



## NARRATING HUMAN ECOLOGY IN ADICHIE'S "PURPLE HIBISCUS"

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### Abstract

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has been constructed in such a way as to convey valuable messages to create awareness about the environment and its role in moulding the character of individuals. *Purple Hibiscus* is set in different places of Nigeria-Enugu, Abba and Nsukka. A metamorphosis occurs in the life of the protagonist Kambili as she shifts from Enugu to Nsukka. Kambili and her brother Jaja, enjoyed all privileges while they were at Enugu, except freedom of thought and action. Their house was surrounded by huge trees and beautiful flowers. But the presence of huge compound walls locked up the scent of fruits and flowers. Kambili and Jaja found it difficult to interact freely with the natural surroundings at Enugu, as their Papa wanted them to strictly follow the schedule he prepared for them. When Kambili and Jaja reaches Nsukka, Auntie Ifeoma encourages them to question authority and plants faith and courage in them. The close interaction of Auntie Ifeoma and her children with the trees and flowers in their garden influences Jaja and Kambili and results in the development of self maturity and identity in them. An isolated existence without the support of nature is impossible for human beings. To get benefits from nature without disastrous exploitation we have to understand the value of the natural resources and live harmoniously with nature and our fellow beings. Most of the literary theories have dealt exclusively on the human world in literature and Ecocriticism has played a significant role in connecting the natural world to the textual world. Adichie has wonderfully presented the close association of human world and the natural world through her work *Purple Hibiscus*. In his book, *Practical Ecocriticism* Love considers the linkage between nature and culture in shaping human attitudes and behaviour ((Love 2003:8). The Ecocritical stance redirects our attention on the renewal of human-nature interaction necessary for a healthy existence on Earth.

Keywords: Environment, Literary world, Exploitation, Renewal

Ecocriticism emphasizes the interconnectedness between human and non-human world as perceived and reflected in a literary text. Gottlieb (2006) is of opinion that shame and guilt about the present environmental crisis can lead to deep fears about the future. A

great concern for symbols of nature can be identified in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Setting, detail and diction work together to create a cohesive tone in *Purple Hibiscus*. Set against the back drop of political unrest in Nigeria, the story is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, Kambili, a young girl who lives with her

powerful and tyrannical father, her emotionally and physically weakened mother who gains strength and courage to overcome bitter experiences in life and her silent brother who turns out rebellious to attain freedom and independence. The physical setting in *Purple Hibiscus* is symbolic of the clash between African and Western civilizations and the dichotomy between the urban and rural settings.

The novel is set in the South eastern Nigerian town of Enugu, Nsukka and Abba which are predominantly populated by the Igbos. Enugu, a sprawling metropolis represents western civilization as it is the site of industrialization and development in comparison to the rural and dusty university town of Nsukka. Abba is the ancestral town of the Achikes which they visit every year during Christmas.

Kambili's description of the house in Enugu alludes to a grand palace with plenty of trees and flowers. Yet the vast space is comparable to a prison surrounded by very high compound walls which restricted interaction with the outer world.

The narrator mentions on the fast blooming of the red hibiscuses in Enugu which can be considered as a representation of violence and bloodshed which frequently occurred in the Achike family.

The character Mama frequently uses these flowers to decorate the church altar which can be considered as a submission of her pains and sorrows before Christ, the Savior, and this very act of Mama makes a beautiful link between nature and religion. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars (Adichie 2007: 9).

Kambili also describes on the majesty of their four storeyed house at Abba with a fountain in front and a variety of trees surrounding it. Our house still took my breath away, the four-story white majesty of it, with the spurting fountain in

front and the coconut trees flanking it on both sides and the orange trees dotting the front yard (55).

Compared to Enugu, Abba was a comfortable place for the children as they didn't had any schedules during their stay there. But they couldn't enjoy complete freedom as they were still under the strict control of their Papa. What made Abba special was the presence of their grandfather, Papa –Nnukwu's house and the narrator describes the place as surrounded by plants and animals which shows that he lived in close association with the natural world. Two goats and a few chickens sauntered around, nibbling and pecking at dry stems of grass (63).

Unlike Enugu and Abba, rural Nsukka was a place of total freedom for Jaja and Kambili as there was no one to control their movements and thoughts. Hence the freedom they enjoyed in Nsukka was not just physical, but intellectual as well. Aunty Ifeoma's children were allowed to develop their own views about life, politics, religion and culture and as they started interacting with their cousins, Kambili and Jaja slowly developed their social skills and began to talk and play more freely.

Aunty Ifeoma grows the purple hibiscus, a rare hybrid created by a botanist friend of hers. Jaja is attracted to the flowers when he reaches Nsukka. For Jaja, the flower being a new creation and uniquely beautiful, represent freedom. It is a symbol of an alternative to the rigid life that has been created by their father for him and his sister. When he takes the stalks to his home, he brings with them a new sense of self and possibility.

In the first chapter Kambili describes her bedroom and their whole compound as bordered by flowers, trees, and insects as well as the interaction of these with human beings:

I sat at my bed room window after I changed; the cashew tree was so close I could reach out and pluck a leaf if it were not for silver-colored crisscross of mosquito netting. The bell-shaped yellow fruits hung lazily, drawing buzzing bees that bumped against my window's netting. (8)

The brief descriptions on seasons, the varieties of flowers and their scents, show a direct connection between the natural and literary world. It was rainy season and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers (9).

The short descriptions on food which can be frequently found in this novel, also links the natural and the fictional world. The soup was thick with chunks of boiled beef and dried fish and dark green onugbu leaves (11-12).

When Papa was in disagreement with Jaja about not receiving the communion, his anger was uncontrollable. Kambili relates this situation to nature. She felt like the compound walls crumbling and squashing the frangipani trees causing an equal imbalance in her house and the natural surroundings. The compound wall would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani trees. The sky would cave in. (14)

At many instances in *Purple Hibiscus* the narrator proudly expresses her father's love and care for his children by using the natural world although the pains inflicted by his punishments weighed more in their lives. "When I had thought of heaven as a child, I visualized Papa's room, the softness, the creaminess, the endlessness. I would snuggle into Papa's arms when harmattan thunderstorms raged outside, flinging mangoes against the window netting and making the electric wires hit each other and spark bright orange flames." (41)

Eugene's affection for children are identifiable at many instances in *Purple Hibiscus*. He wished to protect his children from all kinds of sin although he could never recognize his own guilts. Auntie Ifeoma's questions him for misunderstanding people and evaluating them without considering their good deeds.

Unlike Jaja, Kambili's love for her father was real, even though Kambili was scared to respond to her father's uncontrollable anger. Her admiration for her father is visible at many instances in the novel. She compares the expressions on his face to objects of nature.

I would focus on his lips, the movement, and sometimes I forgot myself, sometimes I wanted to stay like that forever, listening to his voice, to the important things he said. It was the same way I felt when he smiled, his face breaking open like a coconut with brilliant white meat inside. (25)

One of the most important periods in a woman's life, pregnancy and the related difficulties are explained by linking to nature. Kambili compares her mother's weakened body to the cracked harmattan soil when she was pregnant. Her skin, usually the smooth brown of groundnut paste, looked like the liquid sucked out of it, ashen, like the color of cracked harmattan soil (30).

Weather plays a significant role in the novel. Rain and wind reflect the drama that unfolds in Achike's family. A significant change in the lives of Kambili and Jaja happens when they reach Abba, their hometown during Christmas. Kambili explains on a sudden change in the atmosphere foreshadowing the later crisis in the family.

Kambili and Jaja adhered to their Papa's strict rules, until they experienced a different world in Nsukka. Papa was very adamant in making his children follow Christian customs, but spending a long time in Auntie Ifeoma's place gave way to a sudden metamorphosis. Also, Papa- Nnukwu who was a heathen according to Eugene and his belief in the God of the lands influences Kambili and Jaja which affects their belief in Christianity.

The morning winds were swift on the day we left, pulling and pushing the whistling pine trees so that they bent and twisted as, if bowing to dusty god, their leaves and branches thanking the same sound as a football referee's whistle (53). The bowing of the whistling pine trees in front of the dusty God symbolize the submission of Jaja and Kambili to the pagan beliefs of Papa Nnukwu.

In *Purple Hibiscus* palm tree stand as a symbol of good over evil. Kevin, Papa's driver also shared the cruel nature of Eugene who never bothered about his children's likes or dislikes. When they reached their hometown, Kambili and Jaja got permission from their father to meet their grandpa and even if they wished to spend a long time with

him, Eugene ordered them to return after fifteen minutes. After parking the car, Kevin reminded the children about their father's instructions. At this time Kambili stares at a scar on Kevin's neck which was formed when he fell from a palm tree.

I stared at the scar on Kevin's neck before I got out of the car. He had fallen from a palm tree in his hometown in the Niger Delta area, a few years ago while on vacation. The scar ran from the center of his head to the nape of his neck. It was shaped like a dagger. (63)

Eugene feared to send his children to Papa Nnukwu's house as he believed that he was a heathen. But when Kambili examined his eyes to find signs of any difference, of Godlessness she couldn't find any. Papa Nnukwu believed in the God of the lands and he is a true representation of human nature interaction in *Purple Hibiscus*.

I watched a gray rooster walk into the shrine at the corner of the yard, where Papa- Nnukwu's God was, where Papa said Jaja and I were never to go near. The shrine was a low, open shed, its mud roof and walls covered with dried palm fronds. It looked like the grotto behind St. Agnes, the one dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. (66)

A significant change happens in the Achike family when Auntie Ifeoma comes to their house in the home town, a very bold and vibrant woman whose fearlessness was visible in her talk and laughter. It is she who takes the children with her and helps them to develop as individuals. Adichie presents this sudden change in their lives by linking it to nature. Auntie 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 (71).

Green tree branches signify solidarity in *Purple Hibiscus*. Kambili explains on the driver's act of placing green tree branches above their car to exhibit support to the demonstrators at the Government Square. The first week after the coup, Kevin plucked green tree branches every morning and stuck them to the car, lodged about the number plate, so that the demonstrators at Government

Square would let us drive past. The green branches meant Solidarity.(27)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we can also identify a direct link between Nigerian rituals and nature. When Kambili and Jaja were travelling to Ezi Icheke along with Auntie Ifeoma, Papa Nnukwu and their cousins, they found people participating in pagan masquerades. They had heard stories about mmuo, who were considered as spirits climbed out of ant holes, some of whom had scary features created by combining plants and animals. A squirming tortoise was tied to its fore head. A snake and tree dead chickens hung from its grass-covered body swinging as the mmuo walked.(86)

Although Kambili's father, Eugene was an unkind person at home, his generosity was famous outside and he never hesitated to contribute enough money for religious matters. Adichie through *Purple Hibiscus* presents guilty priests who work for belly's sake escaping their real duty of providing spiritual food to the people and she uses elements of nature to make funny contrasts in order to highlight the unhealthy practices working at church.

When the M.C. announced the amount, the priest got up and started to dance, jerking his behind this way and that, and the crowd rose up and cheered so loudly it was like the rumbling of thunder at the end of rainy season.(90)

Adichie uses the image of snake in order to emphasize the sinful nature of those priests who keep a crystal clear character outwardly. His eyes were the same green shade of a snake I had seen once, slithering across the yard near the hibiscus bushes. (105)

Auntie Ifeoma struggled a lot to get permission from Eugene for taking Kambili and Jaja to her home by convincing him that she will take them for a pilgrimage to Aokpe. Before leaving to Nsukka, Eugene gave them schedules for those days and Adichie compares this to the pruning of plants by a gardener. Auntie Ifeoma's children had freedom to think, act and talk at home and they expressed their emotions and feelings at ease. Unlike Eugene who pressurized his children to live up to his expectations, Auntie Ifeoma was a loving parent who

respected the right of every humanbeing. She wanted to help Jaja and Kambili get out of such an airtight atmosphere and cherish every moment of their lives. She was also ready to provide good attention even though she doubted on the comforts of good food and accommodation she can give to them. She wanted to mould them into lively figures by replacing them from the prison created by their Papa.

Jaja and I stood by hibiscus bushes, waiting. The gardener was clipping away at the bougainvillea, taming the flowers that defiantly stuck out of the leveled top. He had raked underneath the frangipani trees, and dead leaves and pink flowers lay in piles, ready for the wheelbarrow. Here are your schedules for the week you will stay in Nsukka, Papa said. The sheet of paper he thrust into my hand was similar to the schedule pasted above my study desk up stairs, except he had penciled in two hours of time with your cousins each day (108).

After entering the town of Nsukka the narrator mentions on a road narrowed down by erosion, a sign of nature's response to the pollution and damage caused due to heavy traffic on road. When we came to a point just past the market where the road had narrowed, eaten away by erosion at the sides, he stopped for a while to let other cars go by (111).

Adichie presents the character Auntie Ifeoma as a representation of hope and freedom. The Marguerite Cartwright Avenue where her flat was situated was bordered by tall gmelina trees and there was a statue of a black lion in the middle of the lawn. She lived in close association with nature and in front of her flat there was a garden where roses, lilies, hibiscuses, ixora and croton grew in plenty, and she used to spend most of her time in the garden may be as an escape from worldly tensions. In front was a circular burst of bright colors--a garden- fenced around with barbed wire. Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a hand painted wreath (112).

On the pedestal of the black lion statue it was inscribed: "To restore the dignity of man." Jaja reads this aloud, indicating the later restoration of their

dignity by Jaja and Kambili after their experiences in Auntie Ifeoma's house.

Kambili's father Eugene was a highly respected person and nobody dared to outwit his decisions. But Auntie Ifeoma, Eugene's sister expressed her dislike towards imposing his strict rules upon his children. The narrator compares her to a whistling pine tree bending on a windy day (124).

Adichie uses elements of nature to convey the behavior and attitudes of characters in *Purple Hibiscus*, which also shows Auntie Ifeoma's courage to outwit Eugene's strict rules.

Auntie Ifeoma stared at the paper in Jaja's hand. Then she started to laugh so hard that she staggered, her tall body bending like a whistling pine tree on a winding day. Eugene gave you a schedule to follow when you're here? Nekwanu anya, what does that mean? (124)

At many situations in the novel the narrator compares human beings to plants and animals. At least people flocked there like they are flocking to Aokpe now. *O bugodi*, like migrating locusts (138).

And on the other hand, she uses emotions and feelings of people in order to convey the working pattern of natural elements. The spotless tub had a triangular hole at one corner and the water groaned like a man in pain as it drained (127).

Man threatens his own natural surroundings, which result in its response in uncontrollable ways. Nature's reply to the harms it had to suffer comes in different forms like soil erosions, strong winds, thunders, heavy rains etc. Most of these forms of response from nature are visible at various instances in the novel *Purple Hibiscus*. Auntie Ifeoma stopped to pluck at some browned leaves in the garden as we walked to the car muttering that the harmattan was killing her plants. (128)

In *Purple Hibiscus* we can also find so many old buildings damaged due to the impact of natural calamities. The building was old; I could tell from the color and from the coated with the dust of so many harmattans that they ever shine again (129).

In Christianity there is an implication that nature is created for the human beings and thus have a right to exploit nature. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the narrator speaks on the blooming of red hibiscuses, which Mama used to decorate the church altar. There are other people in her prayer group who plucked flowers for their selfish needs. This shows man's dominance over nature, in contrast to Mama, a lover of nature and religion who offers the flowers she carefully planted to the Christ. It was mostly Mama's prayer group members who plucked flowers; a woman tucked one behind her ear once-I saw her clearly from my window. But even the government agents, two men in black jackets who came some time ago, yanked at the hibiscus as they left. (9)

The various places mentioned in the novel are surrounded by trees, shrubs and flowers in order to highlight nature's interaction with human beings. The houses we drove past had sunflower hedges, and the palm-size flowers brightened the foliage in big yellow polka dots. The hedges had many gaping holes, so I could see the backyards of the houses--the metal water tanks balanced on unpainted cement blocks, the old tire swings hanging from guava trees, the clothes spread out on lines tied tree to tree.(129)

One of the most important aspects of human-nature interaction is the capacity of plants to cure human diseases. Nsukka, was surrounded by a variety of trees some of which had high medicinal value. While travelling through Nsukka in their car Amaka mentions on the healing capacity of dogonyaro leaves.This can also signify the mental healing of Jaja and Kambili after reaching Nsukka.

Gmelina and dogonyaro trees stood firmly on either side. The sharp, astringent scent of the dogonyaro leaves filled the car, and Amaka breathed deeply and said they cured malaria. We were in a residential area, driving past bungalows in wide compounds with rose bushes and faded lawns and fruit trees.(130)

Aunty Ifeoma always talked with great enthusiasm about her garden and Jaja also shared the same kind of pleasure she had and wondered on the beauty of nature filled with different colors of

plants. She also considers the possibility of finding the presence of God in nature,thus elevating nature to the highest level. "Aren't they pretty?" Aunty Ifeoma asked. "Look at that, green and pink and yellow on the leaves. Like God playing with paint brushes." "Yes", I said. Aunty Ifeoma was looking at me, and I wondered if she was thinking that my voice lacked the enthusiasm of Jaja's when she talked about her garden. (142-143)

Purple Hibiscus stands as a symbol of hope and freedom for Jaja and is highly fascinated by the sight of the rare colored hibiscus in Aunty Ifeoma's garden. The narrator also briefly explains Jaja's attainment of confidence and strength while he is in Aunty Ifeoma's garden. Here we can identify nature's position as a reliever of human tensions.I look up to watch him, to watch his dark skin covered with beads of sweat that gleamed in the sun. I had never seen his arm move this way, never seen this piercing light in his eyes that appeared when he was in Aunty Ifeoma's garden. (145)

Narrator also uses symbols of nature in order to highlight the severity of punishment Eugene enforces upon his wife and children. Jaja's little finger was deformed like a dried stick as a result of his father's punishment.

Jaja's deformed little finger is compared to a dried stick which was the result of his father's punishment for missing two questions on his catechism test.

Blooming of flowers in her garden is considered as a matter of great significance by Aunty Ifeoma and she protects them like her children. She also eagerly waits for the tiny buds to open up which will enhance her happiness. Comparing to the contemporary situation, when people selfishly use their surroundings considering it as their property for dominance, Aunty Ifeoma stands out as a savior of nature. "This is about to bloom", Aunty Ifeoma said to Jaja pointing at an ixora bud. "Another two days and it will open its eyes to the world"(146).

Kambili and Jaja scared to be defiant and was under the complete control of their Papa until they reached Aunty Ifeoma's place. She played a

significant role in their lives to help them gain strength and courage. Auntie Ifeoma explained to them about the defiant king, Jaja of Opobo who refused to support the British and was exiled to West Indies by them. She convinced Jaja and Kambili that defiance can be a good thing sometimes. She compares it to marijuana. An abstract idea, like defiance is conveyed by utilizing objects of nature. Here Adichie successfully applies a simile to provide a wider understanding. "Defiance is like marijuana- it is not a bad thing when it is used right" (144).

In literature, buzzing of a bee is always compared to death or approaching death, as seen in Emily Dickinson's *I heard a fly buzz, when I died* likewise in *Purple Hibiscus*, when Papa -Nnukwu, Kambili grandfather reaches Auntie Ifeoma's house Kambili mentions on the buzz of a bee around the garden. "Papa-Nnukwu's body had weakened due to his old age, his eyes drooped and his lids looked as though they had weights placed on them. The sudden change in Papa-Nnukwu's health and his approaching death is likened to natural objects in order to show the integration of man and his surroundings. "Papa-Nnukwu is so skinny now," Jaja said. We were sitting side by side on the verandah. The sun had fallen and there was a light breeze. (153)

Like his daughter, Papa-Nnukwu was also a great lover of nature. He loved to have breakfast by watching the morning sun and the sight of men climbing the palm trees also gave him great pleasure.

Papa-Nnukwu had woken up before everyone else. He wanted to have breakfast sitting on the verandah, to watch the morning sun. And also Auntie Ifeoma asked Obiora to spread a mat on the verandah, and we all sat and had breakfast with Papa-Nnukwu, listening to him talk about the men who tapped palm wine in the village and how they left at dawn to climb up palm trees because the trees gave sour wine after the sun rose. I could tell that he missed the village, that he missed seeing those palm trees the men climbed, with a raffia belt encircling them and the tree trunk. (162)

At one instance in the novel, Papa-Nnukwu even requests Ani, the God of land to share the very

little amount of food he had, which shows his close relation to the natural world. I watched him, the smile on his face, the easy way he threw the molded morsel out toward the garden, where parched herbs swayed in the light breeze, asking Ani, the God of land to eat with him. (65)

Papa- Nnukwu also considered nature as a supporter in his old age, who lived alone in his house. We can find him depending on natural objects for support. When he walked us to the car, balancing on his crooked walking stick made from a tree branch (67).

Adichie also uses fruits and trees in order to draw connections between the different stages in a man's life and the natural world. The narrator links Papa-Nnukwu's young age to his capacity to pluck icheku easily from trees.

I remembered what he had said about simply reaching out to pluck icheku from the tree, in his youth. The only icheku tree I had seen was huge, with branches grazing the roof of duplex. Still I believed Papa- Nnukwu, that he had simply raised his hands to pluck the black icheku pods from the branches. (152)

Like Jaja, Kambili also gained courage to speak during her stay at Auntie Ifeoma's house. Amaka teases her many times, but Kambili kept silence in the beginning, later she grew up as an individual and could adjust well with her new surroundings. She starts responding to matters she couldn't afford. This transformation in her character is compared to the rustling of crotons in the late morning breeze. I watched a wilted African lily fall from its stalk in the garden. The crotons rustled in the late morning breeze. "You don't have to shout, Amaka," I said finally" (170).

Kambili's shifting attitude towards nature signifies her stage of transformation from ignorance to maturity. Earlier when she showers at Nsukka, Kambili finds an earthworm in the tub and she removes it to the toilet rather than co-existing with it. "AN EARTHWORM WAS slithering in the bathtub, near the drain, when I went in to take a bath in the morning. The purplish-brown body contrasted with the whiteness of the tub...Before I

climbed into the tub, I picked the ropelike body out with a twig broken off a broom and threw it in the toilet”(Adichie 232-233).

Kambili’s mingling with Father Amadi helps her to develop a sense of maturity and self-awareness. She could never imagine falling in love with someone while she was in Enugu. Her chance to experience a man’s love was also less as she always had to suppress her emotions while being there. She separated herself from everything in nature. But her interaction with Father Amadi helped her to recognise her connection with the natural surroundings. This awareness of Kambili gets revealed through her changed attitude towards everything in nature. When Father Amadi takes Kambili to Mama Joe’s shed to plait her hair, she watched a determined snail repeatedly crawling out of the basket and links it to her desire to crawl out of Enugu which always was a prison for her. “She picked up an enterprising snail that was crawling out of the open basket...I wondered if it was the same snail, crawling out, being thrown back in, and then crawling out again. Determined, I wanted to buy the whole basket and set that one snail free”(Adichie 238).

And later when Kambili bathes with rain water she leaves the earthworm without trying to disturb its peaceful existence. This illustrates Kambili’s growth as an individual ready to protect the natural surroundings rather than threatening it.

THAT NIGHT WHEN I BATHED, with a bucket half full of rain water...I did not heat water, either, because I was afraid that the heating coil would make the rainwater lose the scent of the sky.I sang as I bathed. There were more earthworms in the bathtub, and I left them alone, watching the water carry them and send them down the drain (Adichie 269-270)

At this instance we can identify Kambili enjoying the comfort of nature as a relief for her pressurised life under the power of her father. “So we don’t flush when we urinate, only when there is actually something to flush. Or sometimes, when the water does not run for a few days, we just close the lid until everybody has gone and then we flush with one bucket. It saves water”. Auntie Ifeoma was

smiling ruefully”(Adichie 121). Now a days man threatens the natural resources like water by polluting it and also by its unnecessary wastage. In contrast to this Adichie presents Auntie Ifeoma as a protector of natural resources and thus highlights on her concern for nature.

Papa-Nnukwu cleared his throat. “Long ago when animals talked and lizards were few, there was a big famine in the land of the animals.Farms dried up and the soil cracked.Hunger killed many of the animals and the ones left behind did not even have the strength to dance the mourning dance at funerals.One day all the male animals had a meeting to decide what could be done,before hunger wiped out the whole village. They all staggered to the meeting,bony and weak.Even Lion’s roar was now like the whine of a mouse.Tortoise could hardly carry his shell. It was only dog that looked well.His fur shone with good health and you could not see the bones under his skin because they were padded with flesh.The animals all asked Dog how he remained so well in the midst of famine. ‘I have been eating feces like I always do,’Dog answered(Adichie 158).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie incorporates a story of big famine in the land of animals told by the character Papa-Nnukwu,that shows her concern for whole living things in nature.

The gleaming of the statue of the preening lion in the Marguerite Cartwright Avenue stood as a hope for restoration of dignity for Jaja and Kambili when Auntie Ifeoma was residing there. But when she left the place they lost the comfort of a helping hand. “Most of lawns on the university grounds are overgrown now; the long grasses stick up like green arrows. The statue of the preening lion no longer gleams”(Adichie 298).

Yet Kambili decides to visit Nsukka,which was always a place of hope and freedom. Nsukka is presented as a place that can rejuvenate the spirits with its close association with everything in nature. Kambili stops at Nsukka before meeting Jaja at the prison. Kambili believes that she can come out of the tensions about Jaja’s release from the Jail by visiting Nsukka. She wished to take in the freshness

of the air that smells of hills and history that can free her from the tensions within her.

I laughed because Nsukka's untarred roads coat cars with dust in the harmattan and with sticky mud in the rainy season. Because the tarred roads spring potholes like surprise presents and the air smells of hills and history and the sunlight scatters the sand and turns it into gold dust. Because Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song (Adichie 299).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, nature appears as a comfort zone for the characters at many instances and shared their sorrows. When Jaja and Kambili were young, their Papa asked them to get the sticks themselves in order to receive punishment and they always chose whistling pine branches which were malleable compared to the stiffer branches of the *gmelina* or the avocado.

The attacks of Harmattan on the earth signifies disturbances that affect the lives of Kambili and Jaja. But Jaja always kept a hope of overcoming those disturbances and problems and earlier his eyes stuck upon the purple hibiscuses of Auntie Ifeoma's house by planting them in his own house he firmly believed that he can bring home the happiness and freedom his cousins enjoyed in their aunt's house. With this hope he brings the stalks of purple hibiscus and Auntie Ifeoma supports his plan, saying that the stalks might take root if it were watered regularly even if it was still harmattan. This shows the chance of acquiring freedom even in the presence of problems at home.

The environment is used to reflect both the inner turmoil and joy of the characters. When Ade Coker died there was heavy rain and wind and it formed a pool beside the hibiscuses. Narrator explains on the effect of such an unbearable event on Papa.

Papa crumpled on a sofa in the living room, sobbing. He seemed so small. Papa who was so tall that he sometimes lowered his head to get through doorways, that his tailor always used extra fabric to sew his trousers. Now he seemed small; he looked like a rumpled roll of fabric. (206-207)

Hibiscuses were planted by Jaja with a hope of gaining freedom from Papa. Ade Coker's death brought great pain in Papa and the pool beside the hibiscuses, signifies the melting down of Papa's stubbornness and which paved way for the gradual conquering of Papa by Beatrice and her children. Back at home, Jaja gains courage and starts becoming defiant. He ignores his father's strict rules and doesn't go to communion which was considered as a terrible guilt by Eugene. Narrator considers this very act of defiance as the result of their life in Nsukka and compares Jaja's defiance to Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus, which was rare, fragrant and which stood as a hope for freedom.

Nsukka started it all; Auntie Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do (16).

While going on a pilgrimage to Aokpe, the narrator explains on the sun taking the color and shape of the blessed Virgin thus elevating nature to the level of its creator's mother.

The sun turned white, the color and shape of the host. And then I saw her, the Blessed Virgin: an image in the pale sun, a red glow on the back of my hand, smile on the face of the rosary-bedecked man whose arm rubbed against mine. She was everywhere. (274-275)

When Auntie Ifeoma went to Lagos for her visa interview Kambili and Jaja were very sad and even if she asked them to pray for her visa they couldn't do that. Here the narrator describes on the tension in Auntie Ifeoma's house until she returned from Lagos and she interrelates this tension to the insects which had stopped buzzing. At this instance, the tensions and pressures in the human world can be related to the disturbances in the natural world. When Auntie Ifeoma finalised her decision to go to America with her children, it was unbearable for Kambili and Jaja and the pressure within them also

brought about a tension in the atmosphere. Finality hung in the air, heavy and hollow. (279)

A little before Papa's death, Aunty Ifeoma took the children for a short pleasure trip to a hill and the experiences they had at that time shows the development in Jaja and Kambili. They could run fast up the hill and could easily laugh. So many things seemed easy for them. While at Enugu, they were scared to enjoy complete freedom and silence pervaded their surroundings except for the occasional out bursts of their Papa's anger.

The narrator relates on sudden changes in the atmosphere before and after the death of Papa, a disturbance in the family leading to an imbalance in environment. The sun had turned red and was about to fall when Aunty Ifeoma said we had to leave.(286)

After his death there was continuous showering of rain and there was a chance of cashews and mangoes falling from the trees and to get rot, which will bring forth a different rare kind of fragrance, the fragrance of freedom which Jaja seeks to attain. Outside, the rain came down in slants, hitting the closed windows with a furious rhythm. It would hurl down cashews and mangoes from the trees and they would start to rot in the humid earth, giving out that sweet-and-sour scent.(288)

The sweet and sour scent of the rotting fruits can signify a blended experience of happiness and sorrow in the Achike family after Papa's death. With papa's death the entire family can enjoy complete freedom from the airtight atmosphere. But Papa was certainly a protector for the children, leaving aside the severe punishments he imposed upon them. Hence his death can bring about both sweet and sour experiences into their lives. Jaja had to surrender before the police for the murder his mother committed.

After visiting Jaja at the prison, Kambili speaks to her mother about her plans for the future. At this moment, the narrator mentions on her plan for planting new orange trees at Abba and on how she expects Jaja to plant purple hibiscus and ixora. She was laughing as she was standing with her mother escaping all tensions in life. She felt as if the clouds were too low, allowing her to touch it and she hopes

for a new beginning, as the new rains will come down soon. Here new rain symbolises a new beginning which will wipe away their sins and sorrows.

### Concluding Remarks

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996:XVIII). Nature and the environment plays a significant role in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, which at many instances become inseparable from the narrative. It certainly functions as a highlighter to several situations in the novel. In the climactic conclusion of the novel, the characters split out of their shells and change in surprising, if not shocking ways. The entropy and rebellion that have been fueling throughout the book ignite in a fatal spark and the rule of the empire burns down. Adichie creates a masterful work with *Purple Hibiscus*, a work that is carefully planted, lovingly tended and brilliantly bloomed.

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