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CONFLICT, DOUBLENESS AND SELF-REALIZATION IN ADICHIE AND HABILA

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ABSTRACT

The present day postcolonial subject is a conflicted individual. Faced with two different cultures; the western culture and the indigenous culture, which both vie for a hold on him, he creates his own special niche where he finds himself. This conflict extends beyond the issue of postcolonial double-ness to include a general dissatisfaction and unrest or dissonance with one's lot in life. Such conflict manifests not only internally but also in interpersonal relations. Consequently, several postcolonial writers have sought to capture this process of finding the self amidst the rigors and occurrences, newness and changes in society. In doing this, some of these writers have put forward religion, rationalization and socialism among other theories as options, elements or pathways which aid the individual in his search for self-realization. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Helon Habila fall into the category of writers who do this. With a focus on the Nigerian society, both writers strive to depict the journey of and processes involved in realizing the self. This paper will therefore focus on demonstrating the conflict which characterizes the postcolonial subject and how this is resolved for self-realization to take place. This paper will explore the subject with a focus on characters in the texts under study. These texts are the novels; *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Measuring Time* by Helon Habila.

KEY WORDS: Conflict, double-ness and self-realization.

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Conflict according to Afzalur Rakhim is: "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities" (16). It refers to some form of friction or discord which manifests in psychological tension, verbal abuse and ultimately, physical violence. It could be intrapersonal occurring within an individual or interpersonal involving more than one individual and often manifests in discontent, tension, disagreement, verbal abuse and interference among other things.

Double-ness on the other hand could imply intrapersonal conflict brought on by unresolved issues surrounding the individual in the society

which he lives. One of these issues is an offshoot or vestigial remain of the colonial encounter. When discussing westernization in relation to indigenous peoples especially those from post colonies, the phenomenon of culture clash and double-ness comes up. Homi Bhabha in his treatise on colonialism and double-ness, developed the concept of 'hybridity.' This concept essentially explains the dual and complex nature of the postcolonial subject. Because the colonizers presented their culture and persons as superior and preferable to that of the colonized indigenous people, the desire to be like the colonizer built up in the indigenous people. Thus, after years of colonialism and denigration of

their culture by the colonizers, the colonized subjects adopted the culture of the colonizers. However, the indigenous people are not fully integrated into this new culture and are rather products of a fusion between their indigenous culture and that of the colonized, resulting in a state of "in betweenness." This situation according to Bhabha, is especially prominent in the younger generation of postcolonials who belong to neither the culture of the colonized or that of the indigenous people but rather a third, new one which is the hybrid culture, consisting of elements of both cultures. In such a state, the postcolonial subject is faced with searching for a means through which he can define, explain himself and be at peace with his situation and place in society. This is where self-realization comes in.

Self-realization has been defined as fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's personality or character. It is "freedom from external coercion, including cultural expectations, political and economic freedom from worldly attachments and desires" (Fitzgerald, 50). As a concept it has become widely popular in the west and other parts of the world with a great influence from some eastern religions such as Hinduism which refers to it as "a profound spiritual awakening where there is an awakening from an illusory self-image or ego to the true, divine and perfect condition that the individual is." Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, in their study of humanistic psychology describe self-realization as "the impulse to convert oneself into what one is capable of being." Maslow goes further to say it is: "psychological growth and maturation which represents the awakening and manifestation of latent potentialities of the human being in ethical, aesthetic and religious experiences and activities" (204). He gives qualities of self-realized people, as goodness, truthfulness, uniqueness and justness amongst others. It is in the light of these that self-realization can be said to involve the awareness and acceptance of the uniqueness and qualities of an individual and the striving towards greater achievements or fulfillment. This concept, according to Carl Jung in his study of analytical psychology can only be attained through individuation, which is the integration of both conscious and unconscious

forces and motivations underlying human behavior (Jacobi 115). Because this process varies in intensity or degree, there are different phases which mark the level of intensity or achievement.

The first phase of self-realization, known as the initiation stage is self-awareness. It involves the coming to terms or knowledge of one's individuality and or peculiar characteristics. Here, the individual's consciousness is turned inwards as focus is on the wants, needs, likes, dislikes, thoughts and actions of the individual without consideration for others. It is like the coming of age of an infant who becomes aware of his or her separateness from the mother and family members. The second phase of self-realization is self-acceptance and involves the affirmation of self in spite of weaknesses or deficiencies. It involves the loving of self by oneself. It is in the effort to make better the deficiencies discovered in the awareness stage that attempts are made at self-realization which is the third and final aspect of individuation. Self-realization is therefore the attempt to balance self-acceptance and the drive or impetus to improve oneself. It is in this attempt that individuals either progress or retrogress as remaining constant is impossible.

Chimmamanda Ngozi Adichie and

Helon Habila as writers, touch on contemporary issues which bother the postcolonial subject. Their works seem to focus on phenomena from the historical into present day burning issues. This paper will examine the presentation of conflict and double-ness, manifesting itself in the confused postcolonial subject and the use of religion and rationalization among other coping mechanisms to resolve this conflict and bring about self-realization. In doing this, the novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Measuring Time* will be used.

Purple Hibiscus

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the imposing figure of Eugene who is not only father to Jaja and Kambili but also a fanatical catholic strikes fear in the hearts of his wife and children. He stresses it on them that all traditional customs are devilish and unchristian, warning them against engaging in tradition-related activities and even discouraging them from developing a close relationship with his father. This he does because his father is a traditionalist. Thus

the text referring to Eugene, reads: "he prayed for the conversion of our Papa-Nnukwu, so that Papa-Nnukwu would be saved from hell." He tells his children, "...you will go this afternoon to your grandfather's house and greet him...don't touch any food, don't drink anything. And, as usual, you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes" (69). Because of this attitude of their father, what they see: the peace, warmth, love, freedom and laughter in Aunty Ifeoma's family which does not practice the same type of Christianity which their family does, Jaja and Kambili end up confused and more dissatisfied with their own family. As children they had always accepted the rigid views and rules of their father until they experienced something different at both their grand-father's house and in Nsukka when they stay for some time at their Aunty's house. Life in the Eugene's compound in Enugu is fraught with tension, fear, resentment, confusion and a certain kind of foreboding of falling into the bad grace of the master of the house.

Self-realization for both of the children thus begins when they realize the difference in the way their house is run and the way that of Aunty Ifeoma is. They begin to internally question and resent their father and his high-handed way of dealing with them. Hence, actualization begins fully for Jaja when he openly questions his father's rules. He refuses to take communion and defends his action to his father, defying him. His knowledge and acceptance of what is wrong in his life and the steps he takes to correct them are indications that his journey of self-realization has begun. Jaja makes up his mind that he would rather die than go back to the way he lived under his father's shadow in fear and terror, without speaking up. Thus when his father tells him that it is death to abstain from taking the communion, he replies defiantly: "then I will die....Then I will die, papa" (15). This marks a new beginning, that of change for the whole family. The children's mother decides she would no longer attempt to hide the physical abuse and psychological trauma which she receives from Eugene as she tells Kambili that she would not replace the figurines which her husband broke when he threw an object at Jaja. These figurines have been her escape and relief as she

always polished them to soothe herself after every episode of abuse from her husband. Eugene too knows that things have changed with Jaja and that he can no longer control him the way he was wont to. Kambili herself, suspects this as she ponders over and recalls how the change began to take place.

Jaja achieves self-realization at the end of the text and becomes his own man, capable of standing for what he believes in and protecting his family members. He owns up to murdering his father and going to jail in order to protect his mother who poisoned Eugene. Thus, when it is almost time for him to be released from jail, he seems to have become wiser and calmer.

Eugene is a business man and catholic who is devout to a fault and seems to be the most conflicted character in the story. He is caught between indigenous traditional values and western Christianity. He chooses Christianity but is unable to harmonize or integrate fully, the place of the two cultures in his life. This leads to his total abandonment of and disdain for almost all things indigenous. On the other hand, he takes on all things western along with ridiculous and un-needed cultures and eccentricities such as his tea routine which he does every Sunday after mass even though hot tea is an aberration in the tropical hot season. Due to his unhealthy obsession with religion and western ideals, he puts his family through a lot of hardship, demanding all sorts of behaviors from them and punishing them in gruesome and cruel ways when they fall short of his standards. He makes them pray almost all the way from Enugu to the village as they travel. He contrives sins which he forces them to seek penance for. He is physically abusive to the point of beating his wife so that she miscarries. He chops of a piece of one of Jaja's little fingers and scalds both of the children's feet in hot water for sleeping in the same house with their grand-father who he considers a "heathen."

Eugene's own double-ness comes in part as a result of his belonging to both the western and indigenous worlds in a hybrid culture which results in a clash for him. His is a life lived in contrast to his ideals, an outcome of which is intrapersonal conflict. He preaches and appears to be a benevolent, knowledgeable and patient catholic as his workers

and far acquaintances testify. However, he is quite different with his family members to whom he gives "tough love." Thus Eugene is a conflicted individual not only because of his inability to harmonize western and indigenous culture but also because he fails to resolve the conflict of conscience within him which dictates to him whether or not he is doing the right thing. This is seen especially in his punishment of his family members. He cries when scalding Kambili's feet suggesting confusion and an unwillingness to hurt her even though he continues. He tells her: "Kambili, you are precious...you should strive for perfection...he poured the hot water on (her) feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying..." (201). This suggests a sick mind, unresolved and consumed by ignorant fanaticism mixed with wickedness. When Jaja refuses to take communion and on the same day leaves the dining table before he does, Eugene seems resigned and tired of fighting to instill discipline in the boy. Consequently, he does not achieve self-realization as he loses control of his wife and children and does not come to a full knowledge of himself. Additionally, he does not act with or possess justness, confidence, happiness, fairness and other qualities of the self-realized individual as given by Abraham Maslow.

Jaja and Kambili's mother does not achieve self-realization in the text. She is cowed, subdued and abused by Eugene all through their married life without fighting back or quitting the marriage. She does nothing to help or defend herself and her children against him. Even though after a while she becomes pushed to the wall and decides to act, she takes it to an extreme like Eugene does and ends up murdering him systematically in a poisoning process which takes weeks to accomplish. Her psychological state towards the end of the story indicates a battered mind, weighed down by grief and possibly regret of her action as her son is jailed in her stead. She seems also to be mourning the loss of her youth, wrong decisions and years which she spent with Eugene, subjugated and obeying his every wish while failing to protect her children. When the novel closes, she is not much better in spirit or physical strength than when the story opened. Thus,

although she has taken steps to rid her life of its major element of turbulence which is Eugene, she lacks the happiness, self-acceptance and confidence which accompanies self-realization.

Kambili herself is on the road to self-realization when the novel ends. Her journey of self-realization like Jaja's begins fully in *Nsukka*. There she doubts and is able to push to the background and into forgetfulness, her father's dogmatic instructions. She begins to loosen up and finds happiness in living and life like other children. On observing her cousins and hearing the fond manner in which they speak of and recall experiences with their late father, she realizes that her father is not the epitome of parenthood and goodness which she assumed him to be. She also hears a few things about her father. She begins to disobey his rules as she bonds with Papa-Nnukwu, keeps a drawing of the old man and has a good opinion of the young priest whom her father dislikes. Thus she like other family members, find it difficult and hypocritical to mourn Eugene when he dies. She reconciles herself to her place in life and becomes accepting of herself and her relationship with God while doing all she can to comfort her mother and hoping for a brighter future for Jaja. Thus she is more contented at the end of the story more than she is at the beginning.

Another character who is self-realized in the story is Auntie Ifeoma who is comfortable with herself. She knows what she wants and goes for it while exercising her beliefs in fairness. She is happy in spite of her meagre resources and brings up children who are confident and happy with themselves and the world.

Measuring Time

Measuring Time unlike *Purple Hibiscus* does not dwell much on the issue of double-ness as it relates to culture conflict which characterizes the postcolonial subject. Rather, the conflict here even though intrapersonal, is connected with singular individual issues which occur within the individual. Interpersonal conflict: between members of the community and the government or rulers is also present in the text. Mamo and LaMamo the twin brothers who are the focal point of the story, are restless from their childhood days and into their youth. Their killing of Duna, the old woman's dog,

attests to this as their dissatisfaction and search for meaning in life comes through. Even their dreams demonstrate this restlessness. "Some of the rage left Mamo with the death of the dog, though he continued running in his sleep long after his brother had stopped" (29). When they meet their Uncle Haruna, they decide on what they want to do with their life-which is to become famous and celebrated as heroes. With this goal in mind, they run away from home in the company of their cousin Asabar to enroll into the army. This decision on their part indicates that self-realization has begun as they make conscious efforts to achieve their desires. However, Mamo's sickle cell anemia does not allow him fulfill this dream of soldiering as he becomes sick along the way and has to go back home while LaMamo and Asabar pursue their dreams. This leaves him frustrated as unlike his brother and cousin, he is trapped within his unhealthy body. He is alone for the first time without his brother, in a house with an estranged father and an aunty whose comforting stories he has outgrown. He realizes how truly alone he is and this discovery of himself prompts him to try a new path- that of education, in the hopes that it would lead to a realization of self.

Mamo's university days give him respite as he finds solace in "reading anybook that took his fancy from Plato to Fanon" (64). He studies history at the university, a discipline which provided a lot of answers to his questions about life and its complexities. Tragedy strikes again however and he is rusticated from the university as his misses his sessional examinations due to ill health. He falls prey to depression, only coming out of it when he finds a purpose in teaching the students of the Keti Community School history and telling them of their place as future African leaders in a bid to influence their future for the better. He eventually finds happiness when he meets Zara for the second time and they become lovers. He also finds fulfillment in the job of re-writing the history of the Keti people and the biography of the Mai as he concludes that "I am alive and useful and everything will work out fine" (164). This is because he decides that he cannot deceive the people and will only write the truth of the people's history. He therefore realizes that writing is his only defense against Keti's decay

as even unconsciously, as a young boy, he writes down the words of the play performed by the women drama group of his village church and titles it *The Coming* in an attempt to preserve the custom of the community and fight against decay. Thus, Mamo realizes himself by the use of the written word which saves him from boredom and lack of purpose.

LaMamo like his brother achieves self-realization in the text. However, he does this through soldiering as he fights against injustice, speaking up even when he is the odd one out. This results in him killing his platoon or team leader while in Liberia when the man attempts to rape Bintou who later becomes his wife. Even on his return to Keti, he is the one who leads the community in a revolt against the palace for its corrupt and oppressive activities. Thus he says to Mamo "Yesterday, when I came, I could see the hopelessness on the people's faces. There was no light of hope anywhere. I felt as if I had lost my way, as if I had entered some crazy town where the sun never shines... I can't bear that ... all wars are unjust, except the one people fight to liberate themselves from injustice" (95). Consequently, even though he feels fulfilled as having done his part, he ends up dying for it as he is shot in the course of the demonstration.

Zara, Mamo's lover realizes herself to an extent. She lets go of the hurt which her past marriage and loss of the custody of her son brings and finds solace in volunteer work and taking Mamo as a lover. However, she retrogresses and becomes very depressed. It is only at the end that the writer suggests that there might be hope for her as she reaches out in a story to Mamo who then vows to return to her house and help her in any way he can.

Other characters who attain self-realization to an extent, in the novel include Uncle Iliya and Aunty Marina. Uncle Iliya in spite of his meagre earnings and disability still manages to provide jobs and education for youths of Keti community which gives him joy until the government closes the school down due to electioneering reasons. However, he suffers disappointment in his son who turns out to be a loafer and later on, a paralyzed drunk. Aunty Marina whose marriage fails, finds happiness in

nursing the twins especially Mamo who is the child of her heart although she suffers grief in the loss of her brother Lamang and later on LaMamo her nephew.

The other prominent characters in the novel do not achieve self-realization. For Lamang, self-realization and fulfillment is always beyond his reach. It spurs him into politics and instead of giving him satisfaction, results in misery, loneliness and despair. Asabar is cured of his exploring spirit by his experience at the state capital and other towns when he goes with LaMamo to enroll in the army. Thus he becomes a political thug who is addicted to alcohol and drugs and always irritable. This leads to his becoming an invalid as in his thuggery activities during the elections, he is apprehended by the police and shot.

Hence, Mamo, LaMamo, Uncle Iliya and Aunt Marina are self-realized to an extent. They possess Maslow's qualities of self-realized people which include goodness, uniqueness, beauty and justice among others. Lamang and Asabar on the other hand, are not self-realized as instead of progressing or moving forwards, towards individualization and fulfillment, they retrogress.

Conclusion

In this paper, it can be seen that religion alone does not bring self-realization to an individual. Rather, the ability to harmonize this with other aspects of life and achieve contentment is what results in self-realization. The two authors demonstrate in their texts the danger associated with fanaticism and rigid control of children as both of the fathers in the two texts have children who veer off in directions which they do not anticipate. They also demonstrate that self-realization can only be achieved when intrapersonal conflict is dealt with and eliminated within the individual. This is because from here, the individual becomes confident to set and pursue goals which would allow for a resolving of conflict outside of himself and within the larger society. Consequently, self-realization which is characterized by confidence, happiness, fairness, goodness and uniqueness is achieved only when the postcolonial subject resolves his conflicted personality and develops a coping mechanism for surviving life within the society.

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