

Boiling Baptisms: Water, Purification, and Catholic Fundamentalism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

It's no secret that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie critiques the Catholic Church in her writing. Her 2003 *Purple Hibiscus* addresses the Catholic fundamentalism of the Church in Nigeria and the oppression resulting from religious absolutism. *Purple Hibiscus* illustrates this complicated nature of religion as a colonial tool of oppression through the eyes of the protagonist, Kambili, as she grows up in postcolonial Nigeria. The residual affects of colonization are evident in the character's external relationships and the internal cultivation of her consciousness, especially in Kambili's understanding of Catholicism and indigenous religion. Critics such as Cynthia Wallace and Anthony Chennells have explored the ways in which the novel handles the blending of culture, specifically Catholicism and Igbo. Building upon these critiques, this paper examines water as a tool in the abusive Catholic fundamentalism of Kambili's father, Eugene. I argue that water plays an important role in understanding Adichie's critique of Catholicism and unveiling the extent of religious oppression within the novel. Utilizing Bhabha's theory of mimicry, this paper explores Eugene's mimicry of Catholic purification rituals as examples of colonial mockery. The horrific baptisms of Kambili and her brother, Jaja, demonstrate their father's belief that religion will cleanse them of uncivilized and sinful indigenous culture. Ultimately, the role of water as a tool for torture and purification exposes the religious absolutism of her father *and* the colonial Catholic establishment of Nigeria.