missal across the living room, in the process breaking the figurines on the étagère. Arguably, adherence and attendance to Catholic rituals is an important aspect of Eugene's lifestyle. Jaja's failure to attend communion is therefore viewed as a transgression of the norms that Eugene subscribes to and is keen to protect. The violent act of hurling the missal across the room instills fear in the family, more so because Eugene uses an artifact associated with worship as a missile (3).

Eugene's attempts to extend his religious idealism to the lives of his children lead to their ostracism from the world of their peers. His requirement that his children subscribe to only those values that he has vetoed as appropriate is read by Ouma as a monologue that seeks to silence other voices emanating from inside or outside his family. At Daughters of the Immaculate Heart School where Kambili learns, she is treated by some students as a pariah. This is because she does not mingle and interact with the other girls freely. Her withdrawn nature is misconstrued as being a show of aloofness, brought about by her father's wealth. Her father's assault on her mother makes her lose concentration in school. She states that every time she tried to read, the words in her books would keep

“turning to blood” (37). Her lack of concentration in school makes her lose the first position at the end of the term to Chinwe Jideze. Kambili’s emotional turmoil is evidence of trauma. She displays some behaviours that are symptomatic of traumatized children. Kamen (2007) identifies such symptoms as flashbacks, sleep disturbances and nightmares, depression, anxiety among others. Instead of Eugene’s religious zeal helping his children to perform well in school, it achieves the opposite effect, that of making Kambili fearful, withdrawn and unable to achieve her best in school.

Healthy development of teenagers requires that they associate productively with their peers. This serves the function of raising their self-esteem. Teenagers who do not associate confidently with their peers become withdrawn and isolated from others (Kamen, 2007). The fact that Eugene does not appreciate Kambili’s uniqueness as his daughter breeds a sense of insecurity and low self-esteem in her. Kambili stands in sharp contrast with Chinwe Jideze, the de facto peer leader in Kambili’s class. Other girls struggle to emulate Jideze, down to her *isi owu* and cornrows hair dos. Jideze walks with a springy step, her tight skirt clinging to her curvaceous hips. She completely ignores Kambili and does not speak to her even when the two are in the same agricultural science group. By using Catholicism to suppress Kambili’s expressiveness, Eugene creates a timid girl out of his daughter, one who is ill at ease when with her peers in school.

Daughters of the Immaculate Heart is a school that is steeped in strict religiosity that Eugene uses to suppress, rather than nurture his daughter’s potential. He unfavourably compares Kambili with Chinwe Jideze, the girl who has for the first time come first in class ahead of Kambili. The method used to make Kambili to outdo Jideze is intimidating, rather than encouraging. Like his predecessor, Okonkwo, in Chinua

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Eugene lapses into a diatribe about how his father was a failure, a failure that he will not stand aside to see it replayed in his children. This is what he tells Kambili:

“Why do you think I work so hard to give you and Jaja the best? You have to do something with all these privileges. Because God has given you much, he expects much from you. He expects perfection. I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone. I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission... Nobody dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school...” (47).

From these words, we contend that Eugene sees working hard and succeeding in school as a duty that his children should fulfill. This is interpretable as being an absolutist approach to child rearing. For him, the important thing is what is right, regardless of the negative consequences of attempting what he perceives to be the right thing to do. We therefore see Papa Eugene as living by deontological principles. Tyler and Reid (2002:137) state this about deontological morality:

Deontological ethical theories are concerned with examining the motivation for an act, not its consequences, and upon that basis establishing whether it is a morally right action. Deontological ethicists take the view that moral principles can be established *a priori*- that is, without experience. They are independent of experience because they are *inherently right*, irrespective of the outcome.

We see Papa Eugene as a deontological moralist because he does not realize that Kambili's industry in school (a morally right action) results to good performance that she does not appreciate (wrong outcome). The consequence Eugene's departure from a teleological approach to Kambili's educational experiences is that Kambili works hard, out of fear rather than a belief in her own abilities. She memorizes what her teachers say,

rather than reading books to understand, since her father's shadow over her impedes her ability to study. Fear and apprehension, akin to a lump of fufu forms in her throat every time she takes a test. This is because she fears that her results might be poor. She succeeds in ascending back to the first position in class the next term. Her attainment of position 1/25 is to her not an academic achievement beneficial to her but a fulfillment of God's purpose in her. Ironically, this is a success of her father's, rather than her own. For her, the fear of disappointing her father overrides her innate desire to excel academically.

Debatably, besides being a place where children acquire education, a school should also encourage development of other personal skills and nurturance of other talents. This means that children should have play time when they can hone their skills and abilities. Kamen (2007:64) identifies the physical competencies that teenagers should develop in school as inclusive of "improving their gross motor skills and co-ordination, which leads to proficiency in climbing, running, jumping, balancing, hopping, skipping and swimming". However, Eugene's brand of Christianity is such that he expects his children to be reserved and to follow strict schedules. As a result, Kambili is required to leave for home immediately the school day comes to an end and so misses out on physical training sessions after classes. At one time, Kevin, Papa Eugene's family driver, reports that she had taken a few minutes more than was necessary before coming out of the school to be driven home and Eugene reacts by slapping her right and left cheeks at the same time, leaving huge palm marks on her cheeks and ringing ears for some days (51).

This physical abuse and intimidation that has its roots in Eugene's religious orientation manifests itself more when Jaja and Kambili go to visit Papa-Nnukwu and Kevin later

reports that they had surpassed the time allotted for that visit by ten minutes. Eugene later confronts the children over this incident that one might dismiss as a misdemeanor saying:

“Kevin said that you stayed up to twenty-five minutes with your grandfather. Is that what I told you?” Papa’s voice was low.

“I wasted time, it was my fault,” Jaja said.

“What did you do there? Did you eat food sacrificed to the idols? Did you desecrate your Christian tongue?”

I sat frozen; I did not know that tongues could be Christian, too.

“No,” Jaja said.

Papa was walking towards Jaja. He spoke entirely in Igbo now. I thought he would pull at Jaja’s ears, that he would tag and yank at the same time as he spoke, that he would slap Jaja’s face and his palm would make that sound, like a heavy book falling from the library shelf in school. And then he would reach across and slap me on the face with the casualness of reaching for a pepper shaker. But he said, “I want you to finish that food and go to your rooms and pray for forgiveness, before turning to go back downstairs (69).”

In this study, it is our contention that rationing the time children can spend with their grandfather is an intrusion into their lives and serves to sever their ties with members of the extended family. Similarly, reference to food served in Papa-Nnukwu’s house as food sacrificed to idols serves to create fear in his children about their own grandfather. That this particular encounter between Eugene and his children almost degenerates into physical abuse serves to show the gravity with which Catholicism has been used by Eugene to terrorize members of his household.

Aversion to Family Life Education (F.L.E.) in favour of a Christian doctrinal one is used to harass Frank and Janet in *The Last Plague*. Janet’s work of educating the people of Crossroads about the ill effects of having too many children and of unprotected sexual liaisons is countered by the managers of the mission school ran by head Faru. The school community views Janet’s work as corrupting to the morals of the children and so team up with Chief Chupa and members of the clergy to parade her and Frank before a school

gathering. This happens after three boys are found by the school administration while in possession of inflated condoms. The school administration equates reproductive health education with the teaching of carnal matters and in this belief they are backed by the church, which in the meeting is represented by Pastor Batolomeo. For having made children aware about the existence of and uses of condoms, "people like Janet," Batolomeo states, "would be stoned to death in less tolerant societies" (305). Pastor Batolomeo aligns his religious pontification with the conservative curriculum of the mission school to defeat Janet and her work. We see Batolomeo's views on discussing sexual matters as paralleling what Foucault saw as a reticence on sexual matters among the ancient Greeks (McHoul & Grace, 2002). We advance that the attempt by Batolomeo and his church to keep reproductive health information from reaching children is not protective as they think. On the contrary, such a move would ensure that the children travel the path of doom that the older members of the community have done, ending up with large unmanageable families or infected with AIDS.

## **2.2 Subjugation Through Pharisaic Observance of Rituals**

Strict adherence to discipline as required by religious teachings is woven into the general fabric of Kambili and Jaja's lives. We posit that whereas children's activities involve creativity and spontaneity, Eugene has created some "miniature adults" out of his children by requiring them to adhere to strict schedules. Kambili gives us a peek at her life, which is governed by schedules and rules:

I pushed my textbook aside, looked up, and stared at my daily schedule, pasted on the wall above me. *Kambili* was written in bold letters on top of the white sheet of paper, just as *Jaja* was written on the schedule above the desk in his room... Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his

meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep.... (23-24).

With this kind of schedule that seeks to reduce Kambili and Jaja to automatons, what Papa Eugene does for his children is to bog them down with an admixture of religious and secularized rituals that make them dull and melancholic, rather than lively and productive. The result of subjecting the children to this life of routine and drabness is that they become apathetic and withdrawn, unable to freely erupt into fits of laughter or carefree merriment. The children then become gloomy and unappreciative of the wealth that their father tends to think is all that they need so as to enjoy their childhood. It is our contention that a parent like Papa Achike, who designs many mechanical rules for his children to follow, is shirking his responsibility of providing Family Life Education (F.L.E.) to his children. F.L.E. is:

... the orientation of young people on their physical, emotional and social development as they prepare for adulthood, parenthood, work and tasks that one is expected to accomplish within a family set up. It includes norms on personal conduct, skills, roles and responsibilities (FPAK, 2001:59).

F.L.E. therefore necessitates a close and continuous intercourse between a parent and a child, not written, academic instructions for the child to read and follow in a detached and emotionless manner.

In the Ash Wednesday service, Papa Eugene helps to distribute the ash but his line moves the slowest. This is because he takes more time as he presses hard on the foreheads of the worshippers, so as to make a perfect cross with his ash covered thumb. The zeal with which he performs this religious function points to an individual who believes in the power of religious rituals in the subjugation of believers. The pressure

applied on the worshippers' foreheads using the thumb is a physical reminder on the solemnity of the Ash Wednesday ritual. Eugene therefore makes the worshippers in his line feel that the Ash Wednesday is a solemn day, perhaps more so than other Sundays. We advance that the excess pressure on the foreheads of the worshippers is uncomfortable and intimidating. With it, Eugene succeeds in instilling feelings of reverence and awe in the worshippers, thereby seeking to control them through scare tactics.

In *The Last Plague*, we note how Mwangi has painted help from religious leaders as only possible if the seeker of the help is willing to subscribe to the requisite rituals as prescribed by the religious leader. We read this as being a form of coercion because if the leader were to only help those people who subscribe to his ritualistic standards, then those who for their own reasons are not ready or able to toe the line would be denied that help. This is what Janet realizes when she goes to Pastor Batolomeo to ask him to intervene and impress upon Kata not to marry Monika, his dead brother's widow. Pastor Bat adopts judgmental airs and dismisses Kata as an evil man and as for helping Julia out of her problem, he states that she needs to undergo clemency herself. He says:

"She married him, the scoundrel of her own free will,"...  
"Unless she repents and seeks salvation herself, no one can help her now: Everyone knows that God helps only those who help themselves (*sic*)" (96).

By vilifying Kata as above, Batolomeo becomes an adherent of the limited atonement argument as found among some churches. His assertion that Julia must belong to a select group of individuals for her to benefit from his help brings into question the truth about who salvation is intended, an issue that Tyler & Reid (2002) comment on thus:

There has been much theological debate about atonement. In particular, there has been the dispute regarding for whom Christ actually died. Some theologians have argued that he died only for the 'elect' few- that is, those whom God had predestined for eternal life. This is called *limited atonement*... Others, however, have argued that Christ died for all humanity and that all humans are, therefore, saved. His atoning death makes salvation possible for all people who choose to believe in him- this is called *universal atonement* (243).

Universal atonement as found in denominations such as the Catholic Church presupposes that one is not required to undergo some initiation into a special group for him to receive salvation. With limited atonement as found in Pentecostal Churches, one must be subjected to some form of ceremony that will precede his or her reception of salvation. This school of thought that practices particularism is the one that Batolomeo belongs to.

We advance that Batolomeo's assertion that Julia must herself repent and seek salvation smirks of his sense of superiority when it comes to disentangling people's problems. He is therefore an adherent of the limited atonement scriptural interpretation and sees himself as capable of securing salvation for Julia, if she is willing to be subjected to his own rituals. His statement that "God only helps those who help themselves" can be read as indicative of his philosophy that someone who suffers some kind of indisposition has in a way brought it upon herself for not subscribing to the requisite religious rituals that will bring about relief. As such, Batolomeo is not ready to extend his magnanimity to those who are still steeped in their ways and so uses religion to coerce Julia to adopt his brand of Christianity.

Proximity to what is considered to be a shrine or symbol of religious strength is important to Papa Eugene. He seems to believe that the closer he gets to an artifact of religious signification, then the more profound is the power that he will gain. We compare this

belief with that practiced from the auditory perspectives, so that a religious message delivered at a high volume with the help of public address systems and amplifiers is thought to be more moving than one intoned in low pitches. We note that Eugene has a preserved sitting area in the church, right at the front. He also undergoes the process of partaking in the Holy Communion in a more ostentatious way than the other worshippers.

Kambili analyzes her father's mannerisms in the church:

Papa always sat in the front pew for mass, at the end beside the middle aisle, with Mama, Jaja and me sitting next to him. He was the first to receive communion. Most people did not kneel to receive communion at the marble altar, with the blond life-size Virgin Mary mounted nearby, but Papa did. He would hold his eyes shut so hard that his face tightened into a grimace, and then he would stick out his tongue as far as it would go (4).

This excessive display of religious enthusiasm impacts profoundly on Kambili and the rest of Papa Eugene's family. Being the head of the household, Eugene sets standards that he expects his family to conform to, which in essence breeds feelings of fear and inadequacy for those who do not innately share Eugene's zeal. His expectation that his family members should live by idealistic religious standards is contrary to the socially accepted principle of man's fallibility. Ottenberg & Ottenberg (1960:347) write that "all social institutions allow all people a certain falling short from the ideals of behaviour without comment or punishment; but all set more or less rigid limits to their tolerance by stating rules of good manners, of morality, of common sense of law: beyond which if a man fall short, he is condemned 'no gentleman', 'a sinner', 'a fool', or 'a law breaker' by his fellows and by them or by the gods he is punished." In light of the foregoing, we see Papa Eugene as contradicting the universal principle of sufferance that humanity should retain for fellow humanity when one falls short of expected ideals. The requirement that

his family sit at the front pew is interpretable as raising the bar of religious observance for them, a fact that puts them under pressure to measure up to his expectations.

Just as Eugene has reserved a front pew in church for himself and his family, so also do we see Pastor Batolomeo and his church committee reserve their church as a sacred place that they should monopolize without opening it out to needy outsiders. Whereas the church can be considered to be a hallowed place where the needy can come for emotional support and counseling, Batolomeo and his committee barricade themselves within the walls of their church and lock out the needy orphans whom Janet and Frank are trying to get a shelter for. Here, the narrator talks about the committee's self righteous attitude and the exclusivity of their church:

Pastor Bat's Parish Committee was composed of a motley group of old men and women; a self satisfied group to whom the crumbling old church house was their only refuge, a private ground where only *the chosen and the privileged* (my emphasis) had the right to be (114).

We argue that by insisting that orphans left behind by parents who have died from AIDS cannot find refuge within the church compound, the committee connotes that such children do not fall within the definition of "the chosen and the privileged". The old men who run the church therefore see themselves as deserving to be close to the hallowed precincts of the church while AIDS orphans should be far away. In this manner, the church stigmatizes and segregates those afflicted by AIDS as well as their families. This makes children orphaned by AIDS and their relatives even more miserable than the case would have been if Batolomeos's church did not join other voices that are out to stigmatize those afflicted by AIDS.

Quite ironically, Eugene emphasizes the importance of modesty to his family but impassively revels in Father Benedict's praise of his contributions in different church projects. The congregation silently and obediently listens as Benedict repeatedly reminds them about Eugene's generosity towards Peter's Pence and St. Vincent de Paul. Eugene has also paid for cartons of communion wine, new ovens at the convent and for the new wing at St. Agnes Hospital. This broadcasted generosity makes Eugene's stature to grow in the eyes of the church goers.

It is to be noted that part of the Catholic Reformation Movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the defiance of the Protestants' requirement that worship was to be held in a simplified manner. As Molloy (2008:401) demonstrates, the Protestants and the Catholics differed in the following areas:

Protestants rejected the authority of the pope; Catholics stressed it. Protestants demanded the use of native languages; Catholics retained the use of Latin. Protestants emphasized simplicity in architecture and music; Catholics created churches of flamboyant drama.

It is against this backdrop that we read Papa Eugene Achike's contribution to development projects in the church. Just like the Catholic Church sought to stamp its authority through ostentation, Eugene does the same too with the worshippers so that he can gain control over them. The high regard with which he is treated gives him the mandate to watch out on those who miss partaking in the Holy Communion and communicate the fact to Father Benedict. In the eyes of Kambili, Jaja and other worshippers, Eugene becomes a symbol of oppression in the church. In perfecting his pretext at benevolence, Eugene actually places himself at a position where his word

becomes law as he is seen to be one of those people on whom the well being of the others depends.

In *The Last Plague*, Julia and Janet are brought up in restrictive familial spaces, their lives dictated by Muslim laws. Their father, Maalim Juma Maalim mistakenly believes that by running his family on principles of religious restrictions, his children will automatically grow to be obedient. We aver in this study that his attempt to exploit religion to shape his children produces the opposite effect, which is driving them to look for love from men who are not Muslims. The narrator tells of how Maalim's religion had made it easier for Broker to woo Janet:

Wildly independent and resourceful, Broker was the very embodiment of liberty that girls of her age yearned for. He had started by changing her habits and her religion, and skewed her perception of men for ever... And, as if that was not enough to break the poor parents' health, Julia, her only sister, had followed Janet to her new religion and married a man old enough to be her father, a heathen and a fore skin gatherer (65).

Maalim's confinement of his daughters and his restrictions on who they can associate with raises meta-ethical questions. His feelings that his daughters should only associate with fellow Moslems can be adjudged as emotivism devoid of any empirical or factual support. We postulate that just because his family subscribes to Islam, this does not mean that the values he lives by are necessarily universally acceptable. Janet and Julia are not constrained to live by his ethical expectations. Acceptable behaviour is ever changing, depending on how a perceiver of a certain phenomena feels at any given time, and what is acceptable conduct need not be shared by all the people in a given environment. Contributing on this thesis, Tyler and Reid (2002:131) state that:

\*If ethical claims are contingent with emotions, then they would change as emotions changed. Neither could they be universal claims, since the emotions of different speakers would vary.

\*Even when moral statements are carried by the weight of public emotion, that does not make them the reason that they are adopted and it does not make them right.

We see Maalim's attempt at making his daughters associate with the Muslim sub-culture as being an aspect of Islamic morality, weighted by public approval. His decision to limit his children's interactions with non-Muslims is therefore an element of emotivism that his daughters are not bound to agree with and which leads to their defiance. We advance that by confining his daughters within religious boundaries, Maalim Juma Maalim can be credited with sowing the seeds of discord between himself and his daughters, a fact that the opportunistic Broker and the prurient Kata would later capitalize on in their quest of getting some young, untainted girls for wives.

### **2.3 'Othering' Non-Conformists**

In the world of Papa Eugene, western religion, specifically Christianity is regarded with an element of novelty. Religious practices with western origins are therefore seen as exotic and revered while native ways of worship are taken to be commonplace and unappealing. To the worshippers at St. Agnes, the existence of Father Benedict, a priest of Caucasian roots, serves to cast a halo of sanctity to the worship service. Though the priest has been in the locale for seven years, the local people still refer to him as "our new priest" (4). Father Benedict also insists that the Credo and Kyrie be recited only in Latin as Igbo is not acceptable. Igbo songs are only sung during the offertory.

The insistence by Father Benedict that the Credo and Kyrie be recited in Latin is derived from practices present in the Catholic Church during the (Counter) Reformation period

that sought to ward off the onslaught directed at their doctrinal practices by the Protestant Reformation. Molloy (2008) documents how in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Catholic Church came out to resist and reject the demands of the Protestant reformers. Some of the Catholic practices the Protestants rose up against were the authority of the pope, use of non-indigenous languages in the church and erection of ostentatious church buildings. The Catholic Church however sought to defend these traditions. It is from this historical reality that we witness part of the mass at St. Agnes being celebrated in Latin.

What emerges in the worship service at St. Agnes church is that in terms of religious practice, the proper self is taken to be those who have accepted Christianity and learnt how to practice it as per the dictates of traditional doctrine while those who still cherish traditional African values are 'othered' and treated as lesser believers. By virtue of his origins, coupled with a liturgy presented in Latin, Father Benedict has the effect of making St. Agnes church more demanding on the worshippers than it would have been under the leadership of an African Father celebrating mass in local languages. We read Benedict's insistence on privileging Latin over Igbo in his church as a way of ghettoizing those African worshippers who are yet to master Latin. Such people feel despised, rather than loved, while in St. Agnes church.

Whereas physical barriers are used to browbeat Kambili and Jaja into toeing Eugene's line, Musa and Uncle Mark have worked themselves into hopelessness by constantly evoking fearful religious images of doom in their conversations. We argue that the two men rein in other people by dwelling on Biblical and Koranic readings that depict the problems at Crossroads as being a fulfillment of religious teachings about what would happen at the end times. Uncle Mark therefore exercises Coercive social power over

Broker by pointing Broker out as an example of how the end times would be like. As for Musa, the fact that business has deteriorated is evidence of the happenings at the end times. This is what we infer from this talk directed at Broker:

Musa watched another crowd disperse without spending a bean in his place, and was more than dismayed. He walked over to Broker to moan about it, and to wonder if it had anything at all to do with Armageddon and the prophecy that he and Uncle Mark talked endlessly about. Broker was tired and in pain and in no mood for conversation; but he assured Musa that religion had absolutely nothing at all to do with the events of that day (394).

We interpret this attribution of bad business and the existence of AIDS to actualization of religious prophecies as stigmatic and persecutory towards Broker. This is so because Broker is trying to fight the causes of the disease at Crossroads and so insistence that what is happening was preordained is dispiriting to Broker. Musa further goes on to humiliate Broker by refusing to serve him some tea after the latter admits that he prays for his health but does not do it in the Muslim usage (395). In this regard, Broker is treated by Musa as an exception, rather than the norm. In Musa's mind, Broker is a fulfillment of the horrible end time prophecies as articulated by religious literature.

Eugene's veneration of Christianity and his treatment of African ways of worship as diabolical are used by him to shape his children's thinking. He teaches his children to shun loud singing in church, especially if the singing is also done in Igbo language. When Father Amadi leads St. Agnes in celebrating mass and in the middle of the homily breaks into an Igbo song, Eugene purses his lips in disapproval, casts a sideways glance at his children to assure himself that they are not singing alongside the priest and later on compares the young priest to "a Godless leader of one of the Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms" (29).

We read Papa Eugene's brand of Catholicism as exclusivist. This dislike for other people's methods of worship necessarily puts him on collision course with other people.

Thompson (1997:255) disapproves an exclusivist interpretation to religion. He states that:

- An exclusivist holds that only the beliefs of his or her religion are true.

This is not a common position to hold, since it is clear that there are a good number of beliefs that are shared by more than one religion. On the other hand, it is commonly argued that a person's own religion is uniquely privileged in its understanding of religious truth. In other words, that it has the full truth whereas other religions have only partial truth.

When Papa Eugene disapproves of Amadi's Igbo song, yet Father Amadi is also a Catholic priest, Papa Eugene shows the inappropriateness of religious exclusivity as articulated by Thompson. Catholicism, as a religion, is a common and expectedly unifying factor between Father Amadi and Achike and so it should serve to bond them. Papa Eugene should therefore ideally make concessions on Amadi's affinity with Igbo songs in the worship service. Instead, Papa Eugene makes Kambili and Jaja to feel resentful towards Igbo, their African language as well as Father Amadi. They feel that Igbo is a language to be associated with mediocrity and so should be shunned.

We contend that Papa Eugene's dislike for African languages has been imposed on him by the colonial bearers of Catholicism. He therefore fails to apply principles of autonomous morality in his decision on what language(s) should be used in worship. Instead, he applies principles of heteronomous morality in his interpretation of church practices. He takes what Catholicism has introduced to worship practice as being the cultural standard with which propriety in worship should be adjudicated.

Eugene also discourages his children from speaking Igbo in public, ostensibly so that by speaking English, they can look civilized. Igbo is a language that he lapses into only when he is angry. By demonizing local languages and customs, Eugene maroons his family in an unstable state of social in-betweenness as they neither fully identify themselves with their African heritage nor can he hope to transform them into complete European cultural standards. Eugene's treatment of his children is akin to that of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, the latter who also persecutes members of his family, such as Nwoye, his son, whom he feels is effeminate. When we look at *Things Fall Apart*, we notice the analogous relationship that subsists between Kambili and Nwoye's ill-treatment by their respective fathers. The narrator uses the following words to show the mistreatment that Nwoye goes through because of not measuring up to Okonkwo's masculine expectations:

During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cock-crow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue. But his wives and young children were not as strong, and so they suffered. But they dared not complain openly. Okonkwo's first son, Nwoye, was then twelve years old but was already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness. At any rate, that was how it looked to his father, and he sought to correct him by constant nagging and beating. And so Nwoye was developing into a sad-faced youth (Achebe, 1958:10).

The expectation by Okonkwo that a twelve-year-old should display the same industry and zeal in the farm as an adult is akin to Papa Eugene's expectation that his children should be blemish-free. Eugene sees his own father as being Godless. He nevertheless used to idolize his father-in-law (now diseased) for being an epitome of what he considers to be a righteous person. Kambili recalls how their family would stop at their maternal grandfather's home every Christmas to visit with their grandfather. What seemed to have

appealed to Eugene so much was the fact that his father-in-law was light skinned, almost like an albino. He also determinedly spoke English, albeit with a heavy Igbo accent. He could also speak Latin and quote articles from Vatican I. Coupled with other vestiges of imperialistic mannerisms and idiosyncrasies, Eugene's father-in-law became the perfect father that his real one, Papa-Nnukwu, was not. Through this unfavourable comparison of his father to his father-in-law, we aver that Eugene mistreated and continues to mistreat Papa-Nnukwu.

Pastor Bat, Musa and Kata epitomize religious bigotry in *The Last Plague*. They see themselves and those who subscribe to their religious beliefs as being better than the other people who hold different views. They consequently carry out actions that are designed to ostracize, even harm those they consider to be the "other". Pastor Bat for instance refuses to get involved in discouraging Kata from marrying Monika and while talking to Janet about it, he dismisses Kata in the following derogatory terms:

"Your brother is a heathen who worships goats and spirits. You know he does not believe in heaven or hell, anymore; he told me so himself. He is doomed to perish in the eternal fire" (96).

This adoption of a holier-than-thou attitude by Bat is something that he uses to persecute those people who do not subscribe to the values that his church espouses. His dismissal of Kata as a worshipper of animals and spirits flies in the face of the spirit of religious tolerance. Kata is therefore consigned to the group of outsiders, who are not even allowed within the church premises. The narrator makes the following distinction on how the church dichotomizes the people of Crossroads:

It was a small country church, with wooden walls and a broken roof, whose doors and windows had long been vandalized by heathens. But, despite its poverty and desecration, the church

stood in unassailable dignity behind a low cedar fence and was secured by a wooden gate through which only true believers ever ventured. The rest had to stand outside the perimeter fence and wait for the pastor to come and minister to their needs out there by the gates (94).

We read Pastor Batolomeo, just like Papa Eugene, as being a slave of fundamentalism and literalism when it comes to interpretation of religious doctrines. His refusal to treat those he does not perceive to be full church members the same way as those who are supposedly full members is a result of his literal interpretation and application of his reading of the Bible. A plain reading of the Bible is not appropriate as has been noted by a scholar on religion:

Given the ongoing discussion in academic circles about religious belief, and the nature of religious language, one might assume that most believers would come to the conclusion that language about beliefs is best understood in a metaphorical or symbolic way. To pretend that literal language can be used for a concept such as 'God' is self-defeating... (Thompson, 1997: 256).

From the foregoing, a literal understanding of God is interpretable as not being different from idolatry (which Batolomeo accuses Kata of). This is because idols are not necessarily physical objects but can also be mental idols in form of creeds, which are venerated in themselves instead of being used as pointers to what is transcendent. We advance that Batolomeo's church and his conception of God are a form of idolatry that does not assist the people of crossroads towards the discovery of righteousness.

This discriminatory treatment of people based on their perceived levels of faith is used to humiliate those who purportedly are not holy enough. It is also the mindset that makes Kata, a Muslim, to commit acts of atrocities against perceived heathens. This is what Frank learns from Musa:

“Kata killed a man,” Musa revealed. “Slit his throat with a circumcision knife, like a pig.”

“Why?” Frank asked him.

“He was a *kafiri*, an infidel,” Musa said, in a voice that implied it was alright to kill Godless heathens (66).

From the beliefs of Batolomeo, Musa and Kata, we posit that in the society presented by Mwangi, religion fails to play a unifying role but instead balkanizes those who subscribe to its values from those who do not. Musa for example commits a homicide due to his belief that the person he killed was a non-believer and so deserved to die.

Papa Eugene uses English to align himself with white people and therefore appear as more knowledgeable, intimidating and powerful to those he interacts with. His is therefore a fragmented personality since as Kambili has come to notice, he uses Igbo when angry, African accented English on ordinary occasions and British accented English when speaking with white people. The narrator observes how her father demeans himself and acts in a servile manner by adopting a British accent when speaking to Sister Margaret:

Papa changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager-to-please way he assumed with the religious, especially the white religious. As gracious as when he presented the check for refurbishing the Daughters of Immaculate Heart Library (46).

In this case, we posit that by adopting a friendly, affable and arguably condescending and ingratiating attitude with Sister Margaret, who is in charge of Daughters of the Immaculate school, Eugene distances himself from his daughter, showing her that he stands on the same platform with her white teacher, rather than with her (Kambili). This has the effect of creating distance between him and his daughter, a fact that ensures that Kambili feels inferior rather than at the same level of interface with her father. Papa

Eugene can therefore be said to “conduct” Kambili’s behaviour. Foucault (1982:789) states that “in the exercise of power, the dominant party directs or conducts the behaviour of the dominated one”. This is done by leading the dominated party in such a way as to (pre)determine the possible behaviour of the dominated party.

Chief Chupa, in *The Last Plague*, is the custodian of authority and power as bestowed upon him by the government. He is therefore one person who does not take kindly to the incursions and inroads being made by Janet in her civil education of Crossroads’ inhabitants, seeing her work as a weakening of his powers. He therefore concocts some trumped up charges against Janet and Frank, accusing them of corrupting the morals of the children in Crossroads. He is backed by school heads, who claim that children are agitating for the teaching of sex education in their schools (195). It is at this level that religion is used to add more impetus to the fight against Janet and her Family Life Education Program (FLEP). The church voices its concern that knowledge about sexuality would be detrimental to the lives of the children. In the trial, we see a member of the clergy voicing the general feeling of the church on FLEP:

A church leader quietly observed that it is a well known fact that education led to arrogance and corruption. What would stop the children from experimenting with their newly acquired knowledge? (197)

The church leader equates dissemination of FLEP to the children with the rousing of passions in them. To him, children cannot be in possession of knowledge on sexuality without such knowledge being put to the wrong use. He therefore sees knowledge about sexuality as only capable of breeding debauchery, rather than directing the children towards the path of probity. In the same way that Eugene aligns himself with Sister

Margaret, the church leader sides with Chief Chupa so as to identify himself with the social power wielder in trial. He uses his position as a religious leader to coerce Janet and Frank into discarding their campaign.

Admittedly, religious intolerance estranges parents from children in those families caught in a religious beliefs' warp. Mwangi demonstrates the extent to which parents who cling too heavily on religion and attempt to forge the destinies of their children along religious lines sometimes come to naught. In this study, we explore the argumentum that Janet's parents are to a large extent responsible for creating a rebellious girl out of her through their strict Muslim upbringing that throttled Janet's natural romantic pursuits. This is witnessed in the following dialogue with Frank, about how she came to get married by

Broker:

"You would not talk to me," he (Frank) reminded her (Janet).

"You were the son of a preacher," she reminded him.

"And you were the daughter of an old Imam," he reminded.

They were oil and water as far as religion went. But, religion aside, her mother would have skinned her if she had caught her talking to boys. Boys were for shameless village girls.

Then Frank had gone away to college and Broker had come along and, respecting neither religion nor family values, swept her off her feet and made her as shameless as a girl could get. Then he had married her and forever estranged her from her parents. The parents had left Crossroads shortly after that, to escape the stigma and to mourn the fact that she, who had lacked nothing at all in her life, had given herself to a *kafiri*, a non-believer, and a rogue whom everyone knew would come to nothing (46).

Seemingly, by sufficiently meeting their children's material needs, Eugene and Maalim erroneously think a strict application of Biblical and Quran principles of discipline will be enough to chaperone their wards towards the path of tractability. Their attempt at "governing their children" (Foucault, 1982:790) does not bring about the desired conduct.

In this study, it is our contention that their book application of religion to children who are growing and who need to satisfy the normal developmental requirements has the power of creating rebellion and estrangement, rather than subservience in the children. Maalim's attempts to steer Janet towards his preferred marital choices interfere with her connubial plans to such an extent that she finally makes a hasty decision, that of accepting Broker as her mate.

#### 2.4 Transgressions of Norms

Musa is appalled that Broker, who is seriously sick, does not pray for his healing "appropriately" as required by Islam. As a conservative Muslim, Musa alleges that prayers for the sick should be said in the right manner so that the sick person can get healed. He therefore becomes angry upon learning that Broker is lackadaisical and pedestrian about praying. Broker does not even believe that any prayers offered to God would improve his health. He earns Musa's wrath for this as we see from their exchange:

"You don't pray anymore?" Musa was horrified.

"Oh, I do," Broker assured him. "I pray all the time."...

"But I don't face in particular direction or assume any special position when I pray."... (395).

Arguably, Broker's failure to yield to the rules of Muslim worship is informed by the fact that even amongst the devout Muslims themselves, the direction one faces when praying has changed in the course of history. When Musa learns that Broker does not dedicate special prayers for his health status, he changes his attitude towards him. The narrator tells us that Musa even refuses to honour Broker's order for tea, describing Broker as a *kafiri*. By admitting that he does not follow the prescribed rituals of prayer, Broker is

seen to have gone contrary to Muslim prayer procedure that can be broken down to the following steps:

Before prayer, the individual is normally expected to perform a ritual of purification using water, washing the hands, arms, face, neck, and feet. If water is unavailable, purification may be done with sand.

Those who pray face towards Mecca... In the earliest days of Islam, Muslims faced Jerusalem for prayer, but later revelations received by Muhammad in Yathrib changed this direction to Mecca (Molloy, 2008:446).

This variation that has taken place with regard to the direction Muslims have faced when praying is replicated in Broker's negligence to prayer procedure. Musa sees Broker as having broken the sacred code that regulates Muslim prayers especially for the sick. We advance in this study that by trying to dictate to Broker a prayer procedure that Broker is not comfortable with, Musa applies a form of coercion, relying on religion. The fact that he refuses to serve Broker some tea is evidence of the fact that this coercion has unpleasant ramifications for Broker.

Whereas religion should serve to guide mankind into following acceptable courses of action, Eugene uses it to peddle scare tactics to those whom he does not regard to be holy. His quests to surmount all forces that do not rally behind his religious fanaticism make him to transgress cultural norms such as reverence and respect towards one's parents. As a consequence, he leads in a prayer for the conversion of his own father, Papa-Nnukwu. Eugene reserves some time in his prayer for describing hell, which he hopes to save his father from, by converting him to Christianity. Since Papa-Nnukwu is a heathen as far as Eugene is concerned, he has been banned from entering Eugene's house. Prevailed upon by members of his *umunna* to be letting his children talk to their

grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, Eugene nevertheless takes cautionary measures to prevent them from being tainted with what he considers to be heathen practices. Here, we see him giving firm instructions to his children on how they are to behave when they go to visit their grandfather:

Papa closed the Bible. "Kambili and Jaja, you will go this afternoon to your grandfather's house and *greet him* (my emphasis). Kevin will take you. Remember, don't touch any food, don't drink anything. And as usual, you will not stay longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes" (61).

In this case, Eugene attempts to cut familial links between his own children and their grandfather. He paints his own father as a diabolical man, a fact that leads to Papa-Nnukwu's traumatism; that he is treated like a pariah by his own son. Eugene's reference to his children's visit to their grandfather's house as going to "greet him" and his gifts of meager amounts of money to Papa-Nnukwu are a perfunctory exercise of cosmetic civility, meant to preserve his respect as a revered *Omelora* in Abba. Arguably, the curtailing of interaction between his children and their grandfather makes their lives dreary as they are not able to partake in the joys of interacting with one of their relatives.

Eugene goes further to exhibit his vitriolic aversion to traditionalists such as Papa-Nnukwu by descending into a verbal tirade when he sees Anikwenwa in his Abba home. Calling the old man a worshipper of idols, Eugene demands that he leaves the precincts of his home immediately. The old man, drawing on tribal wisdom, reminds Eugene that he (Anikwenwa) sucked at his mother's breast at the time that Eugene's father did the same but this subtle admonition is lost on Eugene; he insists that Anikwenwa must leave his compound (70).

Stigmatization of People Living With Aids (P.L.W.A.) has been exacerbated by religion, instead of being lightened by the same. The treatment of people who have contracted H.I.V. as pariahs who have brought the unlucky situation upon themselves is attributable to characters who profess some form of religious belief. A case in point is Musa, who every now and then keeps using the word "unclean" to refer to those who have not adopted the Islam faith. He owns a hotel and rooms for boarding but is discomfited by the possibility of one of his boarders, Broker, who is suffering from AIDS, dying in his premises. Although Broker has a lot of money and has been able to exercise social power over Musa in other ways, it now becomes Musa's turn to exercise coercive social power over Broker, using the possibility of evicting him from his property; a possibility informed by his abhorrence of unclean people as well those infected with AIDS. Here, the narrator reveals Musa's apprehension at the possibility of having to deal with a corpse occasioned by AIDS at his premises:

Musa was determined that Broker should not die in his room at night and was keeping a close watch on Broker's health. The slightest change had him sending for Janet, and on the carpet praying for Broker's recovery. He was also secretly rehearsing the Muslim prayers for the dead (398).

We deconstruct Musa's concern with Broker's health as not being based on his wish for Broker's recovery but based on the fear that his death would affect his business and his faith. His treatment of Broker and Janet can be summarized as being a form of emotional abuse on Broker. We postulate that his abhorrence at the possibility of dealing with Broker's death on his premises is an abomination.<sup>9</sup> This is because Broker is a living person deserving to be treated with respect, his health status notwithstanding. We

therefore question Musa's taking of money from a client that he associates with dirt and filth.

## 2.5 Warped Interpretation of Phenomena

Eugene uses the ritual of formal liturgical prayers to suppress his household and restrict his family members into adopting what he considers to be the opposite way of worship. The patterned prayers that have fixed statements that attract fixed answers are an extension of Eugene's rigidity and inflexibility when dealing with his family. Kambili says that while they are in Abba, her father leads in the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and Glory Be while they respond loudly to the first few words but remain enveloped in an outer silence. His direction for the family to pray in their own words for the intercession of the spirit releases Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice from this imposed silence and thereafter they are able to bubble into loud, discordant prayers, devoid of the impersonal and mechanical responses of the liturgical prayers. It can be concluded that Eugene has disregarded all aspects of traditional worship because he sees Catholicism as being a superior religion. By virtue of the fact that it is an alien form of worship replete with novel rites, Eugene mistakenly believes that it is therefore better and holier than what he had known before.

The equating of a religious experience to externally learnt and perfected rites and routines runs contrary to studies on what constitutes a genuine religious experience. A religious experience is about:

...the encounter with something that is totally other, unknowable; something awesome in its dimensions and power, but also attractive and fascinating. ... a whole range of feelings ('creeping flesh'; the fear of ghosts; the sense of something that

is uncanny, weird or eerie) ... (Otto, Rudolf cited in Thompson, 1997:11)

The gist of the above understanding of a religious experience is that a subject cannot compel himself to undergo the experience. Instead, the religious encounter is involuntarily and inadvertently experienced. Papa Eugene does not anchor his religious experiences on Otto's understanding of religion. On the other hand, we see Kambili go through what Otto describes. This happens when she goes to Aokoje on a pilgrimage and experiences the apparition of the Virgin Mary, yet the other family members with her do not witness anything.

We notice that using the character of Grandmother, Mwangi has also exposed the Manichean approaches employed by the religious to shoo those they do not consider pious towards conformity. She therefore tries to show Janet the folly of her anti-Aids campaign by invoking the name of God and associating AIDS with God's retribution. Grandmother tells Janet of how she sides with Crossroads men, whom she says have come to accept the power of God that is manifested by the outbreak of AIDS:

"They know they cannot fight God," Grandmother told her. Men were wise to know that, if God wanted to finish off the whole of His people, He would do so and no one could stop Him. God could not be stopped (42).

Grandmother portrays God as a vengeful and unequivocally unyielding being quick to condemn those whose conduct the supposedly holy people disapprove. We call this a Manichean approach because it aims to separate good from evil, so that AIDS has to be compartmentalized as either good or bad. This philosophy is in keeping with Eugene's judgmental predisposition towards his father. We advance that invocation of God's name by Grandmother is an attempt by her to elevate herself to the plateau of righteousness

while cosigning Janet and her ilk to the terrain of iniquity, just like Eugene does with Papa-Nnukwu. By using God's name to bolster their arguments, the two characters usurp God's power and exercise it over other characters. Grandmother therefore demoralizes her granddaughter, making Janet's anti-Aids work more difficult.

The patterns of speech, mannerisms and idiosyncrasies of Eugene's family members are coloured by his religiosity. Beatrice, Kambili's mother, has only two children but is due to deliver another child in October. Upon getting this information from her mother, Kambili replies with the words "Thanks be to God"(20), not because that would be her natural response in a situation like that but as she says, it is what their father would have expected them to say whenever something good happens. We submit that it would be more customary for a child who hears that her mother is expecting a child to mellow up into a state of glee and/or wonderment depending on how well she understands parturition matters but with Kambili, the response is subdued, a result of her father's brand of religion that frowns upon excessive show of exuberance.

The constrained demeanor with which Eugene's family is forced to display their emotions especially in the presence of other people is quite unlike that of Ade Coker's family. Ade Coker is described as a small, round, laughing man. He delights in playing with his children, even throwing the younger child in the air. He claims that the higher one throws up the child, the higher it is likely to fly. This is analogous to the fact that the encouragement given to a child by its parent propels it to higher levels of achievement. Yawande, Coker's wife has a relaxed, cordial relationship with her husband, to the extent that she is free to slap Coker playfully on the shoulder, something that would seem like an abomination for Beatrice to try with Eugene. Coker notes the unresponsive deportment

that Kambili and Jaja effect and laments that they are always so quiet. Eugene is proud of his children's silence, claiming that they are unlike "those loud children people are raising these days, with no home training and no fear of God" (58). Asked by Coker if they enjoy going to Abba, Jaja and Kambili have first to cast a glance at their father to read his facial expression. Seeing a smile of encouragement on his face, they automatically answer in the affirmative. Eugene therefore sees the withdrawn nature of his children as a sign of good breeding instead of it being a sign of maladjustment. Using religion as a restraining tool, Eugene has therefore killed his children's spontaneity and natural response to happy childhood situations.

As a father and husband, Eugene commands respect that borders on idolatry from his family due to the fact that though Beatrice had several miscarriages after Kambili's birth, he has refused to take on a second wife to give him more children. The Catholicism that he subscribes to requires marriages to be monogamous, a fact that is lost on his wife and children. To his family, his defiance of his *umunna's* advice to take on a second wife is interpreted as loyalty to Beatrice. Here, Beatrice feeds Kambili with this incorrect version of Eugene's loyalty to her:

"God is faithful. You know after you came and I had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our *umunna* even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezenadu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us" (20).

This therefore shows that for Beatrice, the fact that her husband has remained married to her alone is a favour that she reciprocates by remaining loyal to him despite the fact that the miscarriages are occasioned by his physical abuse to her.

A refusal to face up to the challenges that AIDS poses in Crossroads informs the projection with which some characters deal with the scourge. Grandmother for instance does not see AIDS as just an ordinary disease like any other that requires behavioural change and medical management. Instead, like Beatrice, she refuses to acknowledge reality. She decides to blame religion for what afflicts the society even as Janet tries to secularize the problem for her as seen below:

“God has nothing to do with the plague,” Janet told her.  
But the saddest thing about it was that Aids could be prevented.  
“Why, then, is it not prevented?” she asked, indignant.  
“Because people do not want to listen to reason,” Janet told her.  
“It’s easier to believe that the current plague is a curse from God.”  
“Which it is,” she grumbled.  
“Which it’s not,” Janet was emphatic about it. “Aids is a disease like any other. A terrible disease like typhoid and cholera and all those other terrible diseases, but a disease all the same.”  
“A disease so terrible it does not fear God?” she asked.  
“Exactly,” Janet told her. “A disease so terrible it respects no medicine. That’s what is so different about it; that it fears neither man nor God and defies all known cures” (39).

Grandmother’s inability to comprehend how a disease can surmount God’s power and her insinuation that its existence is due to God’s abandonment of humanity is what we infer as being a form of projection. She associates AIDS with some wrong doing, just as do members of the clergy in Crossroads. As seen elsewhere in this study, religious organizations such as Pastor Batolomeo’s church are averse to discussing the H.I.V./AIDS pandemic. Batolomeo does not even want to host the children orphaned by AIDS, seeing AIDS as a disease for sinners. This is what Grandmother also seems to believe, giving Janet an uphill task of trying to impress on her that the disease is not a form of retribution. The secularizing of the AIDS pandemic by religious organizations should be encouraged as has been noted by the United Nations:

Ultimately, if lives are to be saved, faith-based organizations responding to HIV/AIDS need to provide clear and accurate information on ways to avoid contracting and spreading HIV, including the use of condoms. Dialogue on this emotionally charged issue should include scientific information on the proven effectiveness of condoms in preventing HIV transmission, presented in the context of relevant doctrines and religious teachings. Many religious organizations, while promoting the sanctity of sex within marriage and providing abstinence and fidelity education, are in a good position to provide condoms in an appropriate, targeted and sensitive manner as one part of an overall prevention strategy (UNICEF 2003: 9).

UNICEF understands the role of the church in the arrest of the spread of AIDS. By virtue of the fact that religious leaders are revered in the society, then they are more likely to influence characters like Grandmother into not attributing AIDS to God's wrath. UNICEF makes the contentious suggestion that faith-based organizations should even consider encouraging the use of condoms. This is an emotive subject because more often than not, encouraging people to use condoms is misconstrued as endorsing casual sexual relations. Contrastingly, the exchange between Grandmother and her granddaughter is a window into the manner in which Grandmother uses religion to try and deter Janet from her pursuit of trying to educate the people about AIDS. Her arguments are closely related to the often seen notice displayed in some hospitals proclaiming that "We treat but God heals". To her, a malady that does not bow to the power of God can only be God sent and so it is an exercise in futility for Janet to try and fight it.

A further fashioning of Kambili and Jaja's lives around their father's beliefs is seen in the schools that they attend. In this research, we argue that children's education should be offered in as secular or religiously neutral an environment as possible. This would then make it possible for the children to forge their own religious paths that have not been incorporated into their education system. Jaja and Kambili attend the Catholic schools,

St. Nicholas and Daughters of the Immaculate Heart respectively. These are schools that are run on doctrines of Catholicism. The teaching of religion in the Daughters of Immaculate Heart has effaced the inculcation of such national values such as patriotism. It takes the intervention of parents to make the school introduce the singing of the National Anthem in the assembly. The effect of taking Kambili and Jaja to these schools is coupled with the religious environment at home is that they are suffocated with religious dogma that blurs their view of the world.

Just like Grandmother, Musa, the sole Moslem left in Crossroads after Janet's parents left the village, blames AIDS on other factors, not people's behaviour. He sees the plague as having its roots in *majinis*, the evils spirits roaming the village at night and baying for human blood. In essence therefore, it can be argued that Musa is in cahoots with Grandmother in relying on religion to dissuade Janet from her work. Even uncle mark admits that there is an "uneasy relationship between religion and Aids... those who feared the plague turned religious and accused those who did not fear it of immorality" (48).

We introduce the dictum that Eugene's stranglehold on the general psyche of the worshippers at St. Agnes Catholic church is reinforced by Father Benedict's adulatory attitude towards him. He elevates Eugene on a high pedestal of virtue referring to his name alongside that of the pope and Jesus. The fact that Eugene owns a newspaper that he uses to champion the causes of the masses in the face of an oppressive political order is used by Father Benedict to paint Eugene as a selfless benefactor: This is what Father Benedict tells the congregation:

“Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other big men in this country, he could have decided to stay at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure that the government did not threaten his businesses. But no, he used the *Standard* to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising...” (4-5).

One needs to note that Eugene is not only a well-to-do media mogul but also a staunch Christian. Using the newspaper that he owns, *The Standard*, under the editorship of Ade Coker, Papa Eugene has been chastising the junta regime in the country. The tyrannized people therefore hero-worship him. This fact strengthens his ideological hold on the congregation in St. Agnes church and they are thereafter more likely to carry out his wishes without questioning the rationality of their actions. The idolization with which Papa Eugene is treated is a contravention of the expectations placed on people who possess pastoral roles in the society. In Christianity, Foucault (1982) writes that those who possess pastoral power should be prepared to sacrifice this power for the life and salvation of the flock. He differentiates pastoral power from royal power, the latter which demands sacrifice from its subjects. About the spirit of service, Foucault (1982:783) says that:

Christianity is the only religion which has organized itself as a church. And as such, it postulates in principle that certain individuals can, by their religious quality, serve others, not as princes, magistrates, fortune tellers, benefactors, educationalists, and so on but as pastors. However, this word designates a very special form of power.

The main issue that differentiates the conduct of those with pastoral power from the other servants in the society is that those who serve as pastors should shun being exalted. This is not what we see with Papa Eugene. Assisted by Father Benedict, he poses as a benefactor to the church while Father Benedict eggs him on. This contravenes the requirement of a spiritual guide to serve others, not seek self glorification through acts of

broadcasted generosity. Benedict's casting of Eugene as philanthropic and selfless is informed by the fact that it is he (Benedict) who benefits from Eugene's "generosity" rather than Eugene's family members or the worshippers at St. Agnes as individuals. By preferring to treat Benedict well while mistreating his own family, Eugene makes his family to dislike Benedict, whom they view as a competitor rather than a spiritual leader.

## 2.6 Dehumanizing the Vulnerable

Mwangi reveals the often retrogressive rules that churches use to dehumanize and bind people to servitude and suffering. He challenges religion's teachings that human beings can be freed from worldly suffering by living by some prescribed rules. He critiques this belief by pointing out that some of the rules are designed with the aim of limiting the adherents' freedom so that the religious leaders can maintain a stranglehold on them infinitely. This comes to light through Hanna who has come to ask for family planning pills but laments that a friend of hers cannot use the pills as her church is against family planning. Here, she talks with Janet about Namaan's wife's predicament:

"Give me two more," she said. "Did you know that Naaman's wife was pregnant again? She can't use this *dawas* because her church says it is a sin to use them. So now she is pregnant again and her last baby is still crawling. And her husband has gone off to Pwani to look for a job and now she has to give birth on her own in that big house. You don't know how lucky you are to be without a man. Sometimes I wish that mine would go away too and give me a rest. Men! Whatever God had in mind when he made men!"(36).

Naaman's wife goes through the harrowing experience of getting pregnant in quick succession because her church equates use of contraceptives to manipulation of God's designs on the utility of the human body. Hanna is nevertheless well aware that the H.I.V./AIDS challenge must be tackled together with the twin problem of large

unplanned families and that is why she goes for family planning pills from Janet. The question of reproductive health care is therefore a holistic undertaking that even the UN emphasizes on. UNICEF (2003:15) states that:

The spread of HIV from parent to child can be prevented by: ensuring that women do not become infected with HIV; encouraging people to seek voluntary and confidential counseling and testing to determine their HIV status and to get guidance on family planning; providing timely antiretroviral medicines to pregnant women with HIV in accordance with medical practices...

The import of this is that H.I.V./AIDS and large unplanned families are related because both betray an aspect of sexual negligence and/or prodigality on one or both partners.

Mwangi sees sexuality, procreation and bringing up of children as being a sacred undertaking that should be treated with a good measure of respect. What he attacks is the setting up of rules that ensure that the woman does not have reprieve from one birth to the next. If sexual union is solely meant to be for reproduction, then in a religion such as Naaman subscribes to, coition should be limited to only those occasions when fertilization is desired. To engage in the sexual act for pleasure without allowing the woman to take cautionary measures to ward off an unplanned pregnancy infringes on the rights of the woman and leads to a degeneration of her health. This study suggests that Naaman therefore uses religious hegemonism to exercise coercive social power over his wife to such an extent that even his wife's corporeality is within his control.

Eugene's brand of holiness is clothed in a pathological requirement for silence. He represses the speaking of his family members' minds, requiring them to display the Old Testament Judean type of observance to religious teachings. Beatrice, a woman who is carrying, is unable to tell her husband that she feels unwell. Her weak request to remain

in the car as the rest of the family members go to call on Father Benedict on their way out of church is reprimanded by Eugene's mildly deceptive question. He asks her whether she really wants to stay in the car as the rest of them go to visit with Benedict. Her need to remain in the car is borne of the fear that she might vomit while in Benedict's house. However, she is afraid of her husband and has been taught to be silent about anything that Eugene has not sanctioned as appropriate. Beatrice therefore yields to going to Benedict's house.

This seemingly innocuous incident later culminates into physical assault for Beatrice, as Kambili narrates:

I was sitting in my room after lunch, reading James chapter five because I would talk about the Biblical roots of the anointing of the sick during family time, when I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it... I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad... I stepped out of my room just as Jaja came out of his. We stood at the landing and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme border (32-33).

This vicious assault on Beatrice by her husband, which had earlier on in the afternoon been heralded by a prayer by Eugene in which he had prayed for his wife's forgiveness on account of her unwillingness to visit Father Benedict, leads to her miscarriage. Lamanna & Riedmann (1985) write that there are several reasons why women like Beatrice put up with abusive marriages. Some of them include the cultural expectation that makes it a woman's mandate to see to the success of their marriages. Secondly, the husband may be the one who possesses resources while the wife may not and so cannot fend for herself if the marriage fails. Other women have low self-esteem that makes them

confuse “need” for “love.” They fear that if their husbands, who are supposed to love and take care of them, behave violently towards them, then life outside the marriage must be harsher. This is the position that Beatrice finds herself in. Papa Eugene uses Beatrice’s fear of abandonment to exercise control over her.

Eugene’s remorse when he comes back from taking Beatrice to hospital makes him look young and vulnerable to Kambili. His countenance belies his vicious nature, such that Kambili is not quite able to hate him. Eugene goes ahead to hug Kambili, pressing her close to his chest, a gesture that appeases her spirit, so that she does not get the full import of the monstrosity of his deed. In an attempt to cope with the traumatizing experience, Beatrice, upon being discharged from hospital, mechanically polishes the étagère and the figurines in the living room. It is also ironical that the whole family has to go through the arduous task of reciting sixteen novenas to secure Beatrice’s forgiveness. We posit that by physically assaulting Beatrice and then laying the blame for her suffering on her, Eugene misleads his wife into a position of self-recrimination.

Kambili and Jaja spend ten days in Nsukka, a place they had visited so that they could have a chance to travel to Aokoje on a pilgrimage. This visit to Aokoje is done so that the children can go and witness the apparition of the Virgin Mary, which is said to be happening in that tiny village. The Virgin Mary forms part of the Catholic faithful devotions. Molloy (2008:415-416) traces the veneration accorded to The Virgin to the fifteenth century. Initially, she was referred to as *theotokos* or “God’s bearer” by the Eastern Church. The Roman Catholic Church of the West in the middle ages, the churches that were built after 1100 C.E. in France, used the name *notre dame* or “Our lady”. Statues of Mary holding the infant Jesus were also used in churches. In later years,

markedly from the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church reiterated that Mary's conception was devoid of the original sin that had been passed down from Adam. She was then said to occasionally appear to people who were in dire need for help. We advance in this study that Ifeoma takes the children to Aokope in the hope that The Virgin will intervene in their troubled lives.

As has been noted earlier, an exercise of power by men over women sometimes takes the tangent of battery. This may be accompanied by sexual exploitation or even institutionalized rape in the case of the married women. The vulnerability of women to violence meted out to them by men is summarized in the following words:

The lifelong disadvantages that girls and women face because of discrimination against them- including inadequate education, poor pay and employment prospects, and violence, abuse and exploitation by men- make them particularly vulnerable to unwanted or unsafe sex, both within and outside of marriage (UNICEF,2003: 19).

UNICEF establishes the disparate reasons that lead to marginality of women. These are the aspects of women disenfranchisement that men invariably anchor their physical assaults of women on: We interpret Beatrice's marital situation as being as has been described by UNICEF because of the several pregnancies that she gets by Eugene and then loses due to her husband's battery. When Kambili and Jaja return to Enugu for instance, they are met by their mother, who has a swollen face and a black-blue eye, the result of physical abuse by her husband. So far, Beatrice takes the beatings in her stride, struggling to keep the reality of what is happening from the knowledge of her children. Her fear of her husband is such that she is unable to come to terms with her predicament, choosing instead to adopt regressive and near-infantile defense mechanisms to cope with her emotional and physical wounds, one of which is to incessantly polish the étagère in

the living room (35). Unbeknown to her, Kambili is now able to tell that furious polishing of the *étagère* by her mother is a sign of inner turmoil and suffering that her mother is unable to give vent to.

Physical assault on Beatrice by her husband is repeated several times, in each case, being justified as a form of chastising her for her lack of faith. Lack of faith on Beatrice's part is however not the real reason as to why Eugene constantly assaults her because:

Studies indicate that husbands who beat up their wives are attempting to compensate for general feelings of powerlessness-on their jobs, in their marriages, or both... To make up, he asserts himself as the boss at home... In middle class families husbands' feelings of powerlessness may stem from unhappiness on their job, earning a salary that cannot keep up with inflation and the family's standard of living, or being under the stress of a high pressure occupation (Seifer, cited in Lamanna & Riedmann, 1985:365).

The loss of power and inability to cope with external challenges are what makes abusive men to assault their wives. Unable to cope with insurmountable challenges in their lives outside their homes, they find their wives to be "manageable quarries" that they can beat into submission and in so doing assuage their fragile egos. The inability for Eugene to make his family fit his image of religious idealism is his source of powerlessness and his resultant violence towards Beatrice. The zenith of the beatings is reached after Jaja and Kambili travel to Nsukka to sojourn with their paternal aunt, Ifeoma. Left alone with Beatrice, the worst of Eugene's brand of religiosity comes out. Looking dazed and wizened up, Beatrice travels from Enugu to Nsukka and for perhaps the first time opens up about her suffering in the hands of Eugene. This is Kambili's take on how her mother looks and behaves like:

Mama looked around the room. She stared at the wall clock for a while, the one with the broken second hand, before she turned to me. "You know that small table where we keep the *family Bible* (my emphasis), *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly." She sounded as if she was talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood. "My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said that there was nothing he could do to save it." Mama shook her head slowly. A thin line of tears crawled down her cheeks as though it had been a struggle to get them out of her eyes.

"To save it?" Auntie Ifeoma whispered. "What do you mean?"

"I was six weeks gone." (249).

This assault on Beatrice makes her become almost delirious. It confuses her for she does not seem to understand why her Christian husband violates her in such a manner. This incident is the turning point in her life because for the first time, she is able to open up to other people about her suffering. By accepting to talk about it and even allow tears to fall out of her eyes, Beatrice is now ready to face up to her situation, is ready to start taking some proactive measures to better her lot and struggle out of the miasma of the religiously sanctioned domestic violence that had hitherto enmeshed her in an intricate web of suffering and denial.

Eugene has initially successfully convinced Beatrice that her miscarriages and suffering are as a result of her sinful nature. This makes her to project her suffering elsewhere. After Ade Coker, the editor to the *Standard*, is released from detention, Eugene tells his wife that as part of the torture directed towards him, Ade Coker had had many cigarettes put out on his back. Beatrice laments that Ade's persecutors would receive their due, but not while they are in this earth (42). This is a projected complaint about Eugene, who is equally abusive to Beatrice and it is little wonder that Kambili feels she ought to have uttered that statement before her mother did.

Kambili is also obsessed with other people who are suffering which evinces her denial of the reality that it is she and her mother who are indeed suffering in the hands of Eugene. She mentally associates the rampaging soldiers in the market place who are out beating people with her father's tyranny of their household. In much the same way as the dictatorial regime that has assumed office through a coup d'état is violating basic human rights, Kambili's father uses religion as an excuse to terrorize Kambili and her mother. Instead of facing up to him, Kambili gets obsessed with the sight of a woman lying in the dirt in the market place as a soldier beats her. The following words show that she carries with her the memory of this woman:

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. I wished that I could have gone over and helped her up, cleaned the red mud from her wrapper (44).

Kambili attempts to make up for the fact that she is unable to come to her mother's rescue by empathizing with this other woman who is being dehumanized by the soldier. This is because where her father is concerned, his absolute control of the family is unshakable, to the extent that his misdeeds cannot be confronted directly by Kambili or her mother.

Changes in speech mannerisms and idiosyncrasies as a result of factors to do with religion are observable in *The Last Plague*. Ordinarily, since Musa owns a tea house and so is a host to his patrons, he does his best to be as civil as possible. This is necessary for it is by being receptive and respectful to patrons that he can hope to make his business thrive. However, like Kambili, he is given to lapsing to speech habits that are an offshoot of his religious orientation. Unlike Kambili though, he does not display Christian speech

quirks but degenerates into Arabic expletives when his wrath is drawn. This is what happens when the beggar, a poor man who lives in a phone booth near his hotel enters the eatery, without following the instructions he had been given earlier on. Of the beggar, the narrator says that:

He walked with the old men back to the tea house and walked right in, without stopping to wipe his jiggers on the floor by the entrance as Musa had ordered him.

"Give me tea," he ordered. "Give me tea and give me now!"

Musa burst into a torrent of loud swearing, in a language Uncle Mark had never heard him speak before, and which, loosely translated, meant, "Get out of my sight, you uncircumcised, unclean, unbelieving, unrepentant *kafiri!*"(414)

We aver that Musa's outburst in what turns out to be Arabic has its genesis in his religious orientation and the contempt it has for non-believers. He uses his religion-imposed dogma to tyrannize the poor beggar who has money to spend in the hotel but due his dirty and poor state; cannot enjoy that privilege.

## 2.7 The Boomerang Effect

Papa Achike's attempts to use coercive social power to shape his family do not succeed. Instead, his family, the target of his influence, adopts behaviour that is the opposite of what Papa Achike had hoped. Raven and Rubin (1976:405- 7) explain that this negative influence is occasioned by the fact that the target "negatively evaluates the agent, develops a reactance or resistance to restrictions on his independence or may be reacting to some inadvertent communication from the agent".

Atrocious attacks on Kambili and Jaja are witnessed after they come back from visiting Aunty Ifeoma in Nsukka. For failing to inform their father that Papa-Nnukwu was coming to stay with them in Nsukka, the two children are grievously harmed by Eugene.

This happens because Eugene would not have expected his children to sleep under the same roof with a man he considers satanic, let alone share meals with him. Ironically, Papa Eugene claims to be persecuting his children because he loves them.

Physical abuse of children by their parents when such parents outwardly appear to be caring to their children has been seen to be attributable to the children's characteristics, characteristics with parents or the environmental context. DeHart, Sroufe & Cooper (2000:288-291) write that this problem is not limited to parents from low social economic classes only. They note that "the problem crosses all ethnic and social classes, age, and religious lines" and that "some abusing parents appear to outsiders to be devoted mothers and fathers" (288). They posit that where the cause of the child abuse cannot be attributed to characteristics in the children or in the environment, then the causes are likely to be with the parents. With regard to why such parents abuse their children, they write that:

The vast majority of abusing parents suffer no psychotic disorder, and there is *no single personality trait* (such as extreme hostility) that abusive parents share. However, *a broad spectrum of adult characteristics* is associated with child maltreatment, including low self esteem, poor impulse control, doubts about personal power, negative emotions and anti-social behaviour (Cicchetti & Lynch, cited in Dehart, Sroufe & Cooper, 2000:290).

This assertion disapproves the view that abusive parents have some medically explainable paucity and affirms the earlier deduction that powerlessness and low self-esteem are forerunners to violence in the home. In this study, we read Papa Eugene's violence towards his children as being a reaction to fear of powerlessness and emasculation by other forces that compete with him for his family's control, one of which is in the person of Papa-Nnukwu. The fact that the two children fail to make a phone call to him to ask him for intervention when their grandfather comes to recuperate in Auntie

Ifeoma's house is taken to be a transgression of his religious expectations, punishable in an appropriately symbolic form. The narrator tells of the punishment meted out to her and her brother for failing to speak about Papa-Nnukwu's presence at Nsukka:

I went upstairs slowly. Papa was in the bathroom, with the door ajar. I knocked on the open door and stood by, wondering why he had called me when he was in the bathroom. "Come in," he said. He was standing by the tub. "Climb into the tub."... Then I noticed the kettle on the floor, close to Papa's feet, the green kettle Sisi used to boil hot water for tea and garri, the one that whispered when water started to boil. "You knew that your grandfather was coming to Nsukka, did you not?" he asked in Igbo..."Kambili, you are precious." His voice quivered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. "You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it." He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen (193-194).

This scalding of Kambili's feet, an attack that is also visited on Jaja, leaves the two children's feet swathed in thick socks to ward off the pain occasioned by the injuries that lead to the peeling of the outer skin. It however hardens the resolve of the children to defy their father. Specifically for Kambili, this incident makes her remember Papa-Nnukwu's painting that is in her possession. She cherishes the painting even more, instead of being afraid that her father would discover it and punish her for possessing it.

When finally Eugene gets to know that Kambili has a painting of Papa-Nnukwu with her in the house, it is not through an accident but through an unconscious need by her and Jaja to let their father know that they no longer fear him. The two children come to each other's defense, each claiming that the painting belongs to them. This they do in order to try and protect each other. Kambili is thoroughly beaten for trying to salvage the painting, which is torn to pieces by Papa Eugene. Finally, she loses consciousness and has to be

hospitalized. Whereas Eugene had hoped to instill deference in Kambili through fear and violence, the real effect is that Kambili finally sees the evilness in her father's brand of religion and instead adores Father Amadi, who has a human face and understands her feelings.

Perpetration of physical violence by some characters on others under the guise of following religious teachings has been looked at by Mwangi in *The Last Plague*. In her quest to emancipate Crossroads women from the ills that bedevil them courtesy of their subservience to men, Janet publicly articulates her disapproval on wife battery and unplanned births in families. She is heard in public dismissing Crossroads men as "rampant, lecherous bulls with as much finesse, in matters of romance, as passionate porcupines; a futile stampede of horny warthogs with no idea how to please a woman" and goes on to claim that "amorous aardvarks and drunken donkeys are more competent in matters of love than Crossroads men" (64). Using the character of Janet, Mwangi adopts a Platonic aversion to the excessive indulgence in hedonistic activities by Crossroads' men. In their quest to satisfy their seemingly uncontrollable needs for pleasure, the men display the kind of inordinacy that Foucault states Plato censured in the ancient Greeks (McHoul & Grace).

When Musa gets to hear of Janet's opinions about Crossroads men, he reiterates that what Janet requires is a man "to beat her and make her pregnant herself" (65). We suggest that Musa's sanctioning of violence towards Janet is an affirmation of his belief that where a woman such as Janet seems to outdo men and so has more social power than them, then the use of physical force to repress her is acceptable. Such sentiments as is expressed by

Musa fuel Janet's aversion to men and make her even more determined to free the women in Crossroads from the cultural yokes to which they have been fastened for years.

Eugene uses religious rituals at meal times to demonstrate the importance of sharing whatever little things people have. He requires his children to always take a "love sip" of his tea before he drinks the rest of it. Kambili and Jaja believe in the importance of this gesture of love to the extent that they do not tell their father that at times the tea is hot and scalds their tongues (8). Eugene also says grace that lasts for twenty minutes before the family can start taking their lunch, all the time referring to the Virgin Mary in different titles. The overall atmosphere created in Eugene's household is one of complete subservience to Catholicism, giving little room for members of his household to experiment and perhaps find satisfaction in other forms of beliefs. The quiescence displayed by Kambili and her mother to this religious subjugation is borne of the fear of the repercussions that might be visited upon them should they display behaviour that is out of tandem with Eugene's expectations. Jaja's refusal to take the holy communion, his reference to the host as a wafer that gives him bad breath and his claim that the priest keeps touching his mouth in a manner that nauseates him comes as a shock to his father for it is a hitherto unprecedented show of defiance to his authority in the house (6). We advance that Jaja, out of his exasperation with the excess religious requirements, decides to defy them.

The use of religion as a restrictive and intimidating force is seen in the use of physical barriers to restrict Kambili's movement and interaction with other people. This is evidenced by the existence of perimeter walls, both in Kambili's Enugu home and in her school. In both cases, the walls are high, in the former case topped with coiled electrified

wires while in the latter with jagged pieces of green glass with sharp edges. Kambili explains that her father had been swayed into getting her admitted to her present school by the high walls. In their Enugu's home, Kambili and Jaja's rooms are located far apart so as to minimize their contact and interaction. Enugu therefore stands as a contrast to Nsukka, the latter which provides a brand of religion that is based on freedom, sense of discovery and enjoyment. Papa Eugene's attempts to barricade his children within spaces that only he can access makes them dislike Enugu with its resident affluence and prefer Nsukka, which symbolizes freedom for them. However, this form of coercive social power exercise, as we shall demonstrate in chapter four only achieves a superficial effect of overawing Kambili and Jaja. An exercise of coercive social power on one party by another does not totally squash the innate characteristics of the domineered party. Commenting on this resistance to transmutability, McHoul & Grace (2002:72) state that:

One important element of Foucault's thesis on power is that we must not make the mistake of thinking that techniques of power have crushed the natural forces which mark us as distinct types of human beings with various "personality" traits. Rather, differences, peculiarities, deviance and eccentricities are ever more highlighted in a system of controls concerned to seek them out.

The import of the above citation about Foucault is that as will be demonstrated later, the suppression of Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili's natural personality traits by Papa Eugene's government is short-lived. The coercion directed at them overtly silences them but covertly amplifies their innate drives and desires. Their real suppressed traits (re)emerge and boomerang at him after some other different forms of social power takes control of them.

Kevin is employed as the family driver but also acts as a constant chaperone to Kambili and Jaja. He is an extension of Eugene's autocratic religion that does not give room to the children to enjoy moments of their own. The two children grow under the overbearing presence of their father, assisted by Kevin who plays a policing role whenever he and the children leave the house. Kevin's aggressive looking knife scar on his face is a visual equivalent of Eugene's malevolent silence; both evoke feelings of trepidation in the children. By keeping silent, Papa Eugene makes it impossible for his family members to expansively interact with him. Tannen (1990) concurs that men often use silence as a show of power. While women often render themselves powerless by satisfying a constant need to verbalize their thoughts and feelings, men's taciturnity is thought to be an instrument of power. Papa Eugene's reticence is exacerbated by his constant watch over his children. Though the distance between Eugene's home in Abba and Papa-Nnukwu's home is short enough for Kambili and Jaja to walk, Kevin is told to drive them there, so that he can keep an eye on them. In this study, we argue that the rebellion that Kambili and Jaja direct towards their father is heavily dependent on this lack of trust in them that is their father's stock in trade. This constant policing is what finally drives them into breaking free from the shackles of their father's control.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

From the foregoing, we conclude that religious fundamentalism has led some characters to exercise coercive social power over others in different ways. Notably, the results of this coercion have sometimes been as the perpetrator expected while in other cases, the result has been radically different. One way coercion has been exercised is through use of physical violence such as Papa Eugene's hurling of the missal across the room in an

attempt to hit Jaja. He also slaps Kambili for reportedly overstaying in the school. Use of physical violence is also witnessed with Kata, in *The Last Plague*. He is reported to have killed a man whom he considered to be a non-believer. Another character to whom physical harm is directed towards is Namaan's wife, whose church has barred her from using contraceptives, the result being that she gives birth without planning her family. She reportedly gives birth while all alone as her husband has gone to *Pwani* to look for a job.

Beatrice is assaulted by her husband Papa Eugene for being reluctant to go and visit Father Benedict with the rest of the family. Several instances of violence on Beatrice lead to miscarriages and unable to face her husband's battery, Beatrice resorts to such activities as furious polishing of the étagère and the figurines in her house. She lives in a state of denial, until she finally opens up to her children and sister about her suffering.

In this study, we have also demonstrated that coercive social power also takes the form of emotional persecution. Papa Eugene for instance has placed high expectations on his children, to the extent that they suffer emotional trauma associated with fear of failing their father. Although Kambili performs well in school, we have demonstrated that this good performance is not a result of encouragement from her father but instead, it is a reaction to her father's expectations; that she must excel so as to be an example of how a Godly child should be like. We have however seen that she is a melancholic and unhappy child because her withdrawn nature has even locked her out of the company of her peers such as Jideze.

Pastor Batolomeo, working alongside head Faru and Chief Chupa has also been seen to persecute Janet and Frank. Batolomeo is against the FLEP that the two are disseminating in Crossroads. Henchmen are sent several times to go and pick Janet and Frank from their abodes or work places. They are for instance paraded in the school and accused of instilling immoral principles in the children of Crossroads. This happens after three boys are found in possession of condoms. Janet's grandmother has also been shown to constantly discourage Janet from her work. Her (Grandmother's) clarion call has remained that AIDS is a disease sent by God to punish sinners and so Janet's work is an exercise in futility.

Our objective of showing how and why characters use coercive social power to control others has been explored at length. Specifically, we have demonstrated in this chapter that religious orientation is the "how" that coercive social power is acquired while the different sub-sections have dealt with the "exercise" of coercive social power. To touch on one case, the fact that Maalim attempts to Islamize his daughters is a religious way through which he has acquired coercive social power over them. His attempts to confine them within his control and their subsequent rebellion against him are a feature of coercive social power exercise. The end result of this coercive social power acquisition and exercise is that disgraced by his daughters' conduct, Maalim has no option than to move to another area, where he will not be the laughing stock of other people.

We have stated elsewhere in this study that coercive social power is weaker than referent social power. Raven and Rubin (1976:) note that this is so because of several factors. Coercive social power is socially dependent, that is, it requires the continued surveillance of the agent so that the target can continue displaying the required behaviour. This

surveillance is often difficult to effect because the target, "aware about the possibility of punishment, conceals the non-compliance" (Thibaut & Kelley in Raven & Rubin, 1976:411). The influencing agent is also disliked by the target and the target may even try to exit the situation entirely. Although the influencee may display the behaviour required by the agent, such publicly displayed behaviour is often the opposite of the private attitudes of the agent, a phenomenon that Raven and Rubin (1976:403) refer to as "pluralistic ignorance". The interaction of Beatrice and her children on one hand and Papa Achike on the other has clearly vindicated this assertion. In view of the foregoing, in the next chapter, we look at how some new characters in the two texts acquire and exercise referent social power and in so doing, outdo those who have exercised coercive social power in this chapter.

## Chapter Three: Referent Social Power and the Politics of Identity

### 3.0 General introduction

As stated elsewhere in the literature review, referent social power is said to have been exercised if the first party is drawn to think, act and look like a second party, hence the title of this chapter. The first party believes that the second one has the right attributes that should be emulated and so strives to be like the second party. For this form of social power to take effect, the second party need not take any consciously proactive steps or even be aware that the first party is under his (second party's) spell. Exercise of referent power depends on the degree of the influencer's attractiveness towards the influencee.

One determinant of identification between an influencer and a target is the need for consensual validation. Secord and Backman (1974:249) own that "a target compares his or her feelings and experiences with those of other individuals similar to himself or herself". Where such a target identifies a party whose feelings and/or experiences are similar to his or her own, then the second party becomes an influencing agent. The continued display of the required behaviour by the target does not require the agent's surveillance. Both parties might even be opposed to the existence of this power, yet the power will still take effect. Negative referent social power is exercised if the target displays behaviour that is the opposite of what the agent wanted. The strength of negative referent power increases with the degree to which the agent is unattractive to the influencee.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we note that patterns of behaviour attributable to some characters are shaped by other characters who seem to be the role models and who therefore exercise referent power over the first group of characters.

In this chapter, we demonstrate the extent to which referent social power is acquired and exercised through conformity to positive cultural and gender expectations accompanied by a contravention of the negativity associated with the same. The characters who display the desirable gender-based cultural values but succeed in fighting the undesirable ones exercise referent power over other characters. In *Purple Hibiscus*, we investigate how Father Amadi, Amaka and to some extent, Ifeoma and Obiora exercise referent social power on Kambili, Beatrice and Jaja. We therefore purpose to show that the coercive social power that Papa Eugene and his Christian friends exercised on Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili as portrayed in chapter two has been rendered ineffective by Father Amadi, Ifeoma, Obiora and Amaka's exercise of referent social power over Beatrice and the two children. A close look at *The Last Plague* reveals that the coercive social power that Musa, Grandmother and Batolomeo exercised in chapter two is countered by referent social power now in the hands of Janet, Frank, Big Youth and Broker.

### **3.1 Exploitation of Corporality**

Whereas Eugene uses religion to browbeat members of his family into conformity, Father Amadi uses his manly charm, rather than religious pontification to influence Kambili's view of herself and the world in general. Unlike Papa Eugene, he also impacts positively on Jaja and Obiora, such that the young teenagers bloom into strong and assertive young men under his patronage. Right from the first time that Kambili sees Amadi, it is evident that she is attracted to his masculine, yet warm predisposition that immediately strikes her

imagination. This stands in sharp contrast to Papa Eugene, whom Kambili describes as having a blank face (5). Adichie paints Father Amadi as member of the clergy who does not believe in changing those he ministers to using impersonal religious teachings but with his whole being. From Kambili's description of Father Amadi, we read her attraction to his manly and worldly side, rather than his position as a priest. Here, she narrates how Father Amadi appears the first time she sees him:

Amaka did not talk much the rest of the afternoon, until Father Amadi arrived in a whiff of an earthy cologne. Chime jumped on him and held on. He shook Obiora's hand. Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka gave him brief hugs, and then Auntie Ifeoma introduced Jaja and me (134-135).

Ordinarily, one would expect a priest who visits the family of his faithful to be received formally and for him to behave in a stiff and detached manner. However, as we can see above, Amadi interacts with Ifeoma's family with an unceremonious ingenuousness. In this study, we posit that Adichie has foiled Amadi with Eugene. Where the latter waxes in dogmatic religious praxis in his interaction with friends and family members, the former has a folksy and friendly demeanor. He neither adopts a priestly attitude nor stands aloof from Ifeoma's family but instead chooses to greet each of them in a friendly manner, befitting each of them. His protective nature, coupled with his masculinity (enhanced by use of an earthy cologne) appeals to Kambili more than does Eugene's remote and impersonal interaction with her.

So unpriestly is Father Amadi's appearance and mannerisms that the narrator does not have feelings of reverence that she knows she should have towards a priest. He is boyish looking, to such an extent that Kambili feels like it would be sacrilegious to refer to him as "Father". He is also dressed in casual clothes, an open neck T-shirt and a faded pair of

jeans whose original colour Kambili cannot fathom. We read Father Amadi's casual appearance and behaviour as having its roots in the vow of celibacy that Catholic priests take, sometimes too early before they are mature enough to be tasked with having the sagacity to make such momentous life time decisions. Traditionally, those who want to be Catholic priests join the junior seminary from the ages of eleven or twelve before proceeding to study for priesthood at a major seminary, often as they also study for a degree. In recent times however, reacting to the large number of priests who subsequently leave priesthood, probably because they feel that they had made a lifetime's commitment to celibacy before they were mature enough, candidates now usually join the calling after they have left secondary school, and often the university. Many seminaries also encourage the would-be-priests to go and see something of the world before finally committing themselves to priesthood (Stanford, 2008). We therefore see Amadi's personality as being slightly discordant with the celibate life required of priests, a position that he confirms later on in the novel as he increasingly gets attracted to Kambili.

As he talks with Kambili and Jaja, Amadi smiles at them, a sight that they are not used to with their father. In Amadi's casual dressing, we infer Adichie's disparagement of the wearing of religious regalia as a mark of holiness. She shows that for one to be Godly, his external appearance does not have to be ostentatiously and religiously showy or awe-inspiring. Instead, she demonstrates how the charm within Father Amadi's personality makes him adorable to Kambili. At the same time, Amadi's warmth opens Kambili's eyes to her father's brand of religion that is steeped in rituals, rites and sanctions.

Adichie has compared the process involved in the Catholic confessional with Kambili's interaction with Father Amadi. The Foucauldian position on the Catholic confessional is

that it is used in conservative Catholic communities to incite subjects into “generating true discourses concerning their erotic practices” (McHoul & Grace, 2002:79). The confessional is therefore a forum where uninformed women can learn about their own sexuality from the priests, just as we see Kambili being brought to awareness about her own sexual being by Father Amadi. This reliance on the confessional to provide sex education for women happens in Ireland as a scholar has noted:

The Catholic Church in contemporary rural Ireland often substitutes itself in place of women’s ‘self-help’ clinics: Women in the confessional could ‘learn the truth about their reproductive systems from their Bishops, themselves no doubt goaded into speech by the women’s own mutterings in the confessional’ (Llydon, 136-7 cited in McHoul & Grace, 2002:79).

In the society discussed above, information on sexual awareness is a taboo subject among the religious and so it cannot be disseminated openly. When encapsulated within the larger corpus of religious teachings and delivered in the confessional by a priest, it assumes an acceptable modicum of piousness. Kambili’s closeness to Father Amadi while they are in the car elicits in her a sense of abandon and a feeling of wanting to confide in him about those aspects of her sexuality that she has been repressing, just as Irish women would do in the confessional. She feels the need to open up to him because unlike Papa Eugene and Father Benedict, Father Amadi is a priest who leans more on what can be considered the corporal aspects of Christianity, rather than merely dwelling on the transcendent. Amadi’s masculinity effaces Eugene’s pathological pursuit of holiness and perfection. The narrator, once inside Amadi’s car, experiences her first giddy feeling of being close to an attractive member of the opposite sex. With regard to her propinquity to him, she says that:

Father Amadi's car smelled like him, a clean scent that made me think of a clear azure sky. His shorts had seemed longer the last time I saw him in them, well past his knees. But now they climbed up to expose a muscular thigh sprinkled with dark hair. The space between us was too small, too tight. I was always a penitent when I was close to a priest at confession. But it was hard to feel penitent now, with Father Amadi's cologne deep in my lungs. I felt guilty because I could not focus on my sins, could not think of anything except how near he was to me (175).

What we see in this incident is not the customary feelings of awe and reverence that one might expect a teenager in close proximity to a priest to feel. Instead, the sexual being and physical presence of Amadi is a much stronger force in Kambili's imagination than his position as a priest. The fact that Amadi is a priest and Kambili just a young girl who should ideally be his parishioner does not cancel out the power of mutual physical attraction between them. It has been noted that differences typical of how women and men experience and express closeness makes friendships between the sexes particularly interesting. Culture "heavily emphasizes gender and so it is difficult for men and women not to see each other in sexual terms" (Bingham et al. cited in Wood, 1999:145). We conclude that Adichie has negated religion as a socialization tool for a youngster who has not yet become acclimatized to the different nuances of human love, affection and interaction that should precede Godly love.

The use of one's physical appearance to influence other characters is also present in *The Last Plague*. This is witnessed in the person of Janet Juma, whose beauty and the self confidence that she oozes has a mesmerizing effect on Uncle Mark and Musa. Ordinarily, the two old men spend most of their time playing a game of draughts at the latter's tea house. Theirs is a drab existence but this mundane lifestyle is changed by the appearance of Janet as the narrator says:

The woman came on, her movements firm and graceful in spite of the load on her head. She was a well-built woman; solid in a placid, country way. A strong, earthy creature, oblivious of the excitement her gait stirred up in her admirers; the dangerous rush of blood that the sight of her swaying hips sent coursing through the withered limbs of the old men (9).

This sexual attractiveness of Janet stands in sharp contrast with the general apathetic life of Crossroads. Her beauty leads to the discomfiture of the two men. We notice that while the rest of the inhabitants of the remote village are dying from AIDS, Mwangi has introduced Janet, a character full of life and vitality as a precursor to the revitalization of the village, an endeavour that will later be led by Janet. Just like Father Amadi, in *Purple Hibiscus*, who does not fit into people's schema of a priest, Janet also defies the traditional expectations of Crossroad's people about a woman being shy and self-conscious in the presence of men. The two authors cast characters who are charged with the duty of changing other characters as necessarily being radically different from the socio-cultural expectations of the general public.

Janet possesses a magnetic nature whose genesis is her use of womanly allure. She uses this resource to make people like her. Whereas the inhabitants of Crossroads such as Uncle Mark and Musa initially lewdly view her as a sex object, the lady succeeds in tapping to her physical endowments, not for erotic pursuits as would be expected but to entice men for the purpose of making such men her partners in her fight against the AIDS scourge. In doing this, she starts by winning men's respect, which she does through letting the men folk realize that she is independent. Mwangi negates the cultural expectation the two men have; that Janet's beauty can only be used by her to achieve selfish ends. She succeeds in debunking the notion that her body is an exchange

commodity to be proffered to her benefactors. This is evident from the way she defies their prurient suggestion that she shows them how to use a condom.

The two men's injunction to Janet to show them how to use a condom is designed to elicit embarrassment from Janet. They hope that by coming up with such a prurient topic, they are going to cow Janet into stopping her work. They find it odd that a woman, not a man, should be involved in distributing condoms in Crossroads. Sexuality is a concept that men generally seek to steer while expecting women to kowtow. Gender studies suggest that dominant ideologies of masculinity and masculine sexuality are fundamental in structuring men's sexual practices, sexual subjectives and sociosexual relations. Construction of sexual control and knowledge is seen to be a preserve for males. Male sexuality is also privileged over female sexuality (Muriungi, 2005). To Musa and Uncle Mark, Janet's condom campaign is an infringement on their right to possession of control on sexual matters. Janet however further lets it be known to them that she will not succumb to their attempt at domination by turning down Musa's offer of tea and *mandazi* (13-14).

Broker, Janet's erstwhile husband falls into the same fallacy as Mark and Musa when he comes back to Crossroad after ten years of deserting her and her family. He finds that she spends most of her time with Frank, a veterinary officer and Big Youth, a young lad, then makes innuendoes that Frank and Janet are romantically involved. Finding Big Youth alone in Janet's house, he questions him on Janet's whereabouts:

Big Youth was alone in Janet's house when Broker called to see her...

"Greetings," Big Youth said, cheerfully...

"Where is my wife?" he asked.

"You mean Janet?" Big Youth asked him.

"Don't try to be clever with me today, boy, I can't stand it."

"Janet is out," Big Youth told him.

"Out?" he groaned, wiping the sweat from his brow with a white handkerchief. "Out where? (*sic*) Who is with her? Frank?"

"Maybe."

"Why is she always with him?"

"Si they work together," said Big Youth.

"And you," Broker asked him. "What are you to her?"(206).

Broker feels insecure with regard to whether he still has Janet's affection. This is because of the constant presence of Frank and Big Youth in Janet's life. He views the two, especially Frank, as potential competitors for Janet's intimacy. What Broker does not know is that his desertion of Janet changed her in a profound way. If Broker's reappearance means that he must now take complete control of Janet as his wife, then she is apprehensive about her readiness to have sexual relations with him. She no longer has interest in coital matters, due to the anxiety brought about by the possibility of undergoing another rejection. Anxiety has therefore made her to degenerate into sexual dormancy. As a causative factor in some types of sexual dysfunctions, anxiety operates as a threat and activates the nervous system, which in turn prepares the body for defense, leading to sexual depression. This anxiety causes a feeling of being cautious, such that one is unable to concentrate on sexual pleasure (FPAK, 2001). Janet is therefore an individual suffering from fear of loss of control and the resultant injury that might accrue to her by surrendering herself to love and commitment.

Broker's attempt to equate Janet's interaction with Frank to moral decadence is countered by the fact that she does not interact with men only. Her easygoing manner has created camaraderie between her and women such as Hanna, the latter who likes visiting with Janet because she "always makes her laugh" (35). From the foregoing, we notice a trend in which Janet's use of physical looks as an element of referent power is directed towards

achievement of a cause; to emancipate the society from the ravages of AIDS. Her use of her charm to fight the scourge is important considering that ordinarily, it would have been easier for her to fall into the trap of sexual dissipation, which in this case would have probably led her into getting the H.I.V. herself and then spreading it to her admirers.

We contrast Janet's use of her beauty to win approval from other characters with the practice of women relying on their looks and their bodies to earn a living. The way the patriarchal society socializes women into sitting back and hoping that based on their looks, they will get men to take care of them has been challenged by Mwangi. This can be seen from the story of Farida and Jemina, two beautiful women who succumb to AIDS in their quest to rise to riches by using their bodies as pedestals to attain economic emancipation. Both women have travelled from their rural homes to the coast, where the prevalence of HIV infection is high. We postulate that the high infection rate at the coast is a result of the behaviour of the people who live there. Generally, sexual behaviour results from the environment in which people live and operate. "This milieu is in turn a function of local, national and international factors; economics, politics and culture" (Whiteside, 2008:50). What we have at the coast is an environment of holiday makers, an environment in which pleasure seeking is part of the culture. Since both heterosexual and homosexual practices are part of human hedonism, they are practiced in the coast region as visitors seek to fulfill their quest for pleasure. The region is therefore a H.I.V. infection hot spot.

The narrator comments on how Farida had started snubbing male patrons, for instance the following Russian sailor, who did not seem capable of fulfilling her fantasies:

The sailor... spoke no English at all, and even less Swahili... His imagination had been seized and was held captive by Farida's raging *Banjuni* beauty. Twice she had turned down his offer of a night to remember, by explaining to him patiently, in impeccable Swahili, that she had had enough of one-night encounter, with hard-up sailors, and she was on the lookout for true romance- *a wealthy tourist and a lasting relationship*, ( 300, emphasis mine.)

In this instance, Farida comprehends her value as a woman as defined merely by her looks. She has not thought of taking up a career or getting a way of fending for herself without resorting to prostitution. She makes a casual reference to searching for a tourist who is rich to take care of her. This demonstrates the referent social power exercised over her by the tourists. In the following dialogue with Jemina, we are able to see that money, as possessed by the tourists is a resource that makes them exercise referent social power over her and Jemina:

"If one of them offered you a lot of money," Farida had asked Jemina, while waiting for the sailors to disembark, "Would you do it without protection?"

"No," she had said without hesitation.

"For ten thousand?" Farida had asked.

"No," Jemina had said.

"What about one million?" Farida had finally asked. "Would you do it without a condom, for one million?"

Jemina had hesitated.

"That is a lot of money," she had said to Farida. "No one will give you so much money."

Farida had laughed and said, "Me I would" (300).

From this dialogue and considering that Jemina later dies from AIDS, it can be concluded that she finally had unprotected sex, probably after being offered an enticing amount of money. It is therefore commercial sex workers like Jemina and her clients who are responsible for the rapid spread of AIDS in Crossroads. A study of the role played by commercial sex workers in the spread of AIDS especially if there is no condom use shows that:

In many settings, in the early years of the epidemic, commercial sex workers were 'core transmitters.' A modeling exercise in Nairobi illustrated this. It assumed that 80% of sex workers were infected and had four clients per day, and 10% of the men were infected and had four sexual partners per year. If women sex workers increased their client's condom use from 10% to 80%, that was estimated to prevent 10,200 new infections. Increasing condom use among the men to 80% would avert only 88 infections. In Thailand, the early epidemic was spread by sex workers, but the '100%' condom campaigns, 'making condom use in brothels mandatory, was effective at bringing H.I.V. spread under control. In Durban, research in the early 1990s found brothel-based sex workers (who used condoms) had negligible H.I.V. infection (Whiteside, 2008:48).

From these statistics, it can be inferred that the desolation that is devastating Crossroads is due to lack of condom use. From Jemina and Farida's dialogue, we notice a trend where sometimes the failure to use condoms is orchestrated by a client offering the commercial sex worker more money than he would have offered if a condom was to be used. Farida's noble intentions of taking care of her parents, her children and other relatives with the proceeds of her twilight life regrettably do not come to fruition as AIDS gets to her first. The same fate befalls Jemina, who was Broker's lover and probably the one who transmitted the virus to him. Unlike Kambili who has not come to the realization that her femininity is a source of referent social power, even admiration, the two women take the power of their looks too far, leading to their deaths. Conversely, unlike Kambili who performs well in school and so can get another way of earning a living, the two women have not invested in other potentialities. The narrator quips that "No one, it seemed, had benefitted from whatever irresistible offer she (Jemina) had accepted in exchange for the remainder of her life. Aids got to her first (301).

### 3.2 Conformity to Patriarchal Gender Schematics

Janet undergoes self-rediscovery and reconnection with what the men folk would consider to be her feminine side. She has initially been dismissed by the men in Crossroads as a masculine woman who rode “a man’s bicycle... just as a man would” (27). Musa describes her entry to his tea house as being done “in full force, like an army of amazons...” (27). Her seemingly independent and unemotional disposition, we discover later, is a way of dealing with the pain and suffering that she has gone through after Broker deserts her. It becomes clear that deep down, she is a woman like any other, with a touch of empathy and even forgiveness. We notice a huge turn-around in her attitude when she realizes that Broker, who has since come back to Crossroad in need of medical care, food and boarding, has no one to take care of him. The narrator comments on what goes on in Janet’s mind as she looks at the ailing Broker:

She watched him and worried. All her children sucked their thumbs when they were worried.

“Are you alright?” she asked, with some concern.

“I am fine,” he told her. “I’m just fine. Don’t worry about me.”

But she worried.

“I’m going home to do some washing,” she told him. “Have you got anything I can wash for you?” (325).

Janet’s offer to Broker to do his washing for him turns her into a “good girl”, who places the needs of her husband before hers. In a patriarchal society such as Crossroads, women are compelled to display the “good girl” behaviour because in such a society:

...the ‘good girl’ is rewarded for her behaviour by being placed on ‘a pedestal’ by the patriarchal culture. To her are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she’s modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing and nurturing. She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied with serving her family. At times, she may be sad about the problems of others, and she frequently worries about those in her care- but she is never angry (Tyson, 2006:90).

A “good girl” as discussed above is one who is not in competition with men. She is content to play the traditional roles associated with women and does not display ambition to venture into what might be considered to be men’s purview. We postulate that Janet is able to exercise referent social power over Broker and other men in that despite her independence and emotional stoicism, she still yields to cultural expectations about women, such as taking care of domestic chores as noted above. She therefore misleads the men into liking her by purporting to fit into the cultural mould that men have designed for women.

Similarly, just like Father Amadi, who does not bask in the limelight of priestly splendour in his interaction with the faithful, so also does Janet in *The Last Plague* not steal the show when Don Donovan and his entourage come to inspect the progress of her social work in Crossroads. Arguably, Janet has faced many difficulties in her work of educating people about H.I.V. / AIDS in Crossroads and so she is the right person to receive credit from the visitors. Head Faru, the administrator in the local school has repeatedly told Janet that she cannot teach about condoms in his school, since such an action would run counter to the expectations of the Ministry of Education. In a like manner, Pastor Bat has also in the past impeded Janet and Broker’s attempt to start an AIDS orphans’ shelter in his church compound. When Don Donovan and his entourage come to Crossroads, against the expectations of Faru and Bat, Janet passes the credit of the success of the anti-AIDS campaign to them, besides answering questions on their behalf. This is evident after a journalist accompanying Don Donovan’s team asks a question about how the used condoms are disposed. The narrator describes that awkward question moment that Janet astutely diffuses:

The question was not addressed to anyone in particular. It was one of those anonymous missiles that journalists love to fire at smug authority, a terror canon, not aimed at any coordinates, and for a moment, no one dared touch it. But this was Head Faru's school and, like a natural host, he accepted the question.

"Used condoms?" he asked, even before the words had sunk in his brain. "Why do you ask me?"

"Into the latrine," Janet said quickly. "Not out in the compost with the household waste."

"Very good," Don Donovan sounded pleased (345).

Head Faru is caught flat footed because he has not previously taken interest in getting to know how used condoms should be disposed. As the host of the visiting team, he is expected to answer all the technical questions that have to do with the running of his school. We refer to this moment as awkward because everybody expects him to convincingly answer questions about the disposal of the condoms, partly because he is the head of the school and also because he is a man, who should ideally display leadership skills. Culturally, men are more often seen as being leaders and given opportunities to lead than women. Further, the work that they do is more highly regarded by the society than the work assigned to women (Wood, 1999). In this instance, Janet answers a difficult question on behalf of the nervous and ill-informed head Faru but allows Faru to take the credit.

This display of modesty is designed to ensure that Faru appears to be the one who leads his school community in the fight against H.I.V./AIDS. By allowing Faru to appear to be the leader of the anti-AIDS campaign in the school, Janet therefore seeks to have her work get recognition and approval from those in Donovan's entourage and also avoid hurting Faru's fragile ego. In this study, we argue that Janet has not usurped what characters the ilk of Head Faru would deem to be their rightful authority. On the contrary, she rescues Faru from exposing his ignorance and naiveté to the visitors in the school but

at the same time subscribes to the gender expectations in Crossroads that as a woman, she should stay out of the limelight. It is this humility and covert assertiveness that lessens her detractors' onslaught on her FLEP. Head Faru for instance becomes less hostile to her after this occasion, which evinces her exercise of referent social power over him.

Mwangi challenges the notion that for two people to be in love, then they should be free from the normal problems that afflict humankind. Janet and Broker are able to surmount obstacles such as Broker's desertion of Janet as well as Broker's H.I.V. status so that they can reminiscence over their happier times together. Despite the fact that Broker is ailing from AIDS, Janet forgives and accepts him, in essence showing that his illness and helplessness is a source of referent social power directed towards her by Broker. It has been agreed that in a case where one partner in a marriage gets infected with H.I.V., it becomes easier for the family to cope and continue with normal existence if it is the man who is infected. Women have more tolerance and can bear living with an infected partner while the opposite is not often the case. Studies on women's care directed to their H.I.V. infected husbands indicate that:

Often, the husband has been the one to acquire the H.I.V. infection first, and to become sick first, and the wife or wives may or may not get infected. If the AIDS diagnosis is known, the knowledge that there has been a sexual infidelity can lead to great tension and anger, blame and guilt, making the care role more difficult and complex. Yet the majority of women do care for their husbands, though the same is less often true when it is the wife who becomes sick first (Jackson, 2002:249).

This readiness of women to care for their H.I.V infected spouses shows that women view their partners' invalidism as not totally devaluating to them (husbands) while men are likely to view a H.I.V. infected partner as a liability. It can therefore be deduced that a terminal illness in a man elicits empathy in his wife, an aspect of social power reference.

Women therefore have more resilience than men in coping with a catastrophe such as a terminal illness of a spouse while men would in most cases chase away the sick wife or neglect her. The man's relatives are also likely to play a role in initiating divorce proceedings in such a marriage.

We see Janet's softening of feelings towards Broker as typifying a "proper" woman as described by a patriarchal society. Tyson, (2006) contends that women are made to carry out unpaid for domestic chores. She quotes the French materialist feminist, Colette Guillaumin, who refers to unpaid for work by women as being a form of time appropriation of women or *sexage*. On taking care of other people in the home, Tyson (2006:99) writes that:

Although the caring of babies, children, the elderly and *the sick* (emphasis added) is sometimes carried out by paid workers (who are usually women), the overwhelming majority of it is done by unpaid female family members, or in some cultures, by unpaid female religious workers, such as nuns. The overall effect... is to deprive women of a sense of their individuality as well as of their independence and autonomy. In short, women are, as Guillaumin puts it "the social tools assigned to those tasks" that men don't want to do.

The patriarchal society sees it as part of women's nature to be kind and willing to help and ignores the reality that "helping" is economically torporific to the women. When women stay at home to take care of infants and invalids, there is an assumption that they derive satisfaction out of giving care, a satisfaction that is not accompanied by meaningful pecuniary benefits. Jackson (2002) also agrees that care givers in homes that have AIDS sufferers are typically women, ranging from elderly grandmothers to girls drawn out of school or, sometimes women brought in from other households in the extended family. When men, such as Broker, require that the women in their households

take care of the invalids in the family, then such men are exploiting the referent social power that individuals in a state of helplessness exercise over women.

Janet and Broker later revisit the hills where they used to date in their happier days and Broker apologizes for having wasted Janet's time. He concedes that Janet deserved greater happiness than he was capable of giving her. At this moment, Janet states that she was once happy with him too (417). We propose that by falling sick and becoming helpless, Broker is able to win Janet's heart back in the same manner that he did using his charm when they were dating a decade earlier. Interestingly, though Broker is sick, he still exercises referent social power over Janet. The fact that she accepts to take care of him is itself disempowering to her. Janeway cited in Wood (1999) contends that the roles assigned to women- caring for families, keeping a home, and so on- attract low cultural prestige. Similarly, "serving others is seen to be for losers, it is low level stuff. Yet serving others is a basic principle around which women's lives are organized" (Miller, 61, cited in Wood, 1999:57). Society generally teaches women to accept the role of supporting, taking care of, and responding to others. This disenfranchises and disempowers women because they leave competition and success in life and public affairs to men, just like in *The Last Plague*, where we notice that Broker is still struggling to rebuild Crossroads despite his illness.

As a youngster of nearly Kambili's age, Obiora's has an assertive personality that constantly impresses Kambili. Having grown up in restrictive environments where personal expression was repressed, Kambili and Jaja have a fearful and timid disposition. They do not air their views easily as they have been socialized by their father into being demure and to always be expecting guidelines from their father on how to respond

towards even the most basic of situations. In Obiora, the two children learn that as growing teenagers, they are entitled to their opinions and that talking and airing one's views is not an offence but part of healthy and stable teenage development. Obiora is therefore an emotionally stable teenager. One of the emotional development milestones in a teenager of Obiora's age is possession of "confidence in his own skills and ideas and an assertive rather than an aggressive or passive response to challenges" (Kamen, 2007:79). Kambili sums up Obiora by stating that "he was a bold, male version of what I could never have been at fourteen, what I still was not" (138). The narrator is therefore attracted to Obiora's inner strength that in turn leads her to outgrow and surmount her timidity.

In *The Last Plague*, aspects of masculinity attributable to Broker contribute in the shaping of Big Youth's personality. When Broker starts the condom shop, he recruits Big Youth as his assistant. Big Youth is also impressed by Broker's large car and spends a lot of time cleaning and polishing it. What emerges is that Big Youth, who does not have parents, finds a role model in Broker. From a young boy who is unsure of himself, Big Youth increasingly matures into a responsible young man under Broker's tutelage. The young man also admits to liking Broker despite the fact that Head Faru does not think that Broker deserves to come back to Janet's life (217). The mentorship of Big Youth by Broker is corroborated by their verbal and physical closeness as seen in this occasion:

Broker took him (Big Youth) by the shoulder and gave him the most affectionate smile Big Youth had ever seen. Of all the people in Crossroads, Big Youth had grown to be Broker's closest companion, the younger brother he wished he had. Now he walked with him to the grain-store and the fading poster of the life and death equation.

"Did you truly write that?" he asked.

"Yes, boss," Big Youth said with great pride.

"Then there is very little for you to learn from me," he told him (405).

We interpret Broker's interaction with Big Youth as patronal because Broker sees Big Youth as a younger brother, an incarnation of his former self before he was afflicted by AIDS. Big Youth's energy and vivacity stirs up feelings of nostalgia in Broker while Broker (minus his illness) epitomizes masculine success to Big Youth. The two males therefore exercise referent social power over each other due to the complementary nature of their masculine roles and identity. On the one hand, Big Youth cannot fully express his masculinity due to his economic power dearth. On the other hand, since Broker is sick, he has lost the corporal index through which a man can acquire and sustain recognition. He has for instance lost his virility, which he now replaces with a display of economic power, one of which is his "large low vehicle" (Muriungi, 2005:130-131). From the foregoing, it is evident that Broker's referent social power exercised over Big Youth at this moment surpasses that exercised by Janet over the young man. In the same vein, Big Youth elicits feelings of brotherhood in Broker, a factor that makes Broker susceptible to Big Youth's manipulations in some cases.

Amaka, Obiora's sister is adept at executing out the domestic chores that are traditionally associated with women. She has received training from her mother on how to carry out the different duties that a girl and a potential wife is expected to know. As for Kambili, having grown up in an environment where her sense of initiative was repressed, rather than natured, even the most basic household chores present problems for her. At first, Amaka is aghast that Kambili is unable to do what she (Amaka) considers to be easy tasks. Amaka repeatedly ridicules Kambili, the consequence of which is that Kambili realizes that she is not *au fait* with basic skills that a girl of her age ought to be. Like Father Amadi, Amaka wakes Kambili up to the realization that her feminine charisma has been

stultified by her father. Ifeoma also includes the boys in the performance of domestic chores, thereby ensuring that her sons do not grow up with the erroneous and chauvinistic idea that domestic work is a preserve for girls. The fact that even Obiora, a boy is involved in domestic duties while Kambili is unable to perfectly carry out tasks allocated to her opens her eyes to the reality of what skills she lacks as a girl. Kambili narrates how each child contributes to performance of domestic chores and how her ineptitude is sneered at by Amaka:

Amaka scrubbed the floors with a stiff brush, Obiora did the sweeping, Chima plumped up the cushions on the chairs. Everybody took turns washing plates. Aunt Ifeoma included Jaja and me in the plate-washing schedule, and after I washed the garri-encrusted lunch plates, Amaka picked them off the tray where I had placed them to dry and soaked them in water.

“Is this how you wash plates in your house?” she asked. “Or is plate washing not included in your fancy schedule?” (140).

This incident, though hurting to Kambili, is a clarion call to her from Amaka to perfect her house-keeping skills as is required of an African woman. Kambili is likely to try and do as Amaka wants because she would like to win her cousin's approbation. Kamen (2007:58) writes that adolescents “are very keen to acquire peer approval and that in their quest to do so, they may even contravene the expectations of their teachers or parents”. Amaka can therefore be read as withholding approval so as to challenge Kambili's economic status. Kambili is from a rich background but her inability to execute simple domestic chores emasculates her in the face of her peers such as Amaka. Kambili is goaded by Amaka's disapprobation into getting out of her introspected nature so that she can learn gender defined skills that other girls of her age have already perfected.

Several days later, Kambili, who ordinarily speaks with a stammer when nervous and around people fails to answer greetings from Kambili's friends. She is also unable to answer a question about the length of her hair but instead runs away to hide in the toilet. In the evening, Amaka asks her mother if Jaja and Kambili are not abnormal. She says that by acting dumb and running to hide in the toilet, Kambili had behaved like an *atulu* (141-142). These sentiments are expressed within Kambili's earshot. Amaka's disparagement towards Kambili should not be misconstrued as being a pointer to Amaka's impudence or insensitivity. Her behaviour resonates with the customary behaviour of teenagers such as having "strong opinions or beliefs, leading to arguments with adults and peers; may hold grudges and find it difficult to forgive and forget (Kamen, 2007:79). The accusatory, demeaning and denigrating remarks hurled at Kambili by Amaka, though seemingly heart-breaking strengthens Kambili's resolve to learn those basic skills that her family has not taught her and in so doing resemble Amaka and her friends.

Arguably, the fact that Amaka does not retain hostility towards Kambili ad infinitum is an indication of Adichie's development of Kambili's character. In casting Kambili as having gained Amaka's acceptance, Adichie paves way for Kambili to also accept herself. As an age-mate of Kambili, Amaka finally reassures Kambili that she is a normal child, just like any other. Amaka, in a rare gesture of magnanimity, bestows her half-finished painting of Papa-Nnukwu to Kambili, an indication of the thawing of feelings between the two cousins. After Kambili and Jaja go back to Enugu, the following phone conversation that takes place between the two girls shows the extent to which Amaka's approval of Kambili has impacted on Kambili's self image:

“Kambili, *ke kwanu?*” Amaka sounded different on the phone. Breezy. Less likely to start an argument. Less likely to sneer- or maybe that was simply because I would not see the sneer. “I am fine,” I said. “Thank you. Thank you for the painting.” “I thought you might want to keep it.” Amaka’s voice was still hoarse when she spoke of Papa-Nnukwu. “Thank you,” I whispered. I had not known that Amaka even thought of me, even knew what I wanted.

From the dialogue, it is evident that Kambili’s realization that Amaka is an ordinary girl, just like her, capable of grieving Papa-Nnukwu’s demise, and capable of sharing feelings and affection, boosts her belief in herself. In giving Kambili Papa-Nnukwu’s painting, Amaka also displays understanding towards Kambili’s needs and feelings. Teenagers are normally “sensitive to (their) own feelings and those of others with a growing understanding of the possible causes for why people feel and act the way they do” (Kamen, 2007:78). Amaka therefore exercises referent social power over Kambili because by showing Kambili that she (Amaka) empathizes with her (Kambili), henceforth, Kambili is more likely to confide in Amaka and even copy what Amaka does. In showing the humane side of her character, Amaka cancels out the intimidating religious mask of autocracy with which Eugene has dealt with Kambili.

In *The Last Plague*, we note too that just like Amaka who at first vehemently opposes Kambili’s very existence, Janet had also initially rejected Broker, who had come back to Crossroads ailing and seeking to be re-admitted into Janet’s life. At first, she had even sent him away in one of their first heated conversations as we see in this exchange:

“What would you like me to do?” he asked in earnest. “You say it and I will do it right now.”

“Go away,” she said.

“What?” He was incredulous.

“Go away,” she repeated. “That is what I want you to do. Get back in your car and get out of my life. That is what I would like you to do. That is what you have to do” (161).

Having been away, Broker has lost the unique station of being the one who makes commands in his house. This role has since gone to Janet. Since Broker is sick, he realizes that Janet has an edge over him as he cannot fully exercise his power as the man of the house. He feigns belligerence instead of admitting his shortcomings and seeking forgiveness. Unable to accept that he can no longer issue decrees to Janet, Broker seeks an honourable way to exit the situation without too much loss of face. Gender studies have shown that:

Males are proud of their masculinity and sometimes they tend to be sensitive to criticism, especially if it is from the wife. When they have a weakness they cannot control immediately, they may develop a cover-up syndrome by either being rude, harsh or cruel or physically absent themselves from home (FPAK, 2001:13).

To ostensibly show displeasure for his rude reception, Broker therefore leaves Janet's compound. Later on, Janet will accept Broker back to her life, the only difference being that since he is ailing, they cannot have a sexual relation. We suggest that for Janet to accept herself fully, she has to come to a compromise with herself and with Broker. Her final interment of Broker's remains in her own land is the last step in her acceptance of herself as being a Crossroad inhabitant, affected by the AIDS scourge just like all the other lowly women whom she is trying to emancipate from the yokes of gender based suffering. Therefore, for her to have enough referent social power to free other women from the bonds of AIDS and large families that they can ill-afford to take care of, she first demonstrates that she is also affected by the plague that is eating into Crossroads.

It is an African cultural expectation that male members of the family provide security for the family. Aunty Ifeoma has inculcated this principle in Jaja, such that when Jaja finds

out that she is in distress, he does not hesitate in coming to her rescue. After the University terminates her employment, Ifeoma calls Enugu for solace. Her need for a shoulder to lean on finds a ready answer in Jaja, who, completely disregarding his father's views, decides to provide succor to his Aunt. Kambili relates how Ifeoma's phone call affects Jaja:

After Jaja talked to Aunty Ifeoma, he put the phone down and said, "We are going to Nsukka today. We will spend Easter in Nsukka."

I did not ask him what he meant, or how he would convince Papa to let us go. I watched him knock on papa's door and go in.

"We are going to Nsukka. Kambili and I," I heard him say. I did not hear what Papa said, then I heard Jaja say, "We are going to Nsukka today, not tomorrow. If Kevin will not take us, we will still go. We will walk if we have to."...

Jaja came in to say that Papa had agreed that Kevin could take us (261).

This is perhaps the first incident in the novel when Jaja directly pits himself against his father and comes out the victor. He adamantly insists on going to Nsukka accompanied by Kambili despite his father's initial refusal. From his impulsive decision to go to Nsukka to see Ifeoma, we argue that Jaja attempts to fill a void in him by protecting the womenfolk who populate his familial space. Having observed Eugene terrorize his mother and Kambili and not done much in way of intervention has given Jaja a guilt conscious, one that can only be assuaged by constantly coming to the aid of the women. He therefore ignores his father's wishes. Arguably, Papa Eugene's maltreatment of his wife is responsible for Jaja's apparent discourtesy towards him. We say this because studies show that a man's lack of respect for his wife can be passed on to his children (FPAK, 2001). In this case, Jaja adopts a masculine predisposition and from the timid boy of yore emerges a young man with the determination of a mature man. Ifeoma and

her referent power exercise stands at the background of this new emergent Jaja, totally obliterating the timidity that Eugene had instilled in him.

### 3.3 (Re)Igniting Latent Passions

We observe that Father Amadi is an emancipating force as regards Kambili's sexual awakening. His is a direct affront at the puritanical values inculcated in Kambili by her father and the Catholic sisters of the school she attends, Daughters of the Immaculate Heart. Catholicism in Kambili has stifled her sexual consciousness to such an extent that she feels that anything that is even slightly suggestive of sexual matters is distasteful. As a consequence, she marvels at how Chinwe Jideze is able to command a huge following from other girls. Kambili also notes that Chinwe Jideze wears a school skirt that is tight at the waist, one that divides her body into two rounded halves like the figure eight (50). The inability for Kambili to realize that Jideze's figure is an example of feminine beauty that she (Kambili) should also aspire for points at a teenager whose straight-laced upbringing has jaded her secondary sexual development.

We introduce the idea of a jaded sexual growth since it is our contention that a strict religious upbringing has the effect of suppressing normal and healthy sexual orientation. A religious orientation that casts matters of sexuality in diabolical light is wont to interfere with normal sexual relations, even among couples. This is what Eugene has achieved in Kambili's life. Kambili cannot even fathom a situation where her parents are physically intimate. In her mind's eye, she espouses an intimate interaction between her parents as being congruent with some apt religious rituals. When commenting on her mother's pregnancy, she says that:

I did not know that she had been trying to have a baby since the last miscarriage almost six months 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 the affection between them, I thought of them exchanging the sign of peace at mass, the way Papa would hold her tenderly in his arms after they had clasped hands (21).

From Kambili's thoughts on her parents' intimacy, it is evident that she does not see them as capable of having sexual passion for each other. She looks at her parents' sexuality from a dualist perspective. To her, sexual passion and its attendant abandonment of restraint has to be tempered with a measure of Christian piousness for it to be acceptable. What Eugene has done to Kambili is to inculcate in her a Manichean pessimism towards sex that breeds sexual frigidity. Studies done on causes of negativity in sexual matters among devout Christians indicate that:

...this pessimism that emphasizes the runaway destructiveness of sex... dates back to the Manichean dualists of the third century of the Common Era. Manicheans divided all reality and power into two rival kingdoms: the kingdom of God pitted against the kingdom of Satan, Good versus evil, Light versus Darkness... Manicheans tended to associate women with the intentions of the Devil...(Scott & Warren, 1993:189).

We refer to Kambili's views on human sexuality as driven by a dualist proclivity because her father associates *her* sexuality with evil and so it becomes difficult for her to associate *her parents'* sexuality with holiness. It is therefore this wrong impression of sexuality that has killed Kambili's natural responses to sexual situations. She possesses a Victorian girl's understanding of sex as a masculine pursuit in which a girl should not take an active part in but instead wait until a knight in shining armour sweeps her from her feet and (re)kindles her sexuality.

Likewise, in *The Last Plague*, Janet has degenerated into sexual dormancy and acquired an aversion to men courtesy of Broker's desertion of her. She has acquired a reticence towards hedonism and imbibed her grandmother's summative philosophy, that "testicles do not make a man" (221,315). She adopts the Platonic philosophy of shunning excesses of pleasure and instead chooses to live a life of self restraint and moderation. We read Janet's lack of interest with men as comparable to the ancient Greeks' obsession with abstinence and austerity, which they regarded as proper ways of conducting oneself. McHoul & Grace (2002:94) in their study of Foucault's thesis on sexuality write that the Greeks had "a massive interest in, if not cult of, chastity" and that "for some, this was merely a matter of self restraint which again attested to their high status; for others, chastity was a source of wisdom and access to the truth." In this study, we submit that Janet's obsession with sexual austerity is geared towards helping her to cope with the reality of Broker's desertion of her. This conclusion is in tandem with what McHoul & Grace (2002:94) refer to as "a veneration of chastity that leads to strong mindedness and as a discipline which can bring insights unavailable to others." Her despising of irresponsible husbands who do not care for their families is echoed by Janet's friend Hanna who wonders what good there is in a man who has "nothing but his manhood to give to a woman" (37).

Mwangi later on shows that Janet's lack of affection is not an innate nature with her. He paints her as capable of falling in love, yet again, if only she can overcome her fear of rejection. In this study, we suggest that part of the referent social power that Broker exercises over Janet is based on the possibility of a (re)awakening of romantic feelings between them. Not having seen Broker for some time, Janet is said to have "started to

miss his pestering presence" (324), showing that she is not totally without feelings for him. Her thawing of feelings towards Broker is further reinforced by her unexplainable offer to take Broker back into her house as the narrator relates:

He resumed stuffing clothes in a laundry bag in a somber and angry mood. She watched him for a while, before finally asking him, "Would you like to come back home? With me and the Children?"

She had no idea what made her ask that. It was not just pity but something bigger and deeper; the primordial goad that drove poor people to take in injured animals and stray dogs they could ill afford (329).

We advance that from her impulsive invitation to Broker to come back to the fold, Janet has also reconnected with her loving nature. It has taken the illness of her husband to make her realize that love need not be steeped in eroticism; that she can still develop affection for a man even though he is helpless. This is a position we maintain because after Broker's death, he is eventually accorded a befitting funeral and his remains interred in Janet's compound.

Adichie looks at fanatical religious convictions as being discordant with the spontaneity with which love blossoms. She paints strict adherence to religious beliefs and rituals as being irreconcilable with love, the latter which requires an element of abandon and spontaneity, even carelessness. Her notion resonates with the thesis of Scott & Warren (1993:189) who write that those people who have had a Victorian upbringing are wont to fear sex as "the demon in the groin" and also fear that sexual power, once let loose, will grip and destroy its host. They also see sexual power as destructive to them and to others, a loose cannon as it were, in human affairs. Adichie's castigation of religion as a killer of heterosexual intimacy is what informs her creation of Father Amadi, a foil to Eugene. Amadi promises to take Kambili out to go and see him train some boys who have a

football team. Thoughts of Father Amadi conjure up eroticism in Kambili. She becomes self conscious and for the first time, starts to appreciate herself as a female human being, who should be attractive to members of the opposite sex. Her words, below, as she awaits the arrival of Amadi reveal that his referent social power exercise over her is slowly making her to emerge out of a long established sexual reservation:

I heard the Toyota drive up to the front of the flat awhile later. I took Amaka's lipstick from the top of the dresser and ran it over my lips. It looked strange, not as glamorous as it did on Amaka; it did not even have the same bronze shimmer. I wiped it off. My lips looked pale, a dour brown. I ran the lipstick over my lips again, and my hands shook (174).

We aver that Kambili's attempt to apply lipstick, albeit clumsily is the start of her journey towards sexual awakening. Her trepidation as she awaits the arrival of Father Amadi points to an instance of normal teenage excitement in a love situation. This is a stage that nearly eluded her when she was in her father's house as she was not permitted meaningful interaction with other children, let alone members of the opposite sex.

Whereas it is easy to conclude that Father Amadi has pedophilic inclinations, it should be understood that the contemporary Catholic Church is a movement that lays more emphasis on positivity rather than adopting a condemnatory approach to man and his many weaknesses. An inquiry into the Catholic pedagogical praxis and faith has revealed that:

Approach to Catholic education- both of children and of adults- have altered considerably, with a greater emphasis now placed on the positive imperatives of the Catholic teaching, especially with regard to love of neighbour and wider social responsibility. Talk of sinfulness, especially with regard to sex, or of the Devil and hell, is, by contrast, muted with comparison with what was heard in the classroom and from the pulpit fifty years ago. Much effort has been made to ensure that those who fall short of the Catholic ideals in their personal life (for example those who

divorce or have children out of wedlock) do not feel excluded from or rejected by the church (Stanford, 2008:21).

This modulation of teachings about the sinfulness of man and its resultant perdition makes the Catholic Church more appealing to individuals who wish to associate with Christianity but are averse to the dualist gospel of rewardable rectitude versus punishable dissoluteness as disseminated by Pentecostal churches. From the foregoing, instances of sexual foibles among Catholic faithful are not treated with too much denunciation as they are with Pentecostal churches. With regard to sexual attraction between priests and their faithful, it is noteworthy that though the Roman Catholic Church requires the priests to be celibate, this has not always been the case. For more than half of Catholicism history, its priest were allowed to marry and were referred to as “married men of proven virtue” or *viri probati*. Celibacy became mandatory in 1139 when the Second Luteran Council made it so. However, in the Orthodox tradition, priests are allowed to marry but only the celibate ones fill up the higher ranks (Stanford, 2008). Father Amadi is therefore a priest who cannot be said to be transgressing the doctrinal position of the Church. His interest in the welfare of the youth is what makes him get drawn to Kambili and the boys that he trains in football. This impulse to reach out to the young people’s needs is what makes him exercise referent social power over Kambili in a way that Papa Eugene is not able to.

Avowably, Frank possesses referent social power that he uses to stir up long repressed feelings of sexual excitement in Janet. Just like Kambili, Janet yields to the need of male presence in her life. This happens when she gets into close proximity with Frank and like with Broker before, she loses her tight grip on herself and openly displays her yearning for love. Janet, against the trend of her behaviour admits to feeling lonely as we can deduce from the following words:

"I'm tired of living alone," Janet said. She had been too strong for too long. It exhausted her to always be strong. Until now, she had not met a man who did not weary her, a man she could live with. Someone she could share with (339).

Here, we witness Janet succumb to the natural tendency of a person who has over-exerted herself to seek succor in form of a companion. There is a suggestion that towards the end of the story that Frank and Janet are poised to become romantically involved. Frank had left Crossroads to go and pursue further studies but had been misdiagnosed as having H.I.V. However, now that he is back to Crossroads and has been tested and proven to be free from the virus, Mwangi suggests that he and Janet can now settle down in marriage. This seems to be the right course of action for both because as young people, they still need to satisfy their carnal desires while ensuring that they avoid contracting H.I.V.. In order to curb the spread of H.I.V./AIDS, Jackson (2002) proposes that the common answer to the need for sex is for people to marry so that they can have a socially acceptable outlet for their sexual expression. She also goes on to note the need to increase one's education and acquire sufficient economic security before one marries makes many young people delay marriage for years, even after they have reached sexual maturity. This is what has happened with Frank. We propose that as a man, Frank (re)awakens amorous feelings in Janet. He penetrates the veneer of toughness in Janet and brings out the vulnerable part of her as a woman. With him, Janet does not see the need of the façade that she adopts when handling chauvinistic characters such as Kata and Chief Chupa.

Grandmother, in *The Last Plague*, incessantly reminds Janet that inasmuch as she is independent, she still needs the presence of a man in her life. The old woman is not

convinced that just because Broker disappeared and left Janet to suffer, then he remains extraneous to her even after he makes a comeback. Mwangi demonstrates, using the character of Grandmother, the special office held by a man in his family, regardless of the weaknesses that might be attributable to him. Here, she wistfully reminds Janet of the positive side of Broker:

“What was true yesterday is not important today,” Grandmother said... Your husband is a total man. A man of vision and ability, a man strong enough to look after his own. Did he not catch you and tame you, when you were a young and wild thing, and make you into a woman? Did he not give you *three* good children and build you a nice house?”(316).

Out of her experience with the *pro tem* and transient nature of human comportment that at any given time relies on the prevailing circumstances, Grandmother advises Janet not to make very binding decisions during moments of blinding anger or hopeless desperation. She shifts the balance of referent social power exercise to Broker by recognizing the patriarchal society’s expectation for a man to be accorded appreciation and peace of mind by his wife, even though sometimes he may have done some things that are less than laudable. She therefore identifies herself with Broker in as far as a man’s exercise of authority in his home goes. When it comes to how a wife should deal with her husband at home, experts in marital matters own that:

It is advisable for women to understand that men enjoy a quiet life, where they feel in control. If harassed at home, they may find comfort in extra-marital affairs. Women too should appreciate that some occupations demand more attention in terms of time and money and, therefore, sacrifice is called for. It is the responsibility of the wife to make the home pleasant. A happy marriage results from the ability of the couple to understand, support and encourage each other, taking into consideration the different working environments they live in (FPAK, 2001:13).

FPAK acknowledges that the home is a husband's recuperation turf after he comes from facing the daily toils associated with earning a living. This is why it is imperative that the wife endeavours to be as amenable as possible with her husband while the two are at home. It is therefore prudent for her to voice her dissents at fora that are away from home at other opportune moments. Grandmother's understanding of the transitory nature of human weaknesses is vindicated by the narrator's recollection of how at one time, Broker loved and cared for Janet. On the day of their wedding, Broker had carried Janet on the back of a bicycle and proudly displayed her to the whole of Crossroads. He had told his listeners that he had married Janet to be his for life. Janet had been so happy that she had laughed so much that she had nearly fallen off the bicycle (417). Ten years later when it becomes apparent that he does not have a long time to live, Broker shows his caring nature by leaving his estate in the hands of Frank and Janet. His thoughtfulness and caring nature endears him to Janet, just it did during their dating days. He ensures that his children will be well provided for (382).

In retrospect, it can be argued that from Grandmother's words, Broker was once a caring husband and father who went astray. His desertion of Janet was arguably what led Janet to becoming an emotionally stoical woman. Broker's absconding of his duty was what led to Janet's masculinization. His return, coupled with Grandmother's support of him, softens Janet's heart, making her to seek identification with Grandmother and Broker and thereafter reconnect with her femininity and be once more receptive to Broker.

Affirmation and contravention of expected gender roles is played out through Kambili's interaction with Father Amadi. We argue in this study that teenagers who are able to indulge in physical activities such as games stand on higher social pedestal than those

who have poor psychomotor skills. An ability for a teenager to perform in those areas that require the use of muscles' coordination, *inter alia* running, hopping and playing ball games leads to a higher self-esteem. In Enugu, Eugene has locked his children out of this important aspect of physical development. He has instead drawn a schedule that the children should follow, which is devoid of a slot for outdoor activities. In Nsukka and under the tutelage of Father Amadi, Kambili is introduced to this facet of her life. It is evident that prior to this encounter, Kambili has not had much practice in games as this dialogue with Father Amadi reveals:

His boys were not here yet, so the football field was empty. We sat on the stairs, in one of the two spectator stands that had a roof.

"Why don't we play set ball before the boys come?" he asked.

"I don't know how to play."

"Do you play handball?"

"No"

"What about volleyball?"

I looked at him and then away. I wondered if Amaka would ever paint him, would ever capture the clay-smooth skin, the straight eyebrows, which were slightly raised as he watched me. "I played volleyball in class one," I said. "But I stopped playing because I... I was not that good and nobody liked to pick me (175-176).

As noted in chapter one, referent social power is what adolescents use to seek or gain peer approval. Adolescents relate in peer groups in which they also form friendships and engage in games. Kambili's slothfulness in games evinces her poor interaction with her peers. The fact that nobody liked to pick her for volleyball is interpretable as being a result of her distantness which in turn attracts frostiness from her peers. It is this alienation that Father Amadi confronts by exposing Kambili to games. His concern with Kambili and the boys' skills at games is in tandem with the policy of the Catholic Church about the uplifting of individual and societal welfare.

The church lays emphasis on what can loosely be referred to as social justice as well as pro-life issues. It for instance promotes social justice through development agencies such as the worldwide Caritas International Network (CIN), a body that tackles economic injustice, political oppression and abuse of human rights (Stanford, 2008). In this study, we read Kambili and the boys in the football team as afflicted by an aspect of marginality; Kambili due to coming from an abusive family and the boys due to economic challenges. The fact that Father Amadi comes to their aid arms him with referent social power which overcomes Papa Eugene's coercive social power exercise on Kambili. Papa Eugene's philanthropy is only directed towards church development projects and not social justice for the marginalized.

Later on, Amadi invites Kambili to run after him and he suddenly dashes off. She enjoys the wind on her face as she runs. This incident becomes an invitation for the narrator to be more extroverted. We contend that the beginning of physical activities by Kambili uplifts her spirits and continuously removes the gloomy atmosphere with which her life had been covered, due to her father's mechanical approach to child rearing.

The positive effects of this episode on the general psyche and mien of Kambili come to the fore when she resumes school. While her father's upbringing had made her an outcast when with her age mates and social group members, Amadi opens out the world of friendship, comfort and camaraderie in her. Kambili is able to fit into a healthy social life in school. Kamen (2007:59) identifies aspects of a healthy social life in school for teenagers as "an ability to enjoy the company of other children or young people; formation of individual friendships; belonging to a gang or a group, participation in games or sports or other group activities including clubs and hobbies; and ability to

follow complex rules fully". Here, Kambili relates what happens in games when she goes back to school:

I joined a group of girls on the volleyball field on the second day of the school. I did not hear the whispers of "backyard snob" or the ridiculing laughter. I did not notice the amused pinches they gave one another. I stood waiting with my hands clasped until I was picked. I only saw Father Amadi's clay-coloured face and heard only "You have good legs for running (204-205).

Here, we notice that Kambili's affability increases her receptivity by her peer group members. She loses her self-consciousness, a fact that makes her more sociable. Kambili's participation in games when she resumes school is therefore evidence that Father Amadi is able to remove shyness and awkwardness from her, two weaknesses that Eugene's upbringing had planted in her. She is hence forth able to relate with other girls in a healthy way.

In a like manner, Broker is able to pull Janet out of her life of emotional solitude to once again express feelings of love for men. By dissenting her, Broker makes Janet to retreat into an emotional prison from where she does not want to venture out. She steels herself and refuses to expose herself to hurt once more by avoiding the vanities of love. Grandmother's words that "testicles do not make a man" become the guiding beacon that Janet follows in her interaction with men. Towards the end of the novel though, Broker, once more exercises referent social power over Janet. Since Janet has now emotionally fortified herself, it takes the weakness of Broker, who is ill and about to die, for Janet to reconnect with her loving nature. In effect, the reason why Broker earns Janet's approval is because he denounces the doctrine of "male dominance and female subservience" (Whiteside, 2008:52) that is found in patriarchal societies' marital unions. In such marriages, there exist instances of unequal partnering, where the woman may be too

young or too economically dependent on the man. This is the kind of dominance that Broker relinquishes to Janet, courtesy of his illness, and in so doing, earns her acceptance.

Arguably, by disappearing from Crossroads, Broker saves Janet from contracting the virus, because had he stayed and lived a life of promiscuity, he might have infected her (418). In effect therefore, by staying with Janet and by loving her, Broker would have led to her death; by deserting her and coming back to her to ask for forgiveness, Broker makes it possible for Janet to develop selfless love that is not based on what the other person has to offer. Broker deviates from the normal expectation that a man wins a woman's love by being a strong provider. When he embraces his weakness and accepts that he is the one being provided for, Broker exposes his humane side that effectively also reconnects Janet with her humane side.

*Purple Hibiscus* is a coming of age story of a girl whose father has locked her in a cocoon of self doubt and self recrimination. It is with Father Amadi's referent social power that Kambili is able to break free from the social prison in which her father has incarcerated her. By bringing his power as a flesh and blood man, rather than as a priest waxing in nebular religious concepts, to bear on Kambili, Amadi effectively frees Kambili's spirit.

Father Amadi emerges as being a positive role model that Kambili's own father is not. Papa Eugene's frequent assaults directed towards Beatrice coupled with his harsh application of rules to Kambili and Jaja makes him a negative role model. When seeking to be a positive role model to children, one:

...should strike a balance between allowing for the child's increasing need for independence and providing adequate

supervision with appropriate guidelines for socially acceptable behaviour. Observing the behaviour of parents and other significant adults (such as childcarers) affects children's own behaviour, how they deal with their own feelings and how they relate to others. This is why it is so important for adults to provide positive role models for children's behaviour (Kamen, 2007:164).

We refer to Papa Eugene as a negative role model who exercises negative referent power over his family because his application of positive and negative imperatives of discipline towards his children is disproportionate. He seeks to direct his children's behaviour through decrees and injunctions more than through guided autonomy. On his part, Father Amadi is a positive role model because he encourages Kambili to be self-governing and explorative. In this study, we aver that Father Amadi has outdone Papa Eugene through exercising positive referent social power over Kambili and Jaja in respect to role modeling.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie offers a commentary on the devastating consequences of a parent playing an unduly excessive supervisory role in the growth and development of teenage children. In this study, we acknowledge that the healthy development of teenagers requires "*a balance between strict applications of discipline and a modicum of freedom*" (Kamen, 2007:164, emphasis mine). It is only through giving children some freedom to explore the world and themselves that they will develop a healthy personality and boost their self esteem.

The low self-esteem that has afflicted Kambili comes to the fore when Amaka's two girlfriends come to visit. It becomes apparent that Kambili cannot relate well with her own peers, let alone sustain a conversation. She is also not *au courant* with dress fashion and habits that a girl of her age should be familiar with. Kambili is anxious, a condition

that leads children to insist on doing things in a certain way and withdrawing from new or unfamiliar situations, including people. This often gets in the way of making friends and having a social life (Jackson, 2002). Though Kambili hails from a rich family background, she is out of touch with modern behavioural trends associated with young girls as the following account about Amaka's two friends reveal:

The two girls said hello, and I smiled. They had hair as short as Amaka's, wore shiny lipstick and trousers so tight I knew they would walk differently if they were wearing something more comfortable. I watched them examine themselves in the mirror, pore over an American magazine with a brown-skinned, honey-haired woman on the cover, and talk about a math teacher who didn't know the answers to his own tests, a girl who wore a miniskirt to evening lesson even though she had fat yams on her legs, and a boy who was fine (141).

Kambili's wonder at the girls' trendy dressing and their discussion that betrays their voyeurism shows that she is ordinarily not inclined to salaciousness. While one might argue that Kambili is well brought up while the two girls have had a prurient upbringing, it is worth noting that interest in sexual matters is a normal and *healthy* part of adolescent development. Kambili's disinterest in sensualism is therefore *unhealthy*. The two girls go ahead to question Kambili about her long and thick hair. Long hair is a mark of beauty that the girls admire in Kambili, yet Kambili has never taken pride in this fact or realized that she is more physically endowed than other girls' around her. She notices that the duo wear lipstick and tight trousers so that they can enhance their looks. Women are decorative objects whose value depends on appearance. This is what makes designers of women's clothing to come up with fashions that call attention to their bodies and make them attractive to viewers. Examples of fashion designs for women include form fitting skirts, materials that cling to the body and trousers that have no pockets large enough to

put wallets and keys, which would distort the shape of the wearer. Women's shoes are also designed "to call attention to the wearer's legs, sometimes at the expense of comfort" (Wood, 1999:145). Adichie has exhibited that Amaka and her friends are in touch with these feminine habits and dress mannerisms that Kambili realizes she lacks. Amaka therefore influences Kambili into thinking about her introspected nature that robs and denies her the ability to relate well with her peers.

### **3.4 Confronting Gender Based Deficiencies Through Assertiveness**

There is an undercurrent that runs through *Purple Hibiscus*, that of Adichie continuously propagating for assertiveness, even defiance of patterns of behaviour that are repressive and gagging. Eugene demands complete and unquestioned obedience from his family members but Auntie Ifeoma plants the germ of disobedience in Jaja and Kambili. While Jaja weeds some ridges while topless, Kambili becomes aware of his smooth, rippling back muscles. Adichie presents Jaja as a strong young man who should not be lowering his neck to the yoke of his father's persecution. Ifeoma compares Jaja to Jaja of Apobo, a legendary African king who refused to cooperate with the white man and was then exiled in West Indies. This analogy later comes to fruition as Jaja goes to jail to shield his mother, who has poisoned Eugene. Contrary to Eugene who bombards his children with religious dogma that requires them to be quiescent and fearful, Ifeoma calls upon Jaja to exercise his manly obligation of being brave and standing up to his oppressors as we see in these words:

"Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes," Auntie Ifeoma said. "Defiance is like marijuana- it is not a bad thing if it is used right."

The solemn tone, more than the sacrilege of what she said, made me look up. Her conversation was with Chima and Obiora, but she was looking at Jaja (144).

What we notice in this case is a situation where Ifeoma encourages Jaja to rebel against his father's tyranny. She makes Jaja aware that parents are not necessarily demigods that their children should never question. In the process of growing up, children and parents often experience much conflict. This happens because the younger generation strives to create an independent life while the older generation tries to maintain control of the children (Olson & Defrain, 2001). Ifeoma therefore suggests to Jaja that an altercation between him and his father might be inevitable. Whatever values of timidity that Eugene has planted in his children are slowly eroded by Ifeoma as she encourages the children to be assertive, rather than constrained by what the society has dictated to them as being the expected course of conduct for children from a religious background.

We notice that Jaja is finally able to surmount his fear of his father because of the encouragement he has received from Ifeoma. The cultural expectation that a man should be brave and assertive finally comes to bear on him. This is a new found strength that Jaja has acquired from her sojourn in Nsukka that takes her father by surprise when Jaja demands his freedom and privacy within their Enugu house using this bold language:

"Papa, may I have the key to my room, please?" Jaja asked, setting his fork down. We were halfway through dinner. I took a deep breath and held it. Papa had always kept the key to our rooms.

"What?" Papa asked.

"The key to my room. I would like to have it. *Makana*, because I would like some privacy."

Papa's pupils seemed to dart around in the white of his eyes.

"What? What do you want privacy for? To commit a sin against you own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?"

"No," Jaja said. He moved his hand and knocked his glass of water over (191-192).

Papa Eugene keeps the keys to his children's rooms so that he can ensure that they do not keep any parts of their lives secret from him. As we can see, he is concerned that Jaja might practice masturbation if he is left unwatched in the privacy of his room. Eugene's stringency on sexuality concurs with Michel Foucault's proposition on the sexuality of the ancient Greeks. The Greeks warned of problems that are associated with "seminal loss". They also considered seminal loss to be a disease that was "shameful in itself" and "dangerous" in that it leads to stagnation; is harmful to the society in that it goes against the principle of propagation of species; and because it is in all respects the source of countless ills, it requires prompt treatment (McHoul & Grace, 2002:93). Eugene therefore keeps a close watch on his children's sexual behaviour, fearing that it might bring about some form of disrepute to him.

Jaja, just like his namesake, Jaja of Apobo, is able to face up to his father's tyranny. By demanding the key to his room, he starts to set spatial boundaries that he does not expect his father to cross. We acknowledge that teenage children are sensitive to intrusion of their privacy, a reality that had so far been obliterated from Jaja's knowledge. It is worthy of comment that the social power that a parent exercises over his or her children is dependent on the culture the family is steeped in. In the agriculturally oriented family, the father has more control over his children while in the city, his influence lessens as the influence of others such as peers and the school increases in the children (Olson & Defrain, 2001). Jaja's interaction with Aunty Ifeoma in Nsukka is therefore comparable to the emasculation of family control in the agrarian father by forces of urbanization. By being assertive and demanding his own space, Jaja demonstrates that he has come of age

and will not yield to his father's whimsical dictates. This happens because of the referent social power exercised over him by Ifeoma.

Kata, just like Eugene, has used patriarchy to intimidate the women in his family. He plans to inherit his brother's widow despite the fact that his brother had died from AIDS. The fact that Monika's husband died from AIDS could also mean that he transmitted the virus to Monika, who would in turn pass it on to Kata and then Kata to Julia.

It is to be noted that although Kata knows about the existence of AIDS, he nevertheless plans to take the risk of inheriting a woman whose husband died from AIDS. This is because the perceptions, interpretations, assessment, management and reduction of sexual risks by individuals hinges on the socio-cultural, economic and political environments in which people live in. "Individuals cannot therefore be seen to be free agents when making decisions about risk reduction in sexual matters" ( Muriungi, 2005:110). In Kata's society, the fact that he is a respected individual in the society he lives in, who is expected to inherit his sister-in-law after the death of her husband, becomes a stronger agent than his fear of contracting AIDS and so increases his chances of indulging in risky sexual behaviour. Women are generally more cautious in entering sexual unions but men's quest to display their sexual prowess sometimes makes them careless. As far as sexual behaviour is concerned, men in many societies can be proud of having multiple partners- it shows their sexual prowess. STIs can be viewed as acceptable "battle scars" showing that a man has succeeded in "getting his way" with a woman (Jackson, 2002:88).

Janet therefore takes Julia, her sister, and Kata's first wife aside and talks at length to her about the importance of protecting herself from AIDS if her husband goes ahead and marries his dead brother's wife. It is instructive that Janet uses her influence over Julia such that Julia, despite at first facing a monumental task of trying to convince Kata to use condoms, finally succeeds. This is after she shows him a book full of pictures of diseased body organs, occasioned by different sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS included (362-365). This becomes a case of Janet using referent social power to change both Julia and Kata's perceptions. Kata can be said to be an example of a "real man" in an African milieu. Mirungu (2005:107) writes about the notion of a "real man" as found in Crossroads. She defines a "real man" as being the one who has conformed to certain types of behaviour associated with masculinity such as sexual prowess. Such a man would therefore view something that interferes with his virility as an ideological risk. Kata is therefore such a man; he is averse to using condoms especially with his wife. Wilton cited in Mirungu (2005:115) writes that a "real man" who uses a condom while having sex risks emasculating himself because a condom is feminizing. On the contrary, by having sex without a condom, a "real man" feels that he is taking responsibility for his safety and that of the woman, without the aid of an external artifact. Since the condom prevents penis-vagina contact, the man sees it as a form of dismemberment while ejaculation into the condom is viewed as a waste of male virility as well as an interference with a man's innate need to subjugate a woman by using her body to propagate his genes.

Julia finally tests HIV negative and vows that she would not be sleeping with any man again. She states that as of that day, she is "cured of men" (391). Her resolve to protect

her life is so strong that having given Kata ten years of her life, she is even ready to divorce him if he does not change his ways. Julia's strength has been brought about by Janet's advice and encouragement to her.

Jaja's bravery resonates with that of Julia in *The Last Plague*. Having unbelievably tested H.I.V. negative, Julia decides to take the reins of her own life. She refuses to let Kata dictate to her if she will live or die. Studies reveal that after marriage, a woman can exercise referent social power over her husband in a manner that an employee, a slave or other social subordinates cannot do with their masters. She can appeal to her husband's affection for her, and she, in turn can use that affection in extracting concessions that a slave or an employee cannot (Degler, 1980). This is why Julia's decision to leave Kata if he does not change his sexual behaviour is an affirmation that with her, Janet has successfully challenged the patriarchal society's habit where it is a man who initiates a relationship and also a divorce in case he is not satisfied with the marriage (391).

We advance in this study that Beatrice, just like her son, is finally able to stand to Eugene's totalitarianism. She does this by putting an insidious substance in Eugene's tea until he finally wastes away and dies. She is also able to win the children to her side, thereby marooning Eugene from his children. Jaja even decides to pay for his mother's homicide by accepting to be imprisoned in her place. This happens after an autopsy is carried out on Eugene's body and the verdict returned that he had been poisoned. The police officers who call on Beatrice's home find Jaja ready. The narrator says that:

The policemen came a few hours later. They said they wanted to ask some questions. Somebody at St. Agnes Hospital had contacted them, and they had a copy of the autopsy report with them. Jaja did not wait for the questions; he told them he had

used rat poison, that he put it in Papa's tea. They allowed him to change his shirt before they took him away (291).

The last statement in the above quote, reminiscent of Achebe's reference to how Unoka took his flute with him as he was escorted to his death in *Things Fall Apart* signals the end of Jaja's life as a free person. It is noteworthy that by accepting his mother's crime, Jaja re-lives and relieves the pain that he feels his mother and sister have gone through as he looked on. Kamen (2007) writes that children who have undergone traumatic family experiences may suffer a feeling of guilt due to the fact that they were unable to prevent an injury or loss of life of a loved one. They may also have revenge fantasies. From the brittle boy who had lived under the colossus of Eugene, a hardened man is carved out of Jaja in prison. Beatrice and Jaja lose their timidity to become as emotionally stoical as Ifeoma, which indicates the latter's referent social power exercise over the former two. Jaja awaits his eventual release, courtesy of a presidential amnesty. There is a promise of a better future for the family, with the despotic Kevin laid off and an effeminate driver, Celestine, joining the family fold.

### **3.5 Of Mentors and Acolytes**

Under the tutelage of Broker, Big Youth comes to learn many skills in much the same way that Kambili and Jaja learn in Ifeoma's house. While Kambili's learning has got to do with traditional roles of girls in the family, Big Youth learns about the gender roles associated with boys. He is made to be part of the team that is building the condom shop in Crossroads. The narrator gives us a peek on Big Youth's contribution in the building of the condom shop:

Frank and Big Youth did most of the building, with old materials and only the bare minimum of tools. They knocked the old

animal clinic back to shape, with old timber and tin drums and iron sheets, and anything they could lay their hands on (256).

Big Youth's involvement in the building of the condom shop is a direct consequence of Broker's referent social power over him. The young man's character development has been used by Mwangi to parallel the development of the campaign against AIDS in Crossroads. The project had been the brain child of Janet, then Broker joined it. After Kata's henchmen destroy Frank's animal clinic, Frank is influenced by Janet into joining her in the fight against the disease. When it comes to the building of the condom shop, it is evident that Broker has fostered Big Youth's sense of responsibility. As a young man who will take the fight against AIDS forward into the next generation, Big Youth has proven his worth. We notice, in this excerpt, that he is even the one who comes up with the shop's name after some initial spats:

Big Youth did not like the name suggested by Janet, and was glad when he counted up all the letters in the name and found them too many to fit in the name board.

"Too long," he announced triumphantly. "Boss?"

They all turned to Janet.

"Must we name it anything?" she asked them.

"Yes," the men said in unison.

"Alright then," she said, to placate them. "You name it."

Big Youth at once suggested that they name it the *Aids Awareness and Birth Control Center*. Again too long for the name board.

"What about *The Condom Center*?" Broker suggested wearily.

"No," Janet said, straight away.

"*The Condom Shop*?" Big youth asked hopefully.

"Brilliant," said Broker, eager to be rid of that problem. "It's simple and to the point. Perfect. Write it"(257).

If Broker's role in Big Youth's life is to be taken to be that of the father that Big Youth does not have, then it becomes increasingly clear that when it comes to acquisition of gender identity, Broker is a positive influence on Big Youth. This agrees with Wood (1999) who points out that parents influence their children's gender identity by frequently

reinforcing the unconscious bases of gender identities. A punishment and reward pattern leads to children learning the behaviours to model and those to discard. We advance that by the fact that Big Youth has been the one who has given the shop its name then he has matriculated into leadership through Broker's guidance and is therefore in a position to influence the change of behaviour in other young people in Crossroads so that the spread of AIDS can be stemmed.

*Purple Hibiscus* offers a running commentary on the insidiousness of the patronizing nature of the Catholic clergy on their subjects. Adichie points out why the master-servant narrative that regulates the interaction of the priests and the worshippers in Enugu's St. Agnes church is a source of negative referent power that makes Father Benedict unappealing to Kambili. While in Enugu, it is Eugene and his family who call on Father Benedict, a practice that is well engraved into Kambili and Jaja's schedules. This requirement is burdening to Kambili and Beatrice and at one time, Beatrice's inability to honour this ritual earns her a beating from Eugene. In a prayer, Eugene refers to Beatrice's attempt to stay away from Father Benedict's house as being selfish and as indicative of her aversion to visiting God's servant after mass whereas the truth is that she was suffering from nausea due to her pregnancy (32). In Nsukka, it is Father Amadi who goes to visit Ifeoma. As Kambili notes, Amadi makes everybody around him at ease by effortlessly switching from one topic to another, depending on who he is addressing. Commenting on this aptitude by Father Amadi to gracefully change from one topic to another, Kambili says that:

He was at home in Auntie Ifeoma's house; he knew which chair had a protruding nail and could pull a thread off your clothes. "I thought I knocked that nail in," he said, then talked about

football with Obiora, the journalist the government had just arrested with Amaka, the Catholic women's organization with Auntie Ifeoma and the neighbourhood video game with Chima (135).

Here, we observe Amadi display an ability to make himself and everybody around him comfortable which is a cultural expectation in a man that has not been interfered with by the fact that he is a priest. The narrator notes that her cousins' attention and interest are fully held by Father Amadi. His self-effacing method of interacting with his flock calls attention to what the role of a Catholic priest really is. Is a priest a social worker whose role is just to say prayers, such as father Benedict 'does? Catholicism responds that the priest is distinct from the lay man in that he is both an icon and a leader of the community. As a leader, his celibate nature affords him an opportunity to serve his flock unhindered by other commitments and demand on his time. As an icon, "he stands in the place of Jesus during the mass and consecration when he turns the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ" (Stanford, 2008:87). We argue for the fact that Father Benedict is merely iconic while Amadi has laid more emphasis on his leadership role. The fact that he can sample different topics, without having to dwell on religious matters all the time increases his referent social power and makes him to outdo Father Benedict and Eugene in moulding the children' personality. It frees their own imagination, which had hitherto been dulled by their father's colouring of their spaces with too much religiosity and coercion.

It is also evident that as a young lady, Kambili has not yet known any man who has openly admired her. The image of her violent father has clouded her view of herself. She does not seem appreciative of her physical endowments as a young lady, who should command admiration from men. Papa Eugene has tried to plant the " the Victorian notion

of the passionlessness of women” (Hutter, 1998:220) in Kambili but it is Father Amadi who makes her conscious of her own value as a young woman by pointing out those aspects in her that define her femininity. For Eugene, a biddable child is one who keeps quiet especially in the presence of adults. This contrasts with Father Amadi whose critical eye unearths a reality about Kambili that she has not as yet become aware of as she notes:

We put our rosaries away and sat in the living room eating corn and *ube* and watching Newline on television. I looked up to find Father Amadi’s eyes on me and suddenly I could not lick the *ube* flesh from the seed. I could not move my tongue, could not swallow. I was too aware of his eyes, too aware that he was looking at me, watching me. “I haven’t seen you laugh or smile today, Kambili,” he said finally (139).

In this instance, Father Amadi enquiringly looks at Kambili, not in the usual reproachful way that she is used with her father but with altruistic understanding. Amadi brings to Kambili’s attention the fact that she is melancholic. His observation runs counter to Eugene’s expectations that children should not be loud. She is henceforth aware that it is not a natural thing for a girl of her age to be so inhibited, quiet and by herself most of the time. Amadi therefore cancels out Eugene’s indoctrination of Kambili; that for her to be a respectable girl, then she must not laugh loudly or carelessly display her emotions. She realizes that it is a natural thing for her to voice her ideas instead of being a passive recipient of other people’s ideas as her father has trained her.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that gender and cultural expectations in the society give rise to both desirable and undesirable realities. Positive referent social power has been seen to be exercised by those characters who possess positive attributes that the society cherishes. Such characters are also able to surmount challenges that are gender

based or are defined by the culture. Negative referent social power is exercised if the target dislikes the agent such that the target seeks to be unlike the agent.

We have noted that referent social power is the kind of power that is derived out of the fact that one character consciously or unconsciously seeks to identify with another. As Secord & Backman (1974:249) write, “the party under the spell of referent power models his or her behaviour on the influencing agent. Initially, the behaviours that that the target adopts as a result of the influencer’s power over him or her depend on the relationship between the two parties but with time, some of the behaviours displayed by the target become independent of the relationship between the influencer and the target”. It is this kind of power that does not require surveillance by the influencing agent that has made characters in this chapter wrench power from, and even exercise it over those who had coercive social power in chapter two.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, it is Father Amadi, Ifeoma and Amaka who are the main characters who have exercised positive referent social power over Beatrice and her children. Papa Achike has been seen to exercise negative referent social power over his children. The values that he cherishes have driven his children into striving to be unlike him. The reference in Father Amadi’s power is borne of the fact that he does not use his status as a priest to pontificate. Instead, he adopts an unassuming way of relating with his faithful. This makes him more appealing to Jaja and Kambili as compared to their father or Father Benedict. As for Ifeoma and her children, their social power reference springs from the fact they are able to inculcate gender roles and develop gender identity in Beatrice and her children. These are the gender roles that Eugene, through use of religion had failed to

inculcate in his children. Papa Eugene had also destroyed aspects of gender identity in Beatrice and the children by trying to make them mere respondents to his whims.

In *The Last Plague*, the coercive social power that had been vested in Pastor Batolomeo, Musa and Grandmother in chapter two is eroded by referent social power now with Janet, Broker, Frank and to some extent Big Youth. Janet displays a mixture of both conforming and contravening gender roles expectations, depending on what she wishes to achieve at any one given moment. In order to get people like head Faru and chief Chupa to support her FLEP in Crossroads, she assents to playing traditional gender roles such as surrendering the credit of the success of FLEP in Crossroads to the men, yet she is the deserving party. At other times, she challenges the masculinity with which Crossroads' men subjugate the women in the village. An example of this is in her ability to influence Julia into talking her husband Kata into using condoms. In the next chapter, we look at how some new characters wrench power from and exercise it over those characters who had social power in chapters two and three. They achieve this feat by exploiting informational social power.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Informational Social Power: A Tale Bigger Than the Tale Teller

### 4.0 General Introduction

Informational social power stems from the contents of what one character tells another and the extent to which the first character's words succeed in changing the second character (French & Raven cited in Lamanna & Riedmann, 1985). Like referent social power, Informational social power is also socially independent. For an influencee to be under its spell, the agent need not apply surveillance. Raven and Rubin (1976) write that informational social power results to changes in the influencee that cannot be reversed even if the agent leaves, loses credibility or becomes unlikable by the target.

In this chapter, we have identified the context under which informational social power is acquired and exercised as being in a traditional African lifestyle. We have then analogized and contrasted this lifestyle with aspects of modernity as found in Papa Achike's household. A traditional lifestyle is seen as accommodative as contrasted to Papa Achike's coercive Catholicism, Pastor Batolomeo's particularistic Christianity or Maalim Juma Maalim's restrictive Islam. In this chapter, we also contrast those aspects of African traditions that are cherishable with those that contribute to an exercise of negative referent power as discussed in chapter three.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the characters who use informational social power are Ifeoma, Amaka, Papa-Nnukwu and the Abba *umunna* wives. Their informational social power exercise is directed towards Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili and challenges the coercive social power exercised over the trio by Papa Eugene and Father Benedict. One notes that Aunty Ifeoma and Amaka have reappeared in this chapter, yet they were also in chapter three. A

commentary on this phenomenon where a character can be said to “disempower his old self through empowering his new self” is made at the conclusion of this chapter. In *The Last Plague*, the main characters who exercise informational social power are Chief Chupa, Kata Kataa, Janet’s grandmother and Janet herself. Like Ifeoma and Amaka mentioned above, Grandmother and Janet bestraddle two areas of social power exercise viz. using coercion and information for Grandmother and reference and information for Janet. In both texts, we have also taken the simple, unpretentious and idyllic traditional African milieus as sources of informational social power.

We avow that tradition is used to persuade Kambili and Jaja into seeing the folly with the Eurocentric way of life dictated upon them by their father. We argue that Catholicism is a metropolitan religion that has been used to undermine Kambili and Jaja’s lives. We posit that Eugene’s attempt to dissociate his family from forces of tradition have been countered by Ifeoma and Papa-Nnukwu’s pastoral lifestyles in which Jaja and Kambili find more spiritual nourishment in than they do with the mechanical incantations associated with Catholic prayer rituals.

Enugu is the seat of Catholicism, modernity and their attendant limitations on Kambili and Jaja. Abba is on the other hand associated with traditionalism. It is then in Nsukka that an acceptable compromise between modernity and traditionalism is struck. Traditional African values that are deficient in Enugu are to be found in Abba while with Nsukka, Adichie shows how religious extremism can be mitigated with the affability of traditions. We read Nsukka as typifying a realistic African milieu, complete with modern trends but also replete with the aesthetics of African culture that rival modernity. Economic problems faced by Ifeoma, while not really constituting a state of squalor, are

nevertheless important in honing Kambili and Jaja's skills at survival. The undercurrent that runs through Nsukka is that though postcolonial Africa has problems of cultural hybridism, an acceptable settlement can still be reached between modernity and/or religion and traditions.

In Abba, the individualism and self-centeredness associated with urban life in Enugu is affronted by the *umunna* concept where clan members come together to collectively celebrate the Christmas festivities. *Umunna* is a way in which members of a clan or village cohere so that they can achieve *esprit de corps*. In his studies on Igbo culture and beliefs, Obiego (1984:43) explains that:

At the higher level than the compound units, we have the *umunna* units. "Umunna" is a fluid term in Igbo language. Its narrowest referent is the children of the same father but of a different mother i.e., in contradiction to *umunne* (Children of the same father and mother or of the same mother but not of the same father). Its widest referent is the group of localized patrilineal members, real or putative, whom one cannot marry... Sometimes it is very loosely applied to members of a village or village-group in contradiction to all other like villages or village groups.

In this study, we conclude that Adichie has used the word "umunna" in the second sense, that of village members who regard themselves as distinct from other villages. These are the people who congregate in Papa Eugene's Abba residence. Their communality and commonality contrasts with the individualism of Catholicism, the latter which purports to bind members of Eugene's family together while in reality it alienates them. Traditionalism is therefore cast as a factor that joins the inhabitants of Abba together. In Enugu, worshippers at St. Agnes congregate but save for the few hours that they are in church, the rest of the time they retreat to their homes to lead a secluded lifestyle. In Eugene's Enugu home, religious rituals perfected in church are replayed in a totalitarian

manner that stifles the personal growth of Beatrice and her children. The Abba collectivity therefore supersedes the Enugu particularism.

#### 4.1 Confronting the Impersonality of Christianity

In Enugu, Sisi is charged with the duties of making food for the family. She is a domestic servant of a low social class. Papa Eugene, despite his Catholicism, has failed to elevate her to an echelon where she can fully enjoy her liberty as a human being. Adichie has chastised the metropolitan religion that stratifies the society into those who are rich and deserving of adoration and the poor, who are relegated into the servant status. Rampant materialism associated with Christianity is intimated, a covetous attitude that is veiled as a form of generosity. The well-to-do feign benevolence towards the needy while secretly relishing their prosperity and associating it with “blessings”. Papa Eugene for instance uses a master-servant narrative in an ironical manner when he eulogizes his poor past as a priest’s houseboy. He draws on his needy past to push his children towards the pursuit of richness and fame, rather than personal satisfaction. While justifying avarice to his children, he asks them:

“Why do you think I work so hard to give you and Jaja the best? You have to do something with all these privileges. *Because God has given you much, he expects much from you* (My emphasis). He expects perfection. I didn’t have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone (*sic*). I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was a houseboy for the parish priest for two years. Yes, a houseboy. Nobody dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school. I was a gardener for the priests while I attended St. Gregory’s Secondary School” (47).

This “Okonkwoan” philosophy where a man works hard so as to exorcise the ghost of his father’s failure is what Papa Eugene relies on in pressing his children on towards

cupidity. He takes religion to be a means through which one ascends to a higher station in life. He therefore imbues his children with rapaciousness that is veiled as an injunction for them to attain academic excellence in school while in reality his wish is to forget about his childhood squalor. This contributes to an exercise of adverse informational social power on the children because they henceforth strive to be unlike him.

We contrast the above attitude with what happens in Abba. Beatrice and Sisi are relieved from the duty of cooking as the wives of the *umunna* take over from them. They do this ostensibly to allow Beatrice to rest after the stress of the city. Helping Beatrice and Sisi in the performance of culinary chores by the wives of the *umunna* is an exercise of informational social power that repudiates the expectation of Eugene's class that menial work is reserved for lowly domestic workers such as Sisi. Their communal cooking symbolically pulls down the walls of socio-economic classism with which Eugene has barricaded his family. Traditions are associated with pecuniary diffidence while Christianity surreptitiously glorifies acquisitiveness. While explaining why indigenous Africans chose to adopt western religions at the expense of their own traditional beliefs, Beier (1975:12) notes that the so called universal religions were thought to be "respectable" and compatible with the materialistic ways that had been adopted from the west. We see the *umunna* concept as being an onslaught to this individualism, materialism and classism that is inherent in western religions.

For their work, the *umunna* wives reward themselves with the leftover food and drinks. It is noteworthy that though Eugene does not mind feeding these people at this festive period, his is more of a patronizing attitude than a genuine need to share. His "generosity" can therefore still be read as an aspect of materialism because by allowing

the poor people of Abba to eat and drink in his house, he seeks to elevate himself into praiseworthiness. We draw this conclusion because of the fact that Eugene generally displays aversion towards traditional practices, yet he has taken the title of *omerola*, which means the one who does for the community. The title *omerola* falls under the social names in the classification of names and titles among the Igbo (Obiego, 1984).

We argue that Eugene's generosity is more of patronage than magnanimity because of his adamant insistence that he cannot host a traditionalist in his house and yet Papa-Nnukwu has no aversion towards hosting Eugene's Christian grandchildren. Eugene therefore exercises duplicity when it comes to generosity, a fact that exposes the divisive nature of the brand of Christianity that he professes. The homeliness of Papa-Nnukwu's reception of his grandchildren is foregrounded more in the children's minds when they go back to their father's house and witness the maltreatment of Anikwenwa by their father. Anikwenwa, an old man, who subscribes to traditionalism, has come to visit with other people in Eugene's Abba residence but he is ejected by Eugene. The following exchange between the two men is to Kambili and Jaja a duel between Catholicism and African traditions:

"What is Anikwenwa doing in my house? What is a worshipper of idols doing in my house? Leave my house!

"Do you know that I am in your father's age group, gbo?" the man asked. The finger he waved in the air was meant for Papa's face, but it only hovered around his chest. "Do you know that I sucked my mother's breast when your father sucked his mother's?"

"Leave my house!" Papa pointed at the gate.

Two men slowly ushered Anikwenwa out of the compound. He did not resist; he was too old to, anyway. But he kept looking back and throwing words at papa. "*Ifukwa gi!* You are like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave!"(70)

We refer to this exchange as a duel because as Eugene exercises coercive social power by ejecting Anikwenwa from his house, the latter appeals to the reverence and sanctity that African traditions bestow on senior citizens to show Eugene the imprudence of what he does. The curse Anikwenwa hurls at Eugene as he hobbles away is a counterpoint to Eugene's prayer for conversion of Papa-Nnukwu from what he considers to be a heathen lifestyle. As a practicing traditionalist, Anikwenwa expects that his curse will lead to Papa Eugene's punishment. Among traditional Africans, there is a belief that a person is punished for the wrongs he does, not in his next life but in his present one. For that reason, "misfortunes encountered by an individual are taken to be an indication that such a person has broken some moral or ritual conduct against God, the spirits, the elders or other members of the society" (Mbiti, 1969:210). In likening Papa-Nnukwu to Anikwenwa, Kambili sees the injustice and sanctimony with which her father deals with traditionalists. Anikwenwa's exchange with Papa Achike is therefore an aspect of informational social power exercise over Kambili.

Papa-Nnukwu's effect on Kambili and Jaja is to make them sharply aware of how their father's relationship with them is impersonal and lacking in empathy. Eugene refers to Papa-Nnukwu as a heathen but Kambili and Jaja sympathize with their grandfather's abject state of squalor. The traditional lifestyle that he leads appeals to the children's imagination. This is so because they have become long accustomed to the ostentatious lifestyle in Enugu that lacks humaneness. The quaint nature of Papa-Nnukwu's dwelling has an emotional appeal that is directed towards the children's sensitive personalities that Eugene has hitherto ignored as they grew up. The following description of Papa-Nnukwu's homestead by Kambili shows her emotional connection with its simplicity:

The compound was barely a quarter of the size of our backyard in Enugu. Two goats and a few chickens sauntered around, nibbling and pecking at drying stems of grass. The house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and Auntie Ifeoma growing up here. It looked just like the pictures of houses I used to draw in kindergarten: a square house with a square door at the center and two square windows on each side (63).

This description that makes reference to childhood drawings by Kambili shows that the homestead calls to mind the beauty of her childhood experiences. It can be argued that in as much as traditional homesteads are not a match to the modern bungalows and mansions as found in Enugu in terms of grandiose architecture, their simplicity and resonance with nature is an aspect of beauty. Mbiti (1969:108) suggests that traditional homesteads and such beauty is a sign of nature's rhythm, a universe in miniature and a symbol of security comparable to "a vast vessel into which men, animals and crops enter and are kept secure from outside dangers". We notice that the children's affluent background has not made them proud. The reality of their father's restrictions on them has annulled what would otherwise be an arrogant predisposition.

The *mmuo* festival, an element of Igbo culture where people gather in the village square to watch masquerades features in *Purple Hibiscus*. This festival that is also to be found as an *egwugwu* gathering in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a display of a society's heroes and ancestors, who dress in masks and wield weapons. It is a feature of African traditions that Kambili and Jaja are introduced to by Papa-Nnukwu. He invites them to compare Catholic priests with traditional leaders and heroes and challenges them to make a deduction as to which between the two has a more profound effect on their lives. We conclude that with traditions, the children are able to see that worship is done for worship's sake while with Catholicism the worship procedure is a means through which

the powerful like Eugene seek to manipulate the less powerful into submission. In this respect, Papa-Nnukwu, exercises informational social power over his grandchildren.

#### 4.2 Sharing and Pastoral Idyll

As stated earlier, the rampant materialism with which Eugene packages Catholicism to Kambili and Jaja finds its answer in the traditional communal spirit of Abba. The practice of visiting each other in Abba to share meals is taken as the norm during the festive Christmas period. The free atmosphere with which food is shared is a welcome change from the Enugu habit of sitting at the dinner table with forks and spoons. It is our contention that the people of Abba have helped in changing Jaja and Kambili so that they do not follow their father's materialistic approach to human interaction.

In *The Last Plague*, Musa's tea house, prior to the devastation of Crossroads by AIDS, had served a similar purpose; that of bringing people together to celebrate their lives and well being. The tea house stirs feelings of nostalgia in Frank as he reminisces over how men used to pass time there. These memories come back to him after he comes back to Crossroads after years of absence from his home village. The following narrator's words show the fondness with which Frank remembers the tea house:

The tea house was exactly as he remembered it; the interior was taken up by the long tables and the rough benches, but the glass counter that once displayed *mandazi* and homemade cakes was now empty and covered with dust. And the place was deserted. In the old days, the tea house had throbbled with life, men relaxing after a hard day's work, playing draughts, laughing and telling long tales that no one believed. Frank remembered killing many an idle afternoon here, playing with the old men, arguing politics and drinking buckets of Musa's unpredictable tea (24).

These social activities carried out by men at Musa's tea house are an aspect of traditional rural settings and contribute to an exercise of informational social power by the villagers

on Frank. Fratkin, Galvin & Roth (1994) note that in a traditional African community, such settings provide an atmosphere for political discussions, performance of rituals, rest and leisure activities such as socializing, playing games, singing and dancing. It is worthy of comment that Frank has been away from Crossroads but has come back with the erroneous belief that he is H.I.V. infected. The urban atmosphere that he has left behind is painted as unfulfilling and is contrasted with his pleasant memories of Crossroads and Musa's tea house. Musa and his tea house are therefore aspects of African traditions that attract Frank back to Crossroads after having sojourned in urban areas for years.

Memories of carefree, laughter filled spaces bond Uncle Mark and Captain Speed. The latter is set to retire as the driver of *The Far Traveler*. *The Far Traveler* is the name given to a bus that traverses Crossroads once per week. For Uncle Mark, the bus represents his only contact with the outside world of civilization and modernity. The two travel veterans reminisce over the different areas that they have visited and like Kambili and Jaja, it is the music-filled, pastoral areas where people are carefree and unrestricted that they found most enjoyable. We advance that Uncle Mark, Jaja and Kambili have found it necessary to at one time in their lives move out of the mundane environments where the rigours of their daily existence have sullied the joys that life has to offer in unaffected social milieus. Uncle Mark talks to Captain Speed about this:

"They were places I felt I had to travel to," he (Uncle Mark) said to the Captain. Something within me said that I had to go there; in order to fulfill my mission in life, whatever that was."...

"*Za-n-zi-ba-ri*," he said, rolling the "r" the way he had heard the natives of the islands do it.

The very name stirred his old loins, charged his body with the forgotten energies of youth. It conjured up images of bewitchingly attractive women, nubile beauties, with long, black hair and skin the colour of dry cocoa beans, dancing under the

coconut trees in the moonlight while the stars flared with jealousy.

*“Za-n-zi-ba-ri!”* he could almost smell the cloves drying in the blinding, white sunlight. *“Za-n-zi-ba-ri!”* (412-413)

Here, Mark and Captain Speed’s nostalgia about the traditional places they had visited many years ago affirms studies done on how people compare the modern trends of life with the traditional ones. Some people for instance feel that they would like to revert to the “good old days”, thereby showing preference to traditional lifestyles as opposed to modern living trends (Hugick, 10 cited in Benokraitis, 2005:128). The traditional and quaint atmosphere that Zanzibar offered remains etched in Uncle Mark’s memory and serves to show the informational social power that inhabitants of traditional environments have over him. As the two men reminisce over their exploits there, they burst into pearls of laughter, much in the same way that Aunt Ifeoma makes laughter to be part of her mien.

This spirit of good will that pervades social interaction in traditional locales is further reinforced by idyllic sights and sounds. Kambili, while in Abba, states that she is woken up by the rustling of coconut fronds and thereafter hears goats bleating and cocks crowing. People are also heard yelling greetings across the mud compound walls. It is noteworthy that in Enugu, Eugene confines the children within their secluded residence where they are out of touch with these aspects of nature. We deconstruct Eugene’s belief that a life lived as per the dictates of Christianity and supported with a lavish lifestyle is more fulfilling than one in a traditional setting where duties and obligations are not scheduled into the children’s routine.

Papa Eugene's pharisaic interaction with his children which makes him to keep them circumscribed is countered by Papa-Nnukwu's yearly invitation of his grandchildren to visit him. Aunty Ifeoma's children have constantly gone to visit Papa-Nnukwu but Kambili and Jaja have not been doing so, thereby missing out on a chance to share the joys of kinship with their cousins. Papa-Nnukwu voices his disapproval about Kambili and Jaja's lack of acquaintance with their relatives, stating that it is not right that they do not know their cousins well (65).

We contend that Kambili and Jaja have been living eremitic lives, marooned within the high walls of their residence and their puritanical schools. Eugene has refused to let his children share games and time with their relatives. Papa-Nnukwu, relying on the traditional expectations that extended family members should congregate every so often to interact, plants the germ of human affection in Jaja and Kambili. He invites them to break out of the shell of an iconoclastic Christian upbringing and instead mingle with their kith and kin in celebration of the gift of relatives. This sentiment resonates with Mbiti (1969:108), who asks:

What then is the individual and where is his place in the community? In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply a part of the whole.

Mbiti affirms that an individual in a society is deficient if he does not exist in mutuality with other society members. Papa-Nnukwu, in this case, exercises informational social power over Kambili and Jaja by convincing them that contrary to what their father has tended to encourage them, to wit, financial autonomy is all that a person needs in order to

be satisfied and happy, closeness to extended family members is equally, if not more important.

Ifeoma, like Papa-Nnukwu, also assists in opening Kambili and Jaja up to the world of sharing the gift of life with the extended family unit. We argue that Eugene has laid too much emphasis on the institution of the nuclear family. To Eugene, a nuclear family that is steeped in Christianity is a good enough environment for bringing up children. Ifeoma on the other hand influences Jaja and Kambili into appreciating the different elements that bind together the extended family unit. She refers to Beatrice fondly, using a traditional title, so that she can exhibit how important Beatrice is to her as an extended family member. From the following words by the narrator, it is clear that traditional references between extended family members are not something that she is unfamiliar with:

“*Nwunye m,*” Aunty Ifeoma called, and Mama turned back. The first time I heard Aunty Ifeoma call Mama ‘*nwunye m,*’ years ago, I was aghast that a woman called another woman “my wife” When, I, asked, Papa said it was the remnants of ungodly traditions, the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife, and later Mama whispered, although we were alone in the room, “I am her wife, too, because I am your father’s wife. It shows that she accepts me” (73).

This fond reference of sisters-in-law as “my wife” is in concordance with findings on the significance of names among the Igbo. Anzonia & Azorji cited in Obiego (1984) state that among the Igbo, people’s names are not mere tags for distinguishing one person from another. Instead, they are expressions of the nature and significance of that which they represent and stand for. Each name therefore has a character and significance of its own. They go on to classify names into natural, historical, social and proverbial categories. *Nwunye m* would fall under the proverbial names category, a category of names that are a mark of wisdom and are used to justify a position or show how things should be. In the

case of Ifeoma and Beatrice, the position justified by reference of the sisters-in-law as *nwunye m* is the affinity and deference that bond them together. Adichie demonstrates that it behooves the extended family members to treat each other with respect and even use endearing words to achieve that end. This sharing of affectionate references by family members contrasts with the Enugu life where Eugene directs endearments towards God with little regard to how fellow human beings such as his family members relate to him.

The hills, River Soi and the flora that Frank and Broker take Janet's children to go and admire are suggestive of the rural beauty that was characteristic of Crossroads before it was garbled by AIDS. The beauty of nature stands in sharp contrast with the indifference of the urban existence that Broker and Frank have run away from. This traditional atmosphere is presented by Mwangi as being symbolic of life and continuity, unlike the urban lifestyle that is associated with suffering and infamy. Here, Broker is seen telling Frank about the significance of some of the landmarks they are witnessing:

“And that stump over there,” Broker told him. “That was once a mighty ebony tree, hundreds of years old.”

The largest tree in all the land; old and solid and meaningful, and no one had thought that it could so easily be destroyed. In its cool shade the eldest of Janet's boy had been conceived and over there...(377-378).

The environmental degradation that Broker points out to Frank symbolically represents the havoc that is being wrought in Crossroads by AIDS. Environmental conservation has been seen to be a concern of traditional African societies. Daneel (2001) for example demonstrates how the Shona traditionalists in the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe fight “the war of trees” against ecological degradation. They have formed a group known as Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC) and work with Zimbabwean Institute for Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCO)

as well as Association of African Earth keeping Churches (AAEC) in planting of trees in *mafukidzanyika* (literary “earth clothing”) ceremonies. This kind of concern with the general environmental and social conditions of a habitat occupies Broker’s mind. In Crossroads, the rebuilding of the social institutions that are being destroyed by the AIDS scourge must go hand in hand with the restoration of the environment. Mwangi compares Broker’s environmental concerns with his reconnection with his children. By taking his children to the beautiful sites that he visited with their mother a long time ago, Broker is able to draw them closer to him, an exercise of informational social power, so that they can recognize him as a parent, just as they do with Janet.

#### **4.3 Sanctifying Traditions**

After Kambili and Jaja interact with Papa-Nnukwu, they are touched by the genuine human warmth displayed towards them; for once, they are able to relate with a person who does not put up fronts as does their father. Kambili goes on to state that she examines Papa-Nnukwu’s eyes for signs of Godlessness but she does not see any. She however says that the signs had to be somewhere in him. This latter statement is based on what her father has continually told her about Papa-Nnukwu, but not based on her own evaluation.

The narrator is impressed and awed by her encounter with Papa-Nnukwu. The picture painted by her father about a Godless man does not seem to get purchase with Kambili. We note that against the wishes and expectations of Eugene, she carries a painting of Papa-Nnukwu, now diseased, back to Enugu as a memento. In this respect, Papa-Nnukwu succeeds in making Kambili commit what to Eugene is a serious religious abomination. In this instance, we encounter Papa Eugene privileging Catholicism over traditionalism.

Comparisons done on Christianity and traditionalism point to the fact that Catholicism cannot be more privileged than traditionalism as an indicator of man's closeness to divinity. Studies indicate that:

If the picture of God revealed to us by Jesus Christ is true, as one who is directly searching for man, not as a subject for condemnation or disdain but as the child of God, then the whole of mankind's religion is God's movement towards and his quest for man. "Christianity", like any other religion must be concerned with divine facts or acts which consist in changes that affect mankind and those are changes brought about solely by the power of God. These acts of God would have as their object the uplifting of man (Obiego, 1984:217).

Obiego's understanding of the significance of Christianity and tradition is that both of them are concerned with activities that are for the benefit of humanity. Papa Eugene however tries to present Catholicism as being a movement towards God and traditionalism as a movement away from God. What Eugene refers to as a heathen way of life is witnessed firsthand by Kambili in *Nsukka*. She wakes up one morning to go and witness her grandfather offering his traditional prayers. He addresses the gods, as he sits astride a low stool. In the words of his prayers, Kambili does not discern any worship directed to idols but instead listens as her grandfather directs his prayers to *Chineke*, uttering the following words that are not in any way interpretable as satanic:

"*Chineke!* I thank you for this new morning! I thank you for the sun that rises."...

"*Chineke!* I have killed no one, I have taken no one's land, I have not committed adultery."...

"*Chineke!* Bless me. Let me find enough to fill my stomach. Bless my daughter Ifeoma. Give her enough for her family."...

"*Chineke!* Bless my son, Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him."...

"*Chineke!* Bless the children of my children. Let your eyes follow them away from evil and towards good"...(167-168).

Reference to *Chineke* cannot be dismissed as being reference to an evil being as Eugene suggests to Kambili and Jaja. This is because:

The Igbo, like all human beings,... confronted with these questions namely, "the why and how of all things"- who made this world and all its fullness?- asserted that *Chukwu* (*Chineke*), God is the origin and ground of all that is.... *Chukwu* is called *Chineke*, i.e., "the creating chi" or (*Deus Creans*). The logical conclusion is that he must be the origin of all things (Obiego, 1984:57-8).

This means that the name that individuals attribute to the deity that they worship is merely a matter of lexicality. Similarly, the worship procedure that differs from one group to another only points to a variance in mores but not to the sacrosanctity of one worship procedure or the profanity of the other. This prayer session captivates Kambili and impresses her much more than does her father and the Catholic prayers that he emphasizes on. In contrast to her father who castigates Papa-Nnukwu in his prayers, her grandfather wishes Eugene well, showing that his traditionalism is not judgmental like her father's Catholicism. The sight of Papa-Nnukwu as he prays is hypnotizing to Kambili. In describing how her grandfather goes about his prayers, she uses words that evoke a mental picture of a beautiful spectacle, revealing the extent of informational social power exercised over her by her grandfather. The memory that the narrator carries with her about this sight cancels out whatever dogma that Eugene had planted in her about traditionalism being diabolical.

Later on, Ifeoma confirms to Kambili that Papa-Nnukwu is not a heathen but a traditionalist. Considering that Kambili, by virtue of her age and upbringing does not know the traditional practices that existed in the days of yore, Ifeoma makes a succinct

comparison between traditionalism and Catholicism, showing that each is as good as the other. The narrator says that:

Aunt Ifeoma was silent as she ladled out the thick cocoyam paste into the soup pot; then she looked up and said Papa-Nnukwu was not a heathen but a traditionalist, that sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar, that when Papa-Nnukwu did his *itu-nzu*, his declaration of innocence, in the morning, it was the same as our saying the rosary (166).

In this instance, Ifeoma adopts a middle ground in her comparison of Catholicism and traditionalism. She deconstructs Eugene's privileging of Catholicism over traditionalism.

Kambili is invited to explore aspects of traditional worship and discover that there is no element of Satanism as her father continuously hints at.

When Kambili goes back to Enugu and compares Papa-Nnukwu and aunty Ifeoma's traditionally quaint abodes with the Enugu mansion, she feels nostalgic about Abba and Nsukka. She longs for the traditional, carefree and rule-free life at Nsukka, seeing their Enugu residence as bereft of human warmth and coziness. Her thoughts about Enugu reveal that the affluence and comfort their home offers no longer gives her satisfaction like the simplicity of the traditional life she had tasted. She says:

I wanted to tell Mama that it did feel different to be back, that our living room had too much empty space, too much wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our furniture was lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted skin in the harmattan, the leather sofa's greeting was a clammy coldness...(192).

We develop the argumentum that Eugene's Enugu home symbolizes a substitution of the socialization function of a traditional African family with provision of impersonal material artifacts (attributable to a modern urban oriented family) to Kambili and Jaja.

Proper socialization of children is important because:

Through socialization, children acquire language, absorb the accumulated knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values of their cultures and learn social and interpersonal skills needed to function effectively in society. Some of... socialization is unconscious and may be unintentional such as teaching culturally accepted stereotypical gender traits. Much of the socialization is both conscious and deliberate, however, such as... raising children in a particular religion (Benokraitis, 2005:9).

Benokraitis accentuates the unique role played by the family in the instilling of values in children. Though provision of material comfort is important, it is the values passed on in form of counseling the stand children in good stead. Suffice it to say that Enugu is a socially bankrupt ground for propagating children's cultural values while Nsukka nurtures this important aspect of children's social development. As Kambili compares their Enugu home with Ifeoma's humble abode, full of life and laughter, it becomes evident that the traditional atmosphere at Nsukka has left an indelible mark in her mind.

In *The Last Plague*, the existence of Grandmother serves to remind the young generation about the special place occupied by the elderly in Crossroads, now that the young generation is the one affected by AIDS. Mwangi uses Grandmother to make a commentary on how the young people have adopted modernity which has led to the spread of AIDS while old people like Grandmother who have lived by the cherished traditional values are still alive. As a custodian of persevering traditional values, Grandmother epitomizes resilience in the face of the adversity that is annihilating Crossroads. The following description of her renders a picture of a person who is not easily moved to surrender:

Hanna was hardly out of the gate when Grandmother came through the small gate joining her compound to that of Janet. She walked slightly bent forward, weighed down by her great age, and the sheer fatigue of being. She laboured her way across the

yard, leaning heavily on the bamboo cane and on the hand of Jeremiah, the orphan boy she had inherited from a dying neighbour. They shuffled slowly forward, together as one, the boy on the look-out for things that might impede their progress (37).

From this description of Grandmother, we advance that while Kambili and Jaja revere the traditional life led by Papa-Nnukwu and shun their father's showy urban lifestyle, Grandmother, in her simple rural life is a foil to the lavish lifestyle Broker and his ilk have lived, which has fueled the spread of AIDS. By adhering to a traditional lifestyle, grandmother arguably leads a "pure" life since "very generally in Africa, it is thought that pollution comes from certain physiological conditions- birth and death, menstruation, and coition..." (Wilson, 1971:37). Grandmother therefore belongs to the school of thought that sees the spread of AIDS in crossroads as being a product of coital habits that are in disharmony with natural laws. Though old and weak, she exercises informational social power over Broker, by the fact that having lived as per the dictates of African traditions, she is healthy while Broker, who has adopted modern trends, is a sick man.

Papa-Nnukwu, Ifeoma, Kambili, Jaja and their cousins drive to Ezi Icheke to witness the *mmuo* festival. As they drive past Eugene's Abba home, Papa-Nnukwu invites Kambili and Jaja to compare Catholicism with African traditions and form an opinion as to which has wreaked havoc in their lives and the society at large. He pokes holes at Catholicism, lamenting on the manner in which it robbed him of his son Eugene. He compares affluence with children thus:

"This is what our people say to the High God, the *Chukwu*," Papa-Nnukwu said. "Give me both wealth and a child, but if I must choose one, give me a child because when my child grows, so will my wealth." Papa-Nnukwu stopped, turned to look back towards our house. *Nekenem*, look at me. My son owns that house that can fit every man in Aba, and yet many times I have

nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries” (83).

Papa-Nnukwu compares possession of a child who has neglected his parents to a state of childlessness. He therefore sees the missionaries as having “killed” his son Eugene. The children are therefore persuaded to see the imprudence of professing a religion that separates a father from his son. They are shown the extent to which their grandfather has suffered as a result of Eugene’s staunch Christianity. They come to the realization that despite their father’s affluence, his own father, their grandfather, does not have enough to eat, courtesy of Eugene’s obstinate practice of Catholicism. In his grandchildren’s lives, Papa-Nnukwu plays an advisory role as well as that of being a cultural norms and values transmitter as espoused by Woods cited in Benokraitis (2005).

Papa-Nnukwu portrays witticism as he reminisces over how the missionaries came to the land and started disseminating their religion. He dismisses the holy trinity, saying that the very idea of God the Father and God the Son, as espoused by Catholicism, is outrageous. Considering that Kambili and Jaja have been brought up in a strict Catholic atmosphere, this is an exceptional moment for them as they listen to Catholicism being questioned and reasons adduced as to why it is not an authentic religion. Papa-Nnukwu relates how the first missionary arrived in Abba:

“I remember the first one that came to Abba, the one they called Fada John. His face was red like palm oil; they say our type of sun does not shine in the white man’s land. He had a helper, a man from Nimo called Jude. In the afternoon, they gathered the children under the ukwa tree in the mission and taught them their religion. I did not join them, kpa, but I went sometimes to see what they were doing. One day I said to them, where is this god you worship? They said he was like *Chukwu*, that he was in the sky. I asked then, who is the person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission? They said he was the son, but the son and the father are equal. It was then that I

knew that the white man was mad. The father and the son are equal? *Ntufia!* Do you not see? That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal” (84).

The analogy of the equality of God and Jesus on the one hand and Papa-Nnukwu and Eugene on the other is a comical trivialization of Catholicism. Papa-Nnukwu seems to suggest that a religion that does not teach about respect for one’s parents must be deficient in principle. Here, we read Adichie’s disapproval of the manner in which Christianity was used to antagonize family members. We note that Christianity as practiced by Eugene lays emphasis on the salvation of an individual while relegating the entirety of a family into a position of insignificance. Arguably, the two children are provided with a peek at the impersonal side of Catholicism. By challenging the idea of God the Son and God the Father, Papa-Nnukwu opens Kambili and Jaja’s eyes to other possibilities of worship different from what Eugene has trained them to be the only acceptable ways. In this way, his informational social power exercise over the children emasculates the coercive social power that had been exercised on them by their father.

Eugene’s neglect of his father is an antithesis of Broker’s treatment of Grandmother. Eugene is well endowed and is in a position of taking Papa-Nnukwu into his own house so that Papa-Nnukwu can enjoy the lavish lifestyle in Enugu. This he does not do. On his part, Broker, though ailing takes good care of Grandmother. Realizing that as per the dictates of African traditions, old people are supposed to be accorded special care, he even buys her a new colourful dress that she dons with great pleasure (220). When we carefully look at Broker’s “love” for Grandmother, the question that comes to mind is, does his material provisions towards her point to a genuine care for her or is it a “bribe”, as it were, to marshal forces and draw her to his side in his bid to disempower Janet? The

answer to this question is important because it has been demonstrated that not all acts of “love” have the welfare of the other person as a motivation. Instead:

... controlling people want power over others. They use “love” to manipulate and exploit those who care about them... Whether the control is well intended or malicious, it ensures the controller’s happiness, not the well-being of the person being controlled (Benokraitis, 2005:158).

There is therefore such a thing as “selfish love”, where an individual goes to great pains to please another in the knowledge that in the final analysis, he will benefit while the other person might eventually lose. We say this because Broker deserted Janet and his grandmother. Now that he has come back, he ingratiates himself with Grandmother in the hope of creeping back into the family fold, yet he knows that it will only be a matter of time before he leaves the family again through death. It is our proposition that when it comes to winning Grandmother’s support, Broker exploits her jaundiced view on how her grandchildren should live their lives. He buys her a dress because he knows that that is one of her expectations of him. Though Janet has lived with Grandmother for the last ten years while Broker was away, she has nonetheless failed to win her admiration because of remaining unmarried.

The unique role played by the elderly women in *Crossroads* is also seen when Broker visits what used to be the home of Jemina’s parents. He comes across a desolate compound that is so silent that he at first thinks that no one lives there anymore. It is only after he wanders around the compound that he finally comes across a horde of scrawny children, hiding in one of the dilapidated huts. After some conversation with the boy who appears to be their leader, Broker is able to ascertain that all the able bodied people in the family, Jemina included, have since died. Broker now realizes that just like Grandmother

in Janet's compound, it is the elderly who take care of the children even in this compound. He gleans this information from this conversation with the boy:

"Who lives here?" Broker asked, of the padlocked huts.

"Grandmother lives here," said the boy.

She had gone to church to look for food, the boy said. So this was what it had all added to, Broker thought. One poor grandmother and dozens of mouths to feed. What had happened to Jemina's brothers and sisters, the men and women who had so diligently produced these children? Were they dead too? Or had they simply fled from despair? (301).

In this philoprogenitive household that Broker visits, it turns out that the younger generation produced the children but the parents were unable to ensure their own survival, let alone the nurturance of their children. It is therefore the old women who have undergone resurgence, so that they now fend for the hapless children. Mwangi demonstrates that in the Crossroads' response to the problems caused by AIDS, matriarchy has more power than patriarchy. The fate of the society hinges on what the women are able to do in the face of the adversity. The control and management of H.I.V./AIDS in Crossroads is in the hands of women, showing that they exercise matriarchal power. Benokraitis (2005:114) writes that "in matriarchy, women control cultural, political and economic resources and, consequently, have more power than men." The fact that about twenty children are now under the care of an old woman, their youthful parents having been wiped out by AIDS, evinces the superiority of the conservative traditional rural lifestyle led by the old generation, which has made them to outlive their roving children who have succumbed to the plague. Jemina's mother is in this scenario the one who has been left behind with the ability to take care of the orphaned children while their parents have been annihilated by AIDS. The careful elderly

women in Crossroads therefore exercise informational social power over the younger careless generation, represented by characters such as Broker.

#### **4.4 Towards Releasing the Latent Power of Traditions**

The informational social power that Papa-Nnukwu exercises on Jaja, Kambili, Obiora and Amaka is exhibited by Jaja when Jaja and Kambili go back to Enugu. To Jaja, Papa-Nnukwu is a hero, who makes Jaja's fear of Eugene to dissipate. Once back in Enugu, the two children, in a hitherto unprecedented move, defy their father's admonitions and go ahead to admire Papa-Nnukwu's painting. Saying that their father is busy talking with Father Benedict and so he will not walk in on them as they marvel at the painting, they unfold it in Kambili's bedroom. Jaja even compares himself to his grandfather thus:

“I have Papa-Nnukwu's arms,” Jaja said. “Can you see? I have his arms.” He sounded like someone in a trance, as if he had forgotten where he was and who he was (209).

It is noteworthy that although Papa-Nnukwu is an old and weak man and that he finally dies, in his old age and even his death, he is a source of informational social power for Jaja. Among traditional Africans, a man is not thought to lose his strength as he grows older. Instead, as his body weakens with age, a man of virtue's strength is transposed and his psychic strength increased. The really old men then become centers of power. Such people might even sit at the same spot at home, doing nothing, not even participating physically in ceremonies. They however become an embodiment of wisdom and knowledge. From them, the younger generation received advice and strength (Beier, 1975). This is the kind of informational social power that Jaja imbibes from his ageing grandfather and continues to draw from even after Papa-Nnukwu dies. The desire for Jaja to resemble his grandfather is evidence of Papa-Nnukwu's influence on his self image.

We argue that Eugene, through his practice of Catholicism, has lowered Jaja's self-esteem but Papa-Nnukwu resuscitates it.

Unconsciously, the two children want to challenge their father's rules by having him see them with the painting. It is clear that they have finally reached a point where physical abuse by their father will not thwart them from appreciating their traditional familial links and heritage. Eugene also realizes that his children are under a spell stronger than that cast by his religious zeal and admonitions. The narrator sums up the events leading to Eugene's discovery of the painting in the following words:

And that was what happened. Perhaps it was what we wanted to happen, Jaja and I, without being aware of it. Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka- even Papa- and things were destined not to be the same, not be in their original order.

"What is that? Have you all converted to heathen ways? What are you doing with that painting? Where did you get it?" Papa asked.

"*O nkem*. It's mine," Jaja said. He wrapped the painting around his chest with his arms.

"It's mine," I said (209).

Here, we witness the two children defending each other by each claiming that the painting belongs to them. What emerges is that the two children are now ready to stand up against their father's tyranny. Eugene also starts to realize that since the children went to Nsukka, he can no longer claim the sole position as the shaper of their lives and thinking patterns. Papa-Nnukwu has initiated changes in the two children that Eugene can no longer reverse.

It should be noted that in Enugu, Kambili and Jaja have only known a modern lifestyle, supported by modern artifacts, mannerisms and foods. In Nsukka, they are provided with a view of a quaint and pastoral lifestyle that though sometimes constrained by financial

inadequacies nevertheless impacts positively on them. We argue that the lack of exposure to aspects of a rural lifestyle has to an extent zombified the two children and it's only through their sojourn in Nsukka that they learn to think and act independently. What emerges is that the children find more joy and fulfillment in traditionalism than in modernity.

The informational social power of African traditions is what Kata Kataa uses to encourage young boys into going through the traditional circumcision ceremony that Janet fears is fueling the spread of AIDS in Crossroads. The young boys would like to emerge as fearless adults and so they brave the painful ceremony, unaware of the danger that they face. In the traditional African context, circumcision, as one of the forms of initiation, implies, in its broadest sense, admission to some form of exclusive membership (Ottenberg & Ottenberg, 1960). Boyhood can be summed up as being a group membership that is mediocre as compared, to manhood. Kata Kataa therefore exercises informational social power over the boys by showing them that he is the one set to convert them from mere boys to respectable men. The following narrator's words are a window to the solemnity with which the ceremony is carried out:

Women cooked and sang at one end of the compound. The boys were lined up naked, in a highly charged circle of men at the other end; each one of them supported and braced by two men, both of whom were well fortified with roasted goat and sorghum wine. One of the men held the boy from behind, in a vice-like grip, to stop him flinching, or making any movements that might be construed as a sign of cowardice and disgrace them all. The other man's job was to constantly whisper encouragement to the boy. Those already circumcised stood back, their jaws clenched against the pain and blood oozing down their thighs, and prayed for the ceremony to end quickly so they could go and groan in private (102).

Circumcision is associated with machismo because the boys who go through it are supposed to acquire bravery as one of the values associated with masculinity. This is why the initiates are held tightly as they go through the surgery and also discouraged from showing signs of cowardice. The use of goat meat and beer add to the fervour of the ceremony. As a rite of passage, circumcision is revered by the inhabitants of Crossroads and this is the knowledge that Kata Kataa relies on as he goes about his trade. The boys therefore look up to Kata Kataa as their role model. Janet tries to thwart Kata's work by pointing out that the use of the shared knife could see the boys get AIDS if one of them has the H.I.V. It is only after the boys get this alarming news that they start to display signs of apprehension, as the narrator says:

They were big boys and they knew a fact or two about the plague, but no one, it seemed had told them that they could catch it through this vital ritual. They were all suddenly uneasy about it. Those already circumcised were greatly alarmed. The rest, Big Youth among them, were extremely uncomfortable and looked for an honourable way out of it.

"Stay!" Kata ordered them, harshly. "Will you now let a lunatic spoil our ceremony? Shall we give up our customs because this woman does not approve of them?"(103)

Circumcision is a rite that precedes courtship, marriage, bearing of children and hence continuity of life. The sudden information that the ceremony could very well lead to the boys' premature deaths is therefore unwelcome news to them. News that the ritual could lead to the boys getting AIDS shift the informational social power balance to Janet's side, albeit temporarily. This confrontation finally leads to Kata declaring that Janet and Frank must also be circumcised forthwith. The informal social power of Kata Kataa as a traditional circumciser is not entirely lost on Janet, since she has also already undergone circumcision, though in her case, it was carried out under the observation and guidance

of a bearded *mutiri* and two grandmothers as well as the circumcising woman herself (172). Frank however breaks free and runs away, chased by the boys who were waiting to be circumcised (105-106). The boys' pursuit of Frank coupled with Janet's manhandling are evidence of the informational social power that Kata Kataa wields over the boys and the elders present in the ceremony. Running after Frank also accords the boys a chance to postpone their circumcision to another safer time without appearing to have lost their nerve.

Kata Kataa continues to counter Janet and Frank's offensive on his position and significance as a circumciser. In much the same way as Kambili and Jaja defy their father by having Papa- Nnukwu's painting in their Enugu home, Kata Kataa also takes his fight for preservation of his significance as a circumciser a notch higher when he sends a group of goons to scare Frank. The rowdy mob descends on Frank's kiosk and creates a disturbance, threatening to circumcise him and then hang him on the nearest telephone pole to dry. They then proceed to bang on the walls of his clinic with clubs as well as chopping the air with their machetes. All this time, Frank has locked himself in the clinic in fear (110). This threat is finally carried all the way to actualization when Kata sends men to demolish Frank's kiosk (118-119). In this study, we aver that Kata's informational social power over his rowdy mob of henchmen is as a result of his position as the village circumciser. The young men who destroy Frank's clinic act under the spell of Kata's informational power over them, believing that what he tells them about Frank and Janet is the truth.

We read a commentary on the sanctity of the family institution in a traditional set up in *The Last Plague*. However much members of a family may become estranged, Mwangi

demonstrates that all parties concerned should go to great lengths in order to restore the family unity. In such an endeavour, other people who have some interest in such a family would be expected to stand aside and pave way for the family in question to recover its footing. We suggest that this reasoning is what drives Grandmother to play a reconciliatory role between Broker and Janet after the former comes back after a ten year absence from home. Here, we see her encouraging Broker to reclaim Janet as his wife despite his long absence from home:

“Your wife has been dying for the lack of a man. You see these two men here? They are always here. They have been hovering over her like hungry vultures. They think I don’t know what they are after.”

“Grandmother,” Janet warned.

“What?” Grandmother said to her. “You think I don’t know what they are after? Especially this one?”

She swung her walking stick at Frank. He stepped back and smiled tolerantly. She turned to Broker and, lowering her voice, shared some secrets with him.

“Your wife has not been the same since you left her,” she said. She has been very lonely and always unhappy. I am trying to find her another man, but now that you are back, she can be happy that you are back”(166).

We postulate that Grandmother’s reference to Janet as Broker’s *wife* (my emphasis) is not just the ordinary reference to a woman who is in a matrimonial arrangement with a man; rather, she uses the word so as to show Janet that it behooves her to treat Broker as she had planned to when they got married, irrespective of what may have happened later on. Her snide remarks about Frank and Big Youth being opportunistic people out to prey on Janet reverberates with her disapproval of third parties who might want to get between her grandchildren’s lives. She uses the traditional expectation that a respectable woman should have a husband to counter Janet’s attempt to send Broker away.

Grandmother's persuasion to Janet to (re)admit Broker into her life raises fundamental questions about the extent to which a woman in a traditional African marital setting should go in an effort to keep her marriage (or a semblance of it) intact. Commenting on this issue, Cherlin (1996:288) says that:

... the investments of time and effort that a wife typically makes in a home- raising the children, providing emotional support to her husband, keeping in touch with her husband's relatives and so forth- cannot easily be transferred to a new marriage. Rather, they are relationship-specific investments, efforts that are valuable only in a person's current relationship... Husbands, in contrast, tend to invest their time and effort in their jobs, accruing, if they are fortunate, seniority, promotions and wage and salary increases. These job investments can more easily be transferred to another marriage...

Cherlin suggests that women invest too much of their effort in the non-economic supportive roles in the family. A failure of marriage is therefore interpretable as being due to a woman's inadequacy in the playing of this unquantifiable duty. This contrasts with a man's economic role, which he can keep altering as he changes jobs or ascends in rank. It is this variability of a man's economic role in his family that he can easily transpose to the family milieu by leaving one marriage and settling in another without a very big feeling of itinerancy. Towards the end of the novel, we see Janet being swayed by these sentiments by Grandmother and the cultural loss a woman associates with losing a family (or part of it) and starting a new one. She consents to taking care of Broker in his final days and even assists him in his bid to (re)connect with his children. Upon his demise, she finally interments his remains in her compound and it is only then that she eventually entertains possibilities of starting another life with her confidante, Frank.

#### 4.5 Fortifying Through Laughter and Affection

In this section, we place laughter, merriment and a chatty, cozy familial atmosphere at the heart of a traditional African lifestyle and contrast it with the observance of silence interspersed with controlled and mechanical recitation of Catholic prayer rituals required by Eugene. We observe that the free environment provided by Ifeoma and Father Amadi where children can express their happiness and sometimes even unhappiness competes with Eugene's stranglehold of silence and imposition of mechanical routines in Kambili and Jaja's lives.

Right from the time Aunty Ifeoma enters Kambili and Jaja's lives, laughter becomes an added ingredient that the two children's lives had hitherto suffered a lack of. The narrator observes this in the following words:

Aunty Ifeoma came the next day, in the evening, when the orange trees started to cast long, wavy shadows across the water fountain in the front yard. Her laughter floated upstairs into the living room, where I sat reading. I had not heard it in two years but I would know that cackling, hearty sound anywhere (71).

Ifeoma's laughter is a challenge to Eugene, who does not approve of loud people. Eugene's wife, Beatrice has for instance been reduced to a whispering fearful person due to the fact that loudness and chattiness is considered by Eugene to be evidence of people "with no home training and no fear of God" (58). Studies on parenting styles indicate that parents who patronize, pontificate to, and generally repress expressiveness in their children block channels of communication with their children. This makes it impossible for such parents to understand their children's problems and needs, making it difficult for them to provide proper guidance and socialization. Writing on this topic, FPAK (2001:59) states that:

It is extremely important for parents to appreciate the problems of the youth and offer spiritual and social guidance to enable them to grow up as responsible citizens. As a parent, it is crucial to spend most of your time with your children in order to explain, clarify and answer questions about the changes they experience as they grow.

This observation implies that young children whose developmental problems are not addressed may seem compliant with their parents' expectations but with time, the unaddressed and bottled up problems will eventually resurface, too late for any corrective interventions to be made. It is this knowledge that makes Ifeoma to confront the timidity that Papa Eugene has built into Kambili and Jaja by providing a traditional aura through which the children can express their feelings of happiness as well as allow repressed feelings of resentment to bubble to the surface. This leads to their healing and rebuilding of their shattered emotions.

It is our position that a parent, though a disciplinarian to his or her children, should find time to display feelings and affection, so that his children can bond with him. We argue that for a child to form an enduring relationship with its father, the father should play, joke with and generally be affable with the child. This is the manner in which Ade Cocker interacts with his family, even throwing the young baby into the air to please him (57). Unlike Eugene who relates with his children in a serious and businesslike manner devoid of a display of fatherly affection, Papa-Nnukwu is also light-hearted and jocular with his grand children, the fact that Eugene has put sanctions on their interaction with him notwithstanding. He gleefully invites them to his humble abode, as dictates of traditions would expect him to. Though not expecting them to consent, he realizes that it is customary for a visitor to be offered food and proceeds to do the same with his

grandchildren. He then pokes fun at Kambili in a manner that her father would consider inappropriate but which in this case is quite enchanting to Kambili. He says:

“Kambili, you are so grown up now, a ripe *agbogho*. Soon the suitors will start to come,” he said, teasing (64).

This joke, though seemingly irrelevant underlies Papa-Nnukwu’s expectation as per African traditions that a girl should at one stage in her life aspire to fall in love and get married, a far cry from Eugene’s preoccupation with Kambili’s righteousness and academic pursuits. We aver that as a unit of the society, a closely knit family is just as important as academic and financial supremacy or even religious uprightness. Papa-Nnukwu therefore succeeds, just like father Amadi, in creating in Kambili an awareness of herself as a female human being with her own desires, feelings and goals that are not necessarily in tandem with her father’s idealistic academic and religious expectations.

Like Papa-Nnukwu, Grandmother also appeals to Janet to get married, believing that a woman should not live alone. She sees Janet’s life as devoid of the kind of love that can only be provided by a man. As per the dictates of African traditions, she has been trying to get Janet to get married to another man since her husband Broker disappeared. When Broker finally comes back, she sees a ready ally in him, since both of them are now trying to exercise informational social power on Janet; to get her to settle down with Broker. Here, she tells Broker of how Janet has longed for his return:

“Your wife has not been the same since you left her,” she said. She has been very lonely and always unhappy. I am trying to find her another man, but now that you are back, she can be happy that you are back (166).

Grandmother’s words exhibit her belief in the power of spousal love and a male dominated relationship. The fact that Broker has been away, having absconded his duty

as a husband and a father are ignored by Grandmother and Broker as the two combine forces to try and influence Janet into accepting Broker back. Janet and Broker are therefore locked in a social power scrimmage as each attempts to outdo the other with regard to who controls marital decisions. In the struggle for power between spouses:

Sociologists have investigated the effects of male dominated, egalitarian and female dominated relationships on courtship and marital satisfaction. Generally, they have found male or husband dominance to be associated with higher satisfaction for both spouses while female-dominant relationships have lower satisfaction (McDonald, & Peplum cited in Lamanna & Riedmann, 1985: 370).

This study affirms that where a man is in control of his marriage, both he and his wife tend to feel that that is natural and so the right status of marriage. In situations where a marriage is wife-controlled, the husband is wont to feel slighted and the wife might feel like a usurper, which would make both of them less satisfied with the marriage. Grandmother's constant nagging to Janet to get a man to live with coupled with the tendency of a male-dominated marriage being happier than a female-dominated one is an aspect of informational social power that wears down Janet's resolve to avoid men. This happens after Janet finally reconciles with Broker and even accepts to bury him after he dies.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, it is Papa Eugene who has severed ties between his children and their extended family members while in *The Last Plague*, pursuit of urban trends, fame and money has driven Broker out of his own home to go and squander his wealth and health with Jemina, Sakina and other women. When he finally realizes that he has inflicted irremediable damage to his health, he resorts to the institution of the family for consolation and acceptance. Having cut off links with family members, he now realizes

that he has to reconnect with them as they will enable him to live the rest of his days in relative happiness. Albeit too lately, he learns that the affection offered by family members is persevering and not based on his fortunes as is the case with the women he has atrophied himself with. We posit that his family members, an element of African traditions, ease his suffering and make his last days in the world a little more supportable.

The narrator notes the arduous task that Broker faces as he tries to regain the lost love:

When Broker was not at Janet's, trying to break her abhorrence of him and win back her affections, he was at Grandmother's, fanning her support of him. Or with the children, shamelessly worming his way into their hearts. Or with anyone he thought could help him warm his way back into Janet's heart. It was a long and frightful journey (191).

Broker's journey back to his family's acceptance involves trying to rebrand himself. He has to prove that his return to his family was incited by his love for them, rather than a realization that he needed them to love him in his hour of need. Later on, Broker succeeds in getting acceptance from the family members, the culmination of which is that he takes the children for a picnic up in the hills. Janet however asks Frank to accompany them but as Frank says, his presence is uncalled for. The narrator relates how Broker's love for the children is self-evident:

...Janet had asked him (Frank) to go along with Broker and the children to keep an eye on things. What things? She did not know. Did she expect Broker in his condition to run off with the children?

"Just go along with him," she had insisted. "For my sake."

Now watching Broker watch the children, and speak so fondly of their mother, he realized that he need not have come along. Broker cared for his children and adored them, in his own remote and selfish way (378).

Broker's good treatment of the children in this picnic is the proof that Janet needed in her appraisal of the indisputability of his concern for the family. Using the traditional

expectation that family members should bond together as his point of reference, Broker is therefore finally able to overcome Janet's initial abhorrence of him.

#### 4.6 Food as a Trope

The significance of traditional food as a bonding factor among family members is played out in Grandmother, Janet and Broker's interaction. Eugene has forbidden his children from eating anything in Papa-Nnukwu's house but the old man nevertheless offers the two children food that he knows they will not accept. In the case of Grandmother, she uses the ritual of food to try and welcome Broker back to the family fold. Knowing full well that it is against the dictates of African traditions to deny a visitor food, she impresses upon Janet the need to serve Broker some food, her displeasure upon his return notwithstanding. Here, Grandmother initiates the discourse on food by reminding Broker of the kind of meals that he preferred before he left Crossroads:

"Do you still love cooked bananas?" she asked Broker.

He still did, he said, especially the way Janet cooked them in ghee and garlic sauce. He had eaten mashed bananas from here to Butare but he had not tasted anything as delicious as what Janet cooked.

"Come to my house," Grandmother ordered Janet. "I have bananas for you to cook your husband. I was going to take them to the market but, now that my grandson-in-law is back, you must cook them for him. This is the greatest day of my life!" (167).

From this dialogue, we infer that some African foodstuffs are not served merely to meet the dietary requirement of the partaker; some of them have a ceremonial or symbolic significance. We see bananas in this case as a special meal that is associated with hospitality towards an exceptional person who visits a household. Arguably, while at first Janet has steeled herself to eject Broker from her house, the traditional requirement that

even a stranger who visits people in a rural setting should be served some food weakens her resolve and instead she consents to feeding Broker. "I'll cook him these... I will give him food" (170) she finally says accepting the proffered bananas. Later that evening, Broker further insinuates himself further to Janet, influencing her, against her better judgment, to even offer tea to him (172). We posit in this study that by invoking the traditional requirement that a visitor should be offered food, grandmother uses informational social power to overcome Janet's initial aversion towards hosting Broker.

Janet's initial refusal to make Broker food, followed later by her acceptance to do the same is representative of her unstable character, brought about by the social power struggle between her and Broker. A husband and a wife are eternally locked in a struggle for dominance. Scholarly studies on the power struggle between a husband and a wife conclude that:

In the language of politics, husbands and wives may be viewed as two separate interest groups. If a husband gains in power, his wife must lose power; if he gains in a privilege, his wife loses privileges, and vice-versa. Marriage- seen in these terms- is a power struggle. The husband may "win" (and become a dominating patriarch) or "lose" (and become a hen-pecked husband) or they may "tie" (and have an egalitarian marital relationship). One gets the impression that men usually have the initial advantage in this struggle. It looks as if men often make the rules to suit themselves; the deference customs, the jural rights, generally point in the direction of a power advantage for the husband ( Stephens, 290, 294, 302 cited in Hutter, 1998:282, 284).

The need for each party in a marriage to impose their will upon the other party is what constitutes a social power struggle. We therefore read the requirement for women to serve visitors food as being a rule that has been made by patriarchy, such that by giving a man some food, the woman feels "generous" and liked by the society while in actual

fact, what this “generosity” does is to confine her to domesticity and subservience to men.

Rituals of making and eating traditional foods are a central trope in *Purple Hibiscus*. Making and partaking of traditional foods is associated with the world of Ifeoma. It is notable that Kambili and Jaja, having come from an affluent family that lives in the urban center are not very familiar with traditional recipes. They are similarly not skilled in the making of ordinary dishes, the result of having Sisi, their domestic servant, who does such work in Nsukka. We posit that by introducing the children to culinary art, Ifeoma draws them closer to African traditions that require children to be conversant with domestic chores, such as food preparation.

Since Ifeoma does not have the benefit of a domestic servant like Eugene, she does most of the food preparation herself, sometimes assisted by her children. This is a world that is new to Kambili and she has to be initiated to it. We notice from the following words by her that even what would otherwise be a commonplace skill like peeling a tuber is not in Kambili’s ken:

Aunty Ifeoma looked doubtful. “Help me with the coco yams,” she said, finally.

I pulled a low stool close to her and sat down. The skins seemed to slip off easily enough for Aunty Ifeoma, but when I pressed one end of the tuber, the rough brown skin stayed put and the heat stung my palms.

“Soak your hands in water first.” She demonstrated where and how to press, to have the skin come sliding off. I watched her pound the coco yams, dipping the pestle often in the bowl of water so the cocoyam wouldn’t stick too much to it. Still, the sticky white mash clung to the pestle, to the mortar, to Aunty Ifeoma’s hand. She was pleased though because it would thicken the onugbu soup well (165-166).

What we see in this instance is Kambili being taken through the steps of preparation of a traditional dish. Preparation of food as we saw earlier with the wives of *umunna* in Abba is a communal venture in a traditional African set up. Food is also an aspect of nurturance, which is another concept associated with women. Typically, girls are encouraged to be communal by their care givers. This is achieved through communication that reinforces cooperation, helpfulness, nurturance and other behaviours that are consistent with the social meanings of femininity (Wood, 1999). We reiterate that preparation of food is part of the skills that tradition expects an African woman to be conversant with. Eugene's preoccupation with religiosity and academic pursuits for his children has locked Kambili out of this interface with life skills. With aunty Ifeoma, she is introduced to food preparation as a cultural practice.

Preparation of food has been shown to be an activity that is not always the domain of women. In the disease ravaged village of Crossroads, it is Musa, a man, who is the champion of culinary art. Perhaps out of boredom from the back water existence of Crossroads, he spends a lot of time trying to come up with different recipes. We note that his constant attempt at food making and trying of different menus runs parallel to Janet and Broker's attempts to resuscitate Crossroads. The man therefore uses his skills in the kitchen to usurp power from Janet and Broker especially when it comes to influencing the strangers who come to the village. While Janet tries to impress Don Donovan with the success of her anti-AIDS campaign, Broker engages the white man in a discussion on BMWs and Volvos. Broker leads Don Donovan into unfathomable, egoistic labyrinths of motor cars knowledge, much to the chagrin of Janet, who is upstaged for her lack of knowledge on automobiles (366,356). On his part, Musa asserts himself as relevant to the

strangers who visit Crossroads using the food he prepares. A case in point is when travelers on *The Far Traveler* disembark, for the first time in crossroads, to patronize Musa's tea house. The narrator tells of Musa's happiness for this rare visit:

Musa was beside himself with excitement. His banana *samosas* went big with the travelers. His kale *samosas* were a major hit too, as was his *ugali* cake, which he slipped to the passengers without Uncle Mark knowing it. He was so happy he hugged and kissed the tea pot and promised to give it a thorough scouring, and gave Captain Speed an extra cup of tea on the house (411).

What we witness is a scenario where Janet, Broker and Musa each seek to claim the throne of importance in the eyes of visitors in Crossroads. Inasmuch as Musa uses food to achieve that end, he wins the recognition and adoration of the passengers on *The Far traveler*, a significant happening considering that for many years, the driver, Captain Speed, and the passengers on the bus have not seen anybody or anything that would want to make them alight at Crossroads. His knowledge on recipes therefore becomes the means through which he exercises informational social power.

Interestingly, the preparation of food is considered to be a feminine task, one which is not associated with power. However, in Musa's case, he associates his ability to delight visitors in Crossroads with his foods with possession of social power. Whether food preparation by a man is empowering or disempowering in the traditional African community is subject to debate. When done by women, food preparation is seen as being evidence of their femininity. When done by men, it is interpreted as being a "skill" that women are incapable of mastering. Consequently, men take delight in slaughtering animals and skinning them, preparing traditional brews or working as chefs in five-star hotels. This use of double standards resonates with what Tannen (1990) refers to as judging of men and women differently, even if they are engaged in the same activity.

We postulate that Adichie aligns Catholicism and the culture of consuming expensive and exotic food with European values and uses Nsukka to discuss the place of traditional African values, culture and food. She shows that the urban lifestyle of Enugu is unfulfilling to Kambili and Jaja while the traditional African duties that they learn while in Nsukka raise their self esteem. Dismissal of western foods is witnessed the first time Ifeoma comes to Abba and is hosted by Beatrice. Kambili describes what happens when Ifeoma is treated to a western gastronomic moment:

Mama came in holding a tray piled high with bottles of soft and malt drinks lying by their sides. A plate of chin-chin was balanced on top of the drinks.

“*Nwunye m*, who are those for? Auntie Ifeoma asked.

“You and the children,” Mama said. “Did you not say that the children were coming soon, *okwia?*”

“You should not have bothered, really. We bought *okpa* on our way and just ate it” (72).

Ifeoma’s reference to *okpa* shows her slant towards traditional foodstuffs as opposed to being obsessed with gourmet diets. To Kambili and Jaja, already used to western diets in Enugu, Ifeoma introduces a new angle into their lives, a reconnection with African traditions, via intercourse with food, which they have lost as a result of being confined for too long within the religious spaces of their Enugu residence. Information on the traditional foods therefore challenges their father’s western culinary obsession.

Like Ifeoma, Grandmother in *The Last Plague* is also cognizant of the special place occupied by meals in a traditional family set up. She therefore takes it upon herself to direct Janet to make Broker some tea and shows her displeasure when Janet says that she will make him cocoa instead. The ritual of tea drinking is common among African women and as such, Grandmother’s directive towards Janet can be seen as an affirmation of the cohesiveness of her (Grandmother’s) family. She is not easily swayed by Janet’s

casual approach to culinary matters and so insists that the food she should make for Broker should be beyond reproach. Here, she addresses Broker, insisting that he must eat and brushes aside his pleas of not being hungry:

“And good food,” she insisted. “Don’t tell me that you don’t want food. I raised four boys and a husband and they were always hungry. I will go for the bananas.” (402).

Initially, Broker attempts to turn down the offer for food but does not challenge Grandmother’s insistence that he eats. His interaction with Grandmother is therefore different from the one he has with Janet. With Grandmother, he does not seem to want to contravene what she says. Fitzpatrick (1998:116-7) refers to the kind of interaction between Broker and Grandmother as “complementary interaction”: one person agrees that the other one is dominant. With Janet, each engages in a situation that might escalate a power struggle, which leads to a competitive symmetry power situation. The tendency of traditional Africans being overly persuasive when it comes to offering a guest food is a form of informational social power that Grandmother practices over Broker. An African who visits another and declines an offer of food, claiming that he or she is full would provoke feelings of offence in his would-be-host. Grandmother knows this and that’s why she does not expect Broker and Janet to do anything short of following her instructions.

#### **4.7 Fanning and Dousing Retrograde Practices**

Mwangi has exhibited how some characters use African traditions to socialize others into accepting retrogressive and sometimes harmful practices. It is some of these practices that are responsible for fueling the spread of AIDS in Crossroads. The practice of wife inheritance is for instance deeply ingrained in the society. One would however expect

that a woman whose husband is planning to inherit the widow of a man who has died under unclear circumstances would be in the forefront in fighting off this cultural practice. This is not what we witness when Janet tries to dissuade her sister, Julia, from accepting Solomon's widow as her co-wife bearing in mind that Solomon had succumbed to AIDS. Instead, as Julia converses with Janet about the issue, we see her defending the practice:

"About your husband," Janet went straight to the point. "You cannot let him marry Solomon's wife."

Julia paused, her cup was halfway to her lips, and asked, "Is that the important thing that you wanted to talk to me about?"

It's more important than you think," Janet told her. "Solomon died from Aids."

The silence that followed this revelation was as cold and as deep as the old Black River. Julia considered several angry things, among them giving back the cup of tea and never again coming to visit her sister.

"My husband must care for his brother's family," she said finally. "You know that too; it's our custom."

"A very dangerous custom," Janet told her. "It will have to be stopped." (52).

Julia's defense of her husband's plans to marry Monika is a result of her acceptance of the "proper woman" (Muriungi, 2005:116-117) role as decreed by her culture. Kata, an adherent of traditional practices and beliefs has therefore exercised informational social power over his wife to such an extent that Julia equates marrying of Solomon's widow, who is probably H.I.V infected, to taking care of Solomon's family. In this instance, an altercation ensues between Janet and Julia about the matter and it all ends with Julia siding with Solomon's widow, Monika. Julia further blurts out that she and Monika depend on their men and are therefore not prostitutes, a thinly veiled attack on Janet's probity (54).

Declaration of innocence as a part of worship rituals is used by the people in Crossroads as a way of dealing with the ravages of AIDS. We argue that in this case, AIDS is seen as some punishment from divinity to the traditional people in Crossroads. The disease is viewed as some kind of retribution exerted by the gods for the transgressions of an individual while on earth. We notice a pattern where the people, in the course of mourning their dead, continually distance themselves from possibilities of them or their relatives having committed acts that are punishable by the disease but instead plead their innocence and attribute the cause of death to something more acceptable. A case in point is the following response given by Nerita's parents to Musa about the young girl's death:

"What ate her?" he (Musa) asked them.

"Nothing," said the father.

"She was a good girl," added the mother. My Nerita was a good girl.

"Just out of college and not even married," said the father. She was not a prostitute or anything like that."

"She was a good girl," affirmed the mother.

"Great sadness," Musa told them" (112).

From the words of Nerita's parents, we infer their distancing of their daughter with any wrong doing that might have visited death upon her. We therefore read their declaration of innocence as being an unsuitable approach to the fight against AIDS as it presupposes that those who contract the disease do so as a consequence of some wrong doing. Such parents therefore exercise harmful informational social power over their children, making it hard for the children to take precautionary measures, such as are being fronted by Janet. As long as youngsters such as Nerita feel that they have not wronged anyone, they continue to engage in cultural and behavioural trends that make them susceptible to H.I.V.

Pleas of innocence are also witnessed with Big Shoe's wife. Like Nerita's parents, she views AIDS as an emasculating force that can only affect those people who by virtue of their lifestyle have called the calamity upon themselves. She is questioned by Musa as he is wont to do to any pall bearer who passes by his tea house:

Musa raised his voice and called out to the coffin bearers, "Who is in the box?"

"Big Shoe, the cobbler," answered the grief stricken woman. My husband, my only man and father of all my children."

"Great sadness," said Musa.

Like most people in Crossroads, he had known the cobbler all his life and known him to be honest and God-fearing.

"What ate him," he asked, his heart heavy with dread. "The plague?"

"The plague could not kill my man," said the cobbler's wife. His brothers were jealous of him and they bewitched him till he died."

"Great sadness," said Musa (99).

Attribution of death caused by AIDS to witchcraft shows the extent to which Big Shoe's wife's adherence to African traditions challenges Janet's FLEP. Big Shoe's plea that her husband was bewitched confirms studies on how death is understood in the traditional African context. In a traditional African scenario:

Death, it was argued, was not natural. More often than not, it caught children or young adults, and almost every death was seen as caused by some person. That person was most often thought to be a witch exercising mysterious and innate power to harm, or a sorcerer who manipulated medicines with elaborate ill intent (Wilson, 1971:35-6).

This attribution of death to a personality, rather than taking it as resulting from medical causes is an aspect of deleterious informational social power that disempowers Janet. It makes her work more difficult because she first has to debunk the myth of AIDS as being caused by supernatural factors before she can hope to change the behavioural trends of the Crossroads inhabitants.

We posit that just like Papa-Nnukwu's traditional worship session impresses Kambili much more than does Eugene's prayers, so also do the bereaved family members in *The Last Plague* strengthen each other with protestations of innocence in the face of AIDS rather than listening to what Janet tells them about avoidance of the disease. They therefore seek to respond to Janet's assertions that AIDS is a lifestyle disease by suggesting that their relatives have led blameless lives and so are victims of happenings beyond their ken rather than people guilty of some transgression. The Crossroads inhabitants who lose their relatives to AIDS show a general aversion towards embracing the scourge as an ordinary medical case that requires medical and behavioural interventions. They interpret these deaths as some metaphysical happenings that cannot be explained merely by studying their environment. They therefore seek answers from transcendence. Studies on how traditional Africans attribute strange phenomena to supernatural causations indicate that:

... no doubt, the very facts of man's confrontation with the physical universe and his awareness of a world, which, though unseen, is yet sufficiently palpable to be real to him pose to man multiple questions which need answers. For example, questions relating to the common occurrence of human existence, questions regarding "serious riddles" like those involved in the phenomena of birth, human life in all its phases and death; questions with reference to that "awesome immanence of the wholly other"- "das ganz Andere"- of Rudolf Otto- which is outside him and stronger than him; questions regarding the very whence and wherefore of the unseen world in which man feels himself enveloped and which he feels he rules, guides or molests him; in short the whence and wherefore, why and how of all things; all these demand answers (Obiego, 1984:57-8).

Obiego reiterates the tendency of man to fear or hold in awe happenings that are not explainable through an analysis of physical phenomena. We place the understanding of AIDS among the people of Crossroads as being that the disease is caused by factors that

belong to another realm of reality that is wholly different from present existence. This belief results to detrimental informational social power that makes it difficult for them and Janet to fight AIDS.

Papa-Nnukwu's deconstruction of the genesis of Eugene's disrespect for him as being steeped in the idea of God the Father and God the Son being equal is akin to how Broker deconstructs the refusal by Crossroads people to use condoms. Arguing that to the traditional people the condoms are unpopular because they are free, he decides to set up a condom shop from where henceforth, the contraceptives would be sold (237). We propose that to the people of Crossroads, not used to charitable work by charitable organizations, the distribution of the free condoms runs counter to what they would expect of something that has been introduced to emancipate them from the ravages of AIDS. The Crossroads people associate value acquisition with a pecuniary decline. If a low risk sexual partner is seen to be more valuable than a high risk one, then they find it odd that the risk reducer (condom) is offered freely. Muriungi (2005) writes that the decision on whether to use a condom or not involves a calculation of the risk involved. A person might for instance fail to insist on the use of the condom because he or she feels that use of a condom is evidence of "cheating or possibility of cheating", which erodes the trust that exists in intimate relationships. The fact that Broker uses the people's skepticism about free condoms to start selling the contraceptives to them is interpretable as being a way in which he "adds value" to the condoms so that the people can see them as bringing an element of positivity into their lives. When given out freely, the people associate them with the perversion of multiple sexual unions. Broker plans to use their

aversion to the free condoms to start selling the condoms to them, on the belief that what has been purchased cannot be discarded.

Janet follows in the footsteps of Broker; she decides to goad the consciousness of the hard traditionalists with the exotic, rather than the conventional. Having seen that the issuance of free condoms is taken by the traditionalists as lacking any merit because of how easy it all looks, Janet acquires a book with gruesome pictures of diseased body parts, occasioned by sexually transmitted diseases. This book contains information that the people in Crossroads have not encountered before. We note the pictures in the book are hitherto unseen in Crossroads and so when Hanna shows the pictures to her husband who has so far been a staunch adherent of traditional practices, he decides to change. Hanna's husband has been compelled by his clan to take on another younger wife but the pictures open his eyes to the reality of sexually transmitted diseases. Hanna narrates to Janet how he reacts:

“He was so angry he wanted to kill somebody,” she said to Janet. “I was shaking like a coward, waiting for him to take his stick and beat me senseless. But he did not do it. Instead he told me not to leave him, that he loved me, and that he had thought over what I had told him, about his younger wife, and he had decided to take action.”(335)

What we witness here is African tradition being turned against itself by Janet. The fact that Hanna's husband is not as yet privy to information on sexually transmitted diseases as a result of his lack of contact with education and modern trends elicits enough informational social power to make him yield to Janet's campaign.

Machismo and display of frenzy and masculinity in the *Purple Hibiscus* mmuo festival is replicated in *The Last Plague* in the circumcision ceremony. In both cases, African

traditions are cast as having some mystic power that evokes feelings of reverence to the ceremonies' participants. Kata Kataa is presented as a fearsome ardent practitioner of circumcision, who competes for social power with Janet, the latter who is a woman and so not expected to contribute anything in the otherwise masculine ritual. The narrator gives us a glimpse of the passion with which Kata Kataa goes about his trade:

Kata Kataa, his hands awash with their blood, pranced from one boy to the next and, knife flashing, did his job with gleeful ardor. Behind him skittered an equally delirious assistant with the soot blackened calabash into which Kata dumped the fruit of his gruesome harvest (102).

The fastidiousness and ecstasy with which Kata and his helper go about the bloody work of circumcising the boys is a machismo designed to call attention to the fact that men embrace, rather than fear gore. It is designed to intimidate women by showing them the extent to which a man can go in handling a scene involving carnage and blood bath without betraying feelings of revulsion. In the *mmuo* festival, women are told to turn their heads when a masked man passes near them. Similarly, in the circumcision ceremony, the women are not expected to participate in any other way but in cooking and singing. Janet's interference with the ceremony is therefore taken with the same gravity as the case would be if a woman unmask one of the masked *mmuos*. The *mmuo* and circumcision ceremonies are carried out in such a manner as to leave women impressed by the power of men. In the case of the *mmuo*, it is the awe associated with the masked men that is a display of male social power. In Kata's circumcision ceremony, the bloody scene is interpretable as being a show of male bravery and fearlessness. Both ceremonies encourage the widespread stereotypes of masculinity, "machismo" and what it means to be a "real man". It encourages male dominance over women (Jackson, 2002:89). An

interference with such a ritual would be interpreted as a case of a woman striking at the very root of the source of male power. Arguably, a boy who has undergone circumcision is taken to be a man in his own right, with the privilege of subjugating the women in his spaces. Janet's manhandling as a result of her daring act is therefore a case of Kata and the African traditions he represents fighting to avoid emasculation.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that as per our objective three, some characters exercise informational social power over other characters. We have shown that such characters rely on the African traditional practices, beliefs and lifestyle to acquire and exercise informational social power. The exercise of informational social power has been seen to be two-pronged: through use of words and through actions. Whereas the general trend is that informational social power as exercised by characters such as Papa-Nnuku and Ifeoma has desirable outcomes, we have shown that this power as exercised by Eugene, Kata Kataa and relatives to AIDS sufferers has detrimental outcomes. Our conception of "African traditions" is that it is a way of life among Africans that was handed down from their forebears and has not been tainted by aspects of modernity or Christianity.

We have also contrasted African traditions with modernity because there is a link between modernity and religion as practiced by such characters as Papa Eugene, Maalim Juma Maalim, Father Benedict and Pastor Batolomeo. We have also demonstrated that informational social power is based on a character's ability to use words or actions to influence the conduct of another. It is therefore exercised through persuasion.

The seats of traditionalism in *Purple Hibiscus* have been shown to be Abba and Nsukka. The characters who have been seen to rely on traditions in their control of others are Papa-Nnukwu, Ifeoma, Amaka and the *umunna* wives. They have influenced the behavioural and thinking patterns of Jaja, Kambili and Beatrice and in so doing, they have challenged the coercive social power that Father Benedict and Eugene exercised over the three characters in chapter two. What emerges though is that Ifeoma and Amaka have exercised both referent social power as well as informational social power over Beatrice and her children. The academic argument that we have explored is that it is not definitive which of the two types of social powers exercised by Ifeoma and Amaka over Beatrice and her children is a greater corollary to the ultimate character change of Beatrice and her children. In retrospect, we could conclude that by exercising two types of social powers over them, Ifeoma and Amaka “compete with themselves” in influencing the three characters.

In *The Last Plague*, the characters who use informational social power are Grandmother, Kata Kataa, Chief Chupa and to some extent Janet and Broker. Like Ifeoma and Amaka, Janet and Broker are “in competition with themselves” because they exercise both referent social power as well as informational social power on other characters. Whereas in *Purple Hibiscus* the main characters over whom power is exercised are Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili, in *The Last Plague*, each of the major characters have been seen to be capable of exercising informational social power over one another. This chapter has also revealed that a traditional African environment is used by some characters to exercise informational social power on those who have lived in unfulfilling urban milieus. In their quest to outdo each other however, it is not conclusive which character has the ultimate

social power of controlling the events in Crossroads. This undecidedness of which character(s) can be said to be the overall social power wielder in the two novels has been the main finding of this chapter.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

This concluding chapter gives a summary of the major findings about the interchanges of social power among the literary characters studied in this research. It offers a summary of who has social power at different times in the plot sequences of the two books and the base that such characters have used to acquire and exercise social power. It also gives a brief chapter by chapter summary of this study. Finally, it gives recommendations on further areas that can attract research in the two novels.

The first chapter has demarcated this study as one based on the study of social power in literary characters and the manner in which no single character in the novels studied can be said to be the ultimate holder of power. In the chapter, we have also narrowed this study down to an analysis of power dynamism in familial settings. The social power context dealt with in the two novels represents ordinary day to day interaction between family members and friends. This approach to the study of power has necessitated the use of three of the six bases of social power exercise as espoused by Raven and Rubin and other social scientists.

Deconstruction has been used to provide a reading that veers off the course of a conventional New Criticism reading of the two books. An ordinary reading of *Purple Hibiscus* might for instance reach the conclusion that Papa Eugene is the ultimate holder of social power in his family while a casual reading of *The Last Plague* could lead to the conclusion that Janet is an all powerful matriarch around whom the story revolves. Using

deconstruction, we have however unearthed different levels and layers of social power exercise that are anchored on coercion, reference or information.

In chapter two, we have shown the extent to which such characters as Papa Eugene Achike, Father Benedict, Pastor Batolomeo and to some extent Maalim Juma Maalim and Musa use coercion to make other characters adopt their general world view. It has also been noted that exercise of social power is highly dependent on the context. In chapter two, the context has been identified as being shaped by characters' religious orientation. Being the first of the discursive chapters of this study, it has not been possible, even prudent, to show from whom the above mentioned characters have wrenched social power. What we have done is to show the manner in which the mentioned characters employ aspects of physical and emotional intimidation ensconced in religion, on other characters in an attempt to subject them. The extent of the success or failure of this subjection is analyzed in chapters three and four.

In chapter three, we have demonstrated that Father Amadi, Aunty Ifeoma and her daughter, Broker, Janet, Frank and Grandmother have challenged the coercive social power exercised by Papa Achike, Father Benedict, Pastor Batolomeo, Maalim Juma Maalim and Musa. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Jaja, Kambili and Beatrice have been the characters who have provided an arena for social power contests as the characters mentioned in chapters two and three engage in a social power tussle meant to win influence over Beatrice and her two children. However, as we have demonstrated, In *The Last Plague*, there are no passive characters around whom the social power struggles of the aggressive characters oscillate. Instead, Pastor Batolomeo, Musa, Maalim and Grandmother's use of religion to force concessions on other characters have been met by

defiance by Broker, Janet, Frank and Big Youth, who rely on the reference of social power to assert themselves and front the values they cherish. We have however stressed that Grandmother is not a polarized character who only displays one type of social power; she wields both coercive as well as referent social power over different characters at different times.

Finally, in chapter four, we have demonstrated that aspects of traditional African lifestyle are used by characters to acquire and exercise informational social power over other characters. Those characters who rely on a traditional African lifestyle to exercise informational social power challenge those who use coercion and reference. Chapter four has however revealed that this challenge is directed more towards those who use coercion than those who use reference.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we have identified Papa-Nnukwu, Ifeoma, members of the *umunna* and Amaka as the main characters who exercise informational social power that is encapsulated within African traditions. As in chapter, two, it is Beatrice and her two children over whom this power has been exercised. Interestingly, Ifeoma and Amaka have straddled the twin areas of social power exercise, using reference as well as information. Looking at *The Last Plague*, what has emerged is that Chief Chupa, Kata Kataa, Grandmother and to some extent, Janet have relied on traditions to exercise informational social power on other characters. Janet and Grandmother have therefore had a two-pronged thrust at social power exercise, Janet using reference and information while Grandmother has used coercion and reference. The three objectives of this study have therefore been amply explored. The major conclusion reached has been that social

power dynamism has resulted in a situation where no single character can be said to be the ultimate social power holder.

In the course of this study, there are some areas that we feel have been opened up for further research and critical commentary with regard to the two novels under scrutiny. One of them concerns a possible reading of the books within the framework hegemonic relations. Looking at the relationship and interaction between men and women as one based on control of one group by the other might lead one into investigating the hegemonic character of men-women interaction. Lears (1985) writes that ideas around the concept of cultural hegemony are used to address relations between cultures and power under capitalism. If men and women are to be taken as representative of two different cultures while a tussle for economic supremacy and control of family and society's economic resources are viewed as colouring the relationship between the sexes, then the Gramscian cultural hegemony theory could be used. The manner in which, Broker, for example, uses his vast wealth to ingratiate himself back to Janet's life and family would fall under hegemonic relations. This too would be the case with a study on how Papa Eugene Achike uses his economic power to subjugate and control his wife's thinking and actions, to such an extent that she takes it to be the norm that he can physically assault her without her coming out to defend herself.

The other area that this study has opened up for further probe is in the analysis of other types of powers in the two texts. We identify such powers as being, reward power, expert power and legitimate power. French & Raven cited in Lamanna & Riedmann (1985) explain that with reward social power, a character's course of conduct as well as thinking patterns are directed by the expectation that he or she will be rewarded by another

character for showing compliance with what the second character desires. With expert social power, one character believes that the second character has superior judgment, knowledge or ability and so the first character does not question or challenge what the second character says or does, believing that it is good for him or her. Finally, with legitimate social power, the first character believes that the second one has a normatively acquired right to direct the conduct of the first character. The first character therefore feels that he or she has a moral obligation to do as the second character wants.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Research Time Table

Activity	Duration	From-To
Preparation of Concept Paper	10 days	January 1st-January 10th 2012
Concept Paper presentation	1 day	January 12 <sup>th</sup> 2012
Coursework Completion	11 months	Jan 13 <sup>th</sup> - December 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2012
Proposal Preparation	2 months	Dec 4 <sup>th</sup> 2012- Feb 13 <sup>th</sup> 2013
Proposal Defense	1 day	Feb 14 <sup>th</sup> 2013
Proposal Correction	2 weeks	21 <sup>st</sup> Mar- 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2013
Data Collection	2 months	April 6 <sup>th</sup> – June 6th 2013
Data analysis	1 month	June 7 <sup>th</sup> – July 7 <sup>th</sup> 2013
Writing of the project	2 months	July 8th – Oct 8 <sup>th</sup> 2013
Making of corrections on the project	3 months	Dec 1 <sup>st</sup> 2013- March 1 <sup>st</sup> 2014
Corrections after external examiner's comments	1 day	May 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2014
Binding and submission of Project	1 day	May 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2014

## Appendix 2: Research Budget

Item	Amount
Proposal writing	2,000
Proposal printing	900
Proposal photocopies	1000
Project printing and photocopies	1800
Binding of project	2600
Travelling	25,000
Subsistence	30,000
Accommodation	45,000
Data collection	10,000
Buying books and stationary	20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>138,300</b>