

## Book Review

### PURPLE HIBISCUS

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By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie  
Fourth Estate (Harper Collins) \$26  
Reviewed by L.E. Scott

The continent – Africa , the country – Nigeria ... a coup has taken place. The editor of an outspoken newspaper is blown to bits because he will not stop criticizing the new military 'head of state'. The owner of the newspaper, a wealthy Nigerian, who has long since given up his 'pagan ways' and embraced the white man's god, is warned by voices of the new government to be careful with the words that come from his pen – as death is walking near him. Unbeknown to 'the voices of the new government', this man fears nothing on earth but the judgment of his new God.

This is the backdrop to Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel. The story she shapes though is not about coups, mass killings, corrupt governments. It is about self-hate, or in the words of James Baldwin, "some Black men of his father's generation believed what white people said about them." Everything around them reinforced their world of nothingness.

The story in Adichie's book is told through the eyes of fifteen-year-old Kambili, who brings us into the house to meet her older brother, mother and father – and it is the fire of self-hate which lives in the father that burns the pages of the novel.

Eugene, the father, has been a very successful businessman; he has provided well for his family. But in doing so, he's paid a terrible price and extracted an almost unbearable obedience from his family.

The core demon in Eugene's being is his belief that he must cleanse himself of his 'African-ness', and embrace the 'white-ness' of colonization. He surrenders his native tongue for English and his 'pagan ways' for Christianity. Eugene's world is a bitter place and without mercy – and the world he has created for his family breathes on their fear of him. Any transgression against the rules of this world can bring about beatings and cruelty beyond belief.

Kambili, this fifteen year old story teller is grown beyond her years. She has felt the brutality of her father's hand and witnessed the sheer madness of rage against her brother and mother. Slowly, this child collages a world where the act of salvation will give birth to an act of killing.

It would not be difficult to view Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus" as a story about a family caught up in a cesspool of twisted family love, hate and deceit – a house full of strangers locked into the 'normality' of what families are today. That would be a disservice to this writer – for living in this book is an array of other lives we see through the eyes of Kambili. Her aunt Ifeoma, who knows the kind of dark world her brother Eugene has created for his family, is not only trying to find a way to save them, but equally, she is trying to save her own family, as her world falls apart. As a professor at the university, where the students are waging a protest against the 'new rules of the state', the generals of the 'new government', believe her hands are locked with those of the protesting students. She has been told by the 'voices of the new government' that "death is walking near her."

*Africana*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a fine writer. When the last page is read, there is a feeling that one has just returned home to visit the family after being away for many years. The returning family member is greeted with love – and standing just in the shadows are the ghosts left behind.