

**Interspecies relationships in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*: an ecofeminist's perspective**

**Adeyemi Amos ADEGBOYEGA**

<sup>a b</sup> ORCID No: 0000-0002-9746-9117

**Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria <sup>a</sup>**

**Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria <sup>b</sup>**

[adeyemi.adegbovega@bowen.edu.ng](mailto:adeyemi.adegbovega@bowen.edu.ng); [aadegbovega18@gmail.com](mailto:aadegbovega18@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

The world that literature mirrors is not just a human world. Nonhumans are important as they play significant roles in understanding and interpreting realities around humans. Conscious of this, literary artists especially those that are inclined to feminism weave into the plot of their works an undeniable, inseparable but indirect link between human and non-human elements, including elements of nature. In instances where this subsists, no interpretation of the plot can be done neglecting the roles of non-human or elements of nature. This makes them symbolic and essential in understanding the experiences of the human character(s) they are linked to, mostly female. An investigation of the relationship between humans and nonhumans is the crux of this study for which Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is purposively selected. This study, a critical qualitative analysis adopts ecofeminism as its theoretical underpinning. In its postulation, ecofeminism believes that concerns that are feminist are similar to concerns of nature and its elements. For ecofeminism therefore, an injury to the female gender is an injury to nature and its elements. It is from this perspective that the study x-rays the connections between human characters, elements of nature as well as ornaments in the novel. The study finds that nonhumans have significant implications for the human characters to which they are linked. Their roles cannot be downplayed in understanding and interpreting the realities human characters. It is based on this that the study concludes that no critical engagement and interpretation of *Purple Hibiscus* can be done neglecting the role of nonhumans as deployed by the novelist.

**Keywords:** interspecies, ecocriticism ecofeminism, anthropocentric, *purple hibiscus*.

## Introduction

As this examination of *Purple Hibiscus* begins, so many probing questions pop up. Recurring among these questions is why the title *Purple Hibiscus*? Why not *Kambili* or any other eponymous title that tilts towards a feminist orientation. Probably, if the aforementioned had been, a sturdy basis would have been provided for the myriad of scholarly interpretations and engagements of the novel from the feminist orientation. Justifiably however, the dispositions of the lead characters to issues around them as events unfold in the novel, serve as a strong premise for the different seeming feminist interpretations of the novel.

A close examination of the lead characters: Kambili – a forlorn daughter, Beatrice – a conformist albeit brutalized wife, Chukwuka famously called Jaja – a non-conformist and rebellious son; all under the care of Eugene – an ardent catholic and symbol of patriarchy, reveals an oppressive familial relationship that was endured until the first three characters assumed new personalities. For Kambili, the character-narrator, her development and assumption of a new personality can be linked to her gradual interaction with non-human species, and the symbolic role of the later in the denouement of the storyline. Similarly, Beatrice's attachment to her figurines, beyond the superficial love for ornaments, especially as her relief technique in the face of patriarchal brutalities underscores the attachment between human and non-human elements in the novel. Justifiably therefore, the symbolic title *Purple Hibiscus* foregrounds the significant interspecies relationships in the novel. The concern in this study is to investigate the interspecies relationship from the perspective of ecofeminism in the novel and its role in resolving the conflict of the plot. The justification for this is based on Patrícia Vieira's submission that 'texts are only a way to reach out to the world, a window through which we can contemplate reality' (71) and *Purple Hibiscus* has been selected purposively for this investigation.

The fact that the world which literature mirrors is not only a human world is at the forefront of ecocriticism. Though relatively new in the field of literary theorization and criticism, theorists and scholars have expressed different opinions on their perception of ecocriticism. Sule Egeya opines that prior to the emergence of ecocriticism in the 1990s, literary criticism had 'neglected the active role of nature and the environment in literature'. It is based on this that he submits that

[e]cocriticism is therefore articulated with two broad aims, namely (1) the recognition and foregrounding of nature and environment in literature and (2) an advocacy for environmental justice; that is to say, demanding justice for brutalized physical and spiritual environments and the peoples inhabiting them.

(2)

Cited in Ann B. Dobie's *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*, Simon C. Estok in 'Shakespeare and Ecocriticism' submits that ecocriticism includes

[...] the study of "any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function— thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise—of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds." (239)

In her opinion, Ann B. Dobie submits that in its entirety, ecocriticism is 'interested in examining the relationship of literature and nature as a way to renew a reader's awareness of the nonhuman world and his or her responsibility to sustain it' (239).

A deducible point from the views examined above is that ecocriticism is hinged on and provides a basis for the investigation of interspecies relationship – between humans, non-humans as wells as other inanimate objects – in literature. It is based on this that non-human entities in the literary world are anthropocentrically viewed and given essence. With this, the non-human entities play significant roles in the development and self-assertion of characters with whom they directly or indirectly relate in any literary creation. What this portends is that beyond their zoophytical nature, these non-human entities assume specific human attributes, lacking in some human characters and others that are inspirational to some human characters. As such, their sustenance or destruction as would be examined later in the study has grave and serious implications for the characters to which they are linked.

As earlier stated, a corpus of critical engagements of *Purple Hibiscus* is from the feminist perspective. As an acclaimed feminist herself, Adichie has not hidden her continued agitation for

the rights of women through her writings. Laure Clémence Capo- Chichi Zanou et al provides justification for this. According to them,

Adichie is engaged to work with women, and through her writings, she gives them the means to empower themselves and the opportunity to achieve their highest potential. She intends to remove the stereotypical portraiture of women and move towards stronger representation of women characters not only taking active and shared roles with men, but also taking responsibility for their own destinies. To achieve her vision, she is convinced that, for lasting change to occur, it has to start from the family, a place where men usually assert their power over the women and get them fall submissive. (66)

Some of the views earlier expressed on *Purple Hibiscus* (both from feminist and non-feminist orientations) will be examined forthwith.

In his examination of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Sky High Flames* as a female bildungsroman, Ogaga Okuyade in 'Weaving Memories of Childhood: The New Nigerian Novel and the Genre of the *Bildungsroman*' identifies four distinct characteristics of the subgenre. According to him,

[f]irst, there is the awakening, when the character becomes aware that her condition of life is a limitation to her aspiration for a better future [and this] prompts the character to question herself as a human being, her social status and her gender. Second, the main character gains self-awareness through her relationships with a network of women, who guide and support her in becoming self-reliant in a patriarchal society. This network provides the character with moral guidance in the face of gender adversity. Third, the character explores her femininity and begins redefining her identity as she journeys into adulthood. Finally, as the character reaches a point of maturity and independence, she takes control of her transition or journey of self-discovery. The character reaches this pinnacle with the help of the women who have guided her. (145/6)

While acknowledging that the development of the protagonists in the selected novels covered the aforementioned stages as well as the roles played by other human characters in these developments, he down played the very important and significant roles of non-human characters in these developments and in the climax and resolution of the conflict in the novels, in this instance *Purple Hibiscus*. This is in a way similar to what Nilima Meher examined in '(Re) writing postcolonial Bildungsroman in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*'. While focusing on the development of Kambili the protagonist, Meher, paid attention to the political and historical background of the novel and this informs his conclusion that '[f]inally, Kambili wins over the proto-colonial power against her. She is the purple hibiscus who has made her root strong, who no longer need needs the help of anyone to grow' (210).

Laure Clémence Capo- Chichi Zanou et al in 'Social Environment and Empowerment in Chimamanda N. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*' focused on women empowerment and disempowerment occasioned by their childhood experiences and their social environment. In their study, considering the childhood experiences of the protagonist, Kambili and her brother Jaja, they saw Enugu as a place of disempowerment, Abba as the beginning of self-discovery and Nsukka as a place of empowerment. These different places had different impacts on the lives and development of the children, especially the protagonist and their mother, Beatrice. In contrast to the views examined above, my intent in the current study is to examine the roles and significance of non-human characters and other inanimate objects like hibiscus, figurines and painting in the novel their implications for the human characters.

### **Theoretical Insight**

As one of the contemporary approaches to literary and critical interpretation, ecofeminism is a multidisciplinary approach founded on the claim that nature/environment and women issues are interconnected in a kind of biologism. Greta Gaard asserts that

[d]rawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any

other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. (1)

The import of Gaard's idea as explicated above is that issues that affect the welfare and wellbeing of the female gender especially in their coexistence with the male gender in the society are those that also affect nature. Providing a fertile ground and breeding space for these issues is patriarchy. In the light of this, as long as the walls of patriarchy is the society remains high, both the female gender and nature will remain oppressed. It is based on this that Janis Birkeland submits that

[e]cofeminists believe that we cannot end the exploitation of nature without ending human oppression, and vice versa. To do both, they reason, we must expose the assumptions that support Patriarchy and disconnect our concept of masculinity from that of "power over" others and the rejection and denigration of the "feminine." (19)

Drawing insights from the views examined above, we can infer that the objectification of both women and nature/environment in a male oriented and dominated society expands the philosophical concerns of the mainstream feminism to nature. This is hinged on the reality that patriarchal societies by creating dualities and hierarchies objectify women and nature to gain power and superiority.

Acknowledging that the default world order is patriarchy, ecofeminism in the words of Yıldız Merve Öztürk posits that patriarchy breeds

[...] a male-centred hierarchy and dualities, creating inequality in society and providing the superiority for men. ... [T]he hierarchy and dualities are used to exert pressure on non-male beings and marginalize them. Thus, in the male-dominant hierarchical order dualities such as male/female, culture/nature, human/nature, white/black, unconscious/unconscious, logic/emotion, soul/body occur, and former dominates the latter. That is, in this order, man is superior to woman, culture is superior to nature, and logic is to emotion. Also, since the man is considered superior to the woman, all the superior features are

attributed to the male and the inferior features are associated with the female. In this way, while man symbolizes culture, consciousness, logic and spirit, woman represents nature, unconsciousness, emotion and body. In this case, women and nature become close to each other in a male-dominant society and are similarly conceptualized. (706)

The import of the above is that the patriarchal society creates a culture through which both women and nature are objectified and oppressed simultaneously in a male dominated society. It is based on this that ecofeminists take as their primary aim, the liberation of both women and nature from the oppression of men. This is driven by the understanding that women are close to nature because the two can reproduce and create life. In the words of Carl Gustav Jung, women generally ‘represent the elements that are associated with fruitfulness and fertility, like arable fields, gardens, rocks, caves, trees or flowers’, (cited in Öztürk, op. cit). With this similar characteristic, ‘women are naturalized and nature feminized and both have close positions in a male dominated society’. (Gaard, 2).

With the patriarchal system in place, culture through oppression is allowed to surpass and overpower nature ignoring the fact that nature is the very essence of all living and non-living creatures. As such, in their postulations and analysis of oppression in the society which are largely androcentric, ecofeminists investigate the framework of hierarchies and dualities in the society distinguishing between privileged and oppressed groups with the male belonging to the former and female and nature belonging to the later. It is in this regards that Gaard submits that ‘[e]cofeminism describes the framework that authorizes these forms of oppression as patriarchy, an ideology whose (sic) fundamental self/other distinction is based on a sense of self that is separate, atomistic’ (2). This sense of self as separate and atomistic is what drives patriarchy in its entirety. Its failure to recognize the interconnection in the world and creation order is the root cause of its sense of disconnection and the resultant violence to assert itself as powerful and domineering. As such, ‘[w]hat is certain is that a failure to recognize connections can lead to violence, and a disconnected sense of self is most assuredly at the root of the current ecological crisis (not to mention being the root cause of all oppression, which is based on difference)’ (2).

With this, ecofeminists have unequivocally been able to create a number of connections and links between ‘the oppressions of women and of nature that are significant to understanding

why the environment is a feminist issue, and, conversely, why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns' (4). In essence, based on the claims of ecofeminism that women and nature are connected conceptually and symbolically, ecofeminists in the words of Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen 'reflects the concerted efforts of women trying to integrate their personal, ecological, and sociopolitical concerns' (2). A crucial addition to the above is the submission that ecofeminism by these concerted efforts seeks to expose all assumptions and frameworks that supports patriarchy and equates women and nature to the other. This responsibility of exposing patriarchy is undertaken either by female or male forces or a combination of both. The import of this is that though patriarchy is a male centered culture, not all men are inclined to it. It is based on the foregoing that ecofeminism as adopted in this study is from the perspective of the invigorating roles of nature in the self-realization and actualization of women as well as the triumph of both women and nature in the face of attempted obliterations by patriarchy and its elements, through concerted efforts of both male and female forces.

### **Interspecies relationships in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*: an ecofeminist's perspective**

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie harps on the very significant roles of nature and other inanimate objects in the self-discovery of some characters in the novel. Indeed, André Kaboré argues that

[i]t appears then that nature and characters are interconnected in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* to such a point that one can argue for the use of the narrative device of "pathetic fallacy" in this novel in the sense of "the ascription of human traits to inanimate nature". Characters' emotions are carried out by natural elements. (32)

Belonging to the nucleus and extended family of Eugene Achike, these characters all females, (Kambili – the character narrator: from whose narration events unfold, Beatrice and Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka) despite the untoward and harsh realities of patriarchy around them having been stimulated by their interactions and connectedness with nature soon emerged reinvigorated and empowered to surmount the daunting challenges of overcoming patriarchy for which they sacrificed their comfort, endured brutality and almost gave up the ghost.



Divided into four parts, 'BREAKING GODS – Palm Sunday', 'SPEAKING WITH OUR SPIRITS – Before Palm Sunday', 'THE PIECES OF GODS – After Palm Sunday' and 'A DIFFERENT SILENCE – The Present', (emphasis in the original), Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* weaves around the plot, the psychological manipulations of the female characters by the lone symbol of patriarchy, Eugene Achike. Herein, they struggled to find self-definition within the rigidity of the system around them. In the words of Okuyade,

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* begins *in media res*, realized through flashback. The novel charts the physical and psychological development of the protagonist, Kambili and her brother Jaja. A development, which designates their struggle to define themselves beyond the stiffened and funless world, their Calvinistic father has designed for them. Their fussy mercantile father builds a world that lacks ventilation, which guarantees a steady relationship with the outside when the inside becomes too suffocating. (10)

For Kambili and her mother Beatrice, while within the stale and suffocating walls of their home, their interactions with nature and ornamental elements let in for them a vent of fresh air which later became widened as they interacted with the outside world. Though the high walls veiled Kambili from the outside world, imprisoned by her thoughts, nature plays a soothing and comforting role for her. In her words,

[...] the cashew tree was so close I could reach out and pluck a leaf if it were not for the silver-coloured crisscross mosquito netting. The bell-shaped yellow fruit hung lazily, drawing buzzing bees that bumped against my window's netting. [...] It was early rainy season, and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillea, cur smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still red ones. They seemed to have bloom so 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. (17)

The undeniable link between nature and concerns of women as well as perceivable role of nature in the self-actualization of women, which are the main concerns of ecofeminism, begins to unfold from the above quotation. Though Kambili and Beatrice were not the only ones living in the compound to observe the vegetation: the flowers bud and the trees fruit, their observations as will be revealed much later in the study had a huge and significant influence on their self-discovery and actualization. This interaction between women and nature is strengthened further by the observation of the narrator. Her observation reveals the affinity between women and nature, as demonstrated by women who are non-members of the Achike's family. In her words, '[i]t 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' (17).

As events unfold, patriarchy's overbearingness on the non-human elements in the novel kick started the negative and self-destructive turn of events. As the plot opens, the reader learns through Kambili, the protagonist that '[t]hings started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the *étagère*' (11). The implication of the above is that patience and a lasting endurance have characterized the familial relationship among the Achikes which can no longer continue. The excesses of Eugene which have had grave implications for the mutuality in his family can no longer be tolerated.

The missal missing Jaja and landing on the figurines thus destroying it is indicative of the fragility of elements of nature and other non-human and as well validates the earlier claim in this study of the overbearingness of patriarchy and its elements on elements of nature and other non-human elements. In their conceptualizations, a missal on the one hand is a religious book that contains the dogmas of religious practice, specifically the Catholic. It contains all hymns, prayers, responses, important chants and instructions for the celebration of mass all through the year including the Eucharist, as such it is sacred. With its content fixed, for the liturgy all year round, the missal is a sacrosanct document, defying modifications and change. This attribute it shares with patriarchy is why Kaboré submits that

[m]ama is so happy with the figurines that she hugs herself. The glass is delicate, easily breakable. It is a sign of fragility in comparison to something stronger like the heavy missal which may personify Papa himself. The author establishes a link between the figurines and Mama's gentle attempts to cope with her husband's violence. (34)

Describing the encounter in more details, the decision and determination of Jaja to achieve self-actualization, starting with his refusal to go for communion bruised the patriarchal egos of his father. Eugene's immediate and short term reaction to Jaja's decision to rather die than take the communion had a lasting, damaging and irreparable effect on the familial relationship amongst the Achikes. The destruction of mama's figurines beyond repairs leaves her permanently demoralized. He

[...] looked around the room quickly as if searching for a proof that something had fallen from the high ceiling, something he never thought would fall. He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, towards Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagère, which Mama polished often. It cracked the top shelf, swept the beige, finger size ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures to the hard floor and then landed after them. Or rather it landed on their many pieces. (15)

Though the narrator, Kambili had hinted a connection between Beatrice and the figurines, her (Beatrice's) decision not to replace them, brings both Kambili and the reader to new realizations. The realization for Kambili on the one hand is the puzzle of why she will not replace one of her most treasured domestic artifact in which she finds consolation after every abuse. Afraid of what will become of her mother now that the figurines are gone; Kambili bares her mind on the importance of the figurines to Beatrice. In her words,

I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were "I'm sorry your figurines broke, Mama." She nodded quickly, then shook her head to show that the figurines did not mater. They did, though. Years ago before I understood, I used to wonder why she polished them each time I heard the sounds from their room, like something being banged against

the door. Her rubber slippers never made a sound on the stairs, but I knew she went down stairs when I heard the dining room door open. I would go down to see her standing by the étagère with a kitchen towel soaked in soapy water. She spent at least a quarter of an hour on each ballet-dancing figurine. There were never tears on her face. The last time, only two weeks ago, when her swollen eye was still the black-purple colour of an overripe avocado, she had rearranged them after she polished them. (18 – 19)

Indeed, beyond the figurines, Beatrice's entire world had just been shattered. On the other hand, the realization for the reader is that of a shattered hope and a permanent extermination of the self-will to endure and coexist with patriarchy despite its numerous negativities. The now shattered figurines considering her attachment to them were at the center of her enduring self-will. The will that she will someday be loved again by her husband and be free from all forms of domestic abuses, the commonest of which is battery. As such, her refusal to replace them, despite the importance they symbolize for her indicates that she had lost hope and given up, but not totally surrendered to her fate as an abused house wife and mother. Confirming Kambili's fears, Beatrice decision not to replace the shattered figurines brought Kambili to another realization. Her mind was certainly made up, not just about the figurines, but about every other thing. In a later conversation, she bares her mind to Kambili on her decision.

“Will you replace the figurines?” I asked. I could smell the chalky deodorant under her arms. Her brown face, flawless but for the recent jagged scar on her forehead, was expressionless. “*Kpa*”, she said. “I will not replace them.” Maybe Mama had realised that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realising it, only letting myself think it. (23)

From the conversations above, it is clear that the destruction of the figurines for her is the proverbial last straw breaking the camel's back. That was the climax for Beatrice. Her refusal to replace the figurines and the events that followed much later in the novel validates this. Again, Kaboré argues that “[i]n fact, since the smashing of the figurines, the relationships in the family

have changed. Mama secretly gets ready for vengeance. Her retaliation will bring consequences to the whole family. Kambili notices the change and does not know what action to undertake' (34). In view of this, it becomes imperative to add here that the suffocating and harsh experiences of both Kambili and Beatrice in the hands of Eugene at Enugu justifies Laure Clémence Capo- Chichi Zanou et al's claim of Enugu being symbolic of disempowerment for both Kambili and Beatrice. According to them

Enugu, the town where the narrator-protagonist and her parents live, and where the story opens, is introduced to the reader as a place which symbolizes women's oppression. Indeed, in Achike's family, Eugene is a stark reminder of the patriarchy and male chauvinism. His attitude and behaviour prevent his wife and children from being happy. He is violent and usually beats both wife and children. He reacts uncontrollably when he is angry and often creates physical damages and destroys household properties beyond repair. [...] Beatrice, Eugene's wife undergoes two miscarriages as a result of being beaten. Jaja's finger is disfigured for failing two catechist questions, Kambili is scolded before her classmates because she comes second instead of first in her class; her feet are soaked because she shares the same room with her grandfather who is considered by her father as a pagan. (68)

Here, Enugu becoming symbolic of disempowerment is made possible owing to the atomistic tendencies of Eugene Achike as well as his strict but inhumane adherence to Catholicism. However, despite the seeming disempowering tendencies, the interaction with nature provided the much needed succor.

Moving forward, while Beatrice's interconnectedness with nature started at Enugu despite the overbearing tendencies of patriarchy, for Kambili, her romance and connectedness with nature was ignited at Nsukka. In the words of the narrator,

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 undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. (24)

Considering the narrative style adopted by Adichie in the novel in which the story ‘begins *in media res*, realized through flashback’ as had earlier been established, it is safe to submit here that the mutual interspecies interactions between the protagonist, Kambili and elements of nature which started in Nsukka is linked to the realities that surrounded her in Enugu. The colors of the hibiscuses, red at Enugu and purple at Nsukka connotes the different experiences of both the protagonist Kambili, her brother Jaja and her mother Beatrice in these two places. Though the hibiscus plant grows in different colors but similar shade, Eugene’s brutality and patriarchal overbearing on his family particularly the female members invariably watered the red hibiscus plant that they continued to blossom indicative of the harsh and brutal realities surrounding the house. The red hibiscuses continue to grow and ‘bloom so fast’ as Eugene’s brutality increased. Indeed, they remained red until the eve of Palm Sunday, when Jaja defiled his father by his refusal to ‘go to communion’ (258). As a result of this, a fitful rage welled up in Eugene and the figurines were destroyed. This could only happen after the children’s (Kambili and Jaja) return from Kambili’s recuperation trip, at the instance of Auntie Ifeoma.

Consequently, because both Kambili and Jaja were acquainted to only red hibiscus plant, a direct function of the realities around them, their first time encounter with the purple hibiscus at Nsukka was a blend of surprise and admiration. Nsukka at that point in time brought respite to them and with it came the new knowledge of purple hibiscus. The admiration for the experimental and unusual purple hibiscus in Auntie Ifeoma’s garden rubbed off on them such that the desire to have it grown in their home at Enugu welled up in them and matching their desires with action, the reader sees the result later at Enugu. With the purple hibiscus now growing in Enugu, it is safe to submit here that an end was in sight for the brutalities at home in Enugu. Reporting Jaja’s observation, she says that “‘See, the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom,” Jaja said, as we got out of the car. He was pointing, although I did not need him to. I could see the sleepy, oval shape buds in the front yard as they swayed in the evening breeze’ (257).

Similarly, as events unfold in the plot of the story especially at Nsukka, the romance and interconnectedness between Kambili and nature took a new turn. She did not only find in Auntie Ifeoma an undisputable love for nature, but she also found a voice through her observation of nature. In Auntie Ifeoma, the reader observes an unreserved love for nature in which she successfully indoctrinates Jaja. Later both Auntie Ifeoma and Jaja spend some time in the garden,

leaving Kambili at the mercy of Amaka. In the same vein, Kambili invigorated by nature eventually responds to Amaka's bullying attitudes, against her prior silence. According to her, '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. "I don't know how to do *orah* leaves, but you can show me."' (177).

Also, though not her first contact with paintings, Kambili's fascination with the paintings done by Amaka from that 'of a woman with a child' to that of Papa-Nnukwu was to the extent that in her words 'I wished I had known that my cousin painted realistic water-colours' (126). No doubt, she fell in love again with nature through Amaka's paintings. It is based on the new dimension of love with nature that she practically gave up her comfort to defend Papa-Nnukwu's painting, which she got as a parting gift from Amaka, a decision she was sure would take a negative toll on her. She found respite in the painting after being punished for what her father calls 'walking into sin'. In her words, 'I got up and hobbled over to get the painting of Papa-Nnukwu from my bag. It was still in the black wrapping. Even though it was in an obscure side pocket of my bag, I was too scared to unwrap it. Papa would know, somehow'. (202). Eventually, when what she feared most befell her, she could not sit and watch her father destroy the much treasured painting. According to her,

Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hands moved swiftly, working together. The painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something I had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at Papa's feet lay pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors. I suddenly and maniacally imagined Papa-Nnukwu's body being cut in pieces that small and stored in a fridge. "No!" I shrieked. I dashed to the pieces on the floor as if to save them, as if saving them would mean saving Papa-Nnukwu. I sank to the floor, lay on the pieces of paper. [...] I lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus in mi *Integrated Science for Junior Secondary Schools*. "Get up! Get away from that painting!" I lay there, did nothing. (216).

What followed her decision to defend or rather salvage the pieces of the painting from further destruction though left much to be desired is a strong indication of her connectedness to nature.

Despite her perceived powerlessness in the face of patriarchy, because of her attachment to painting in particular and to nature in general, she damned the consequences of her decision and action to the utter provocation of her father. Like Beatrice's decision not to replace the broken figurines, Kambili against her father sacrificed her comfort to defend the relic of Papa Nnukwu. Commenting on the attachment of Kambili to the painting, Okuyade posits that

[t]he painting symbolizes freedom and also represents a connection to her grandfather that she was never permitted to have while he was alive. She begins to piece together the painting with alacrity and observes her father with a defiant air representing a rejection, condemnation and disintegration of the unproductive upbringing that her father has given her. The furtiveness with which she handles the painting criticizes everything her father stands for. (155)

Everything in the above quotation connotes patriarchy. As such, owing to Kambili's newly found solace in nature, she cannot but defy her much revered father.

As events in the plot advanced towards resolution, Kambili became so fascinatedly engrossed with her love for nature, such that she embraced nature in its original form. Something she had never done prior to that time. In her words

[t]hat night when I bathed, with a bucket half full of rain water, I did not scrub my left hand [...] I did not heat the 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. (274)

Embracing nature this way opened her up to the new realities around her which served as prelude to the leadership position which she occupied after the demise of her father, Eugene. Considering her gender and status in her nucleus family, her ability to take charge of the leadership roles of her family is symbolic of her triumph over patriarchy, which was inspired by nature. As such, while anticipating Jaja's return from prison and as part of her activities in her new found confidence, Kambili confirms that she 'can talk about the future now' (310), and nature occupies



a significant space in this future. For her, therefore, nature will forever remain relevant in her triumph – breaking loose from the tight of patriarchy – and newly found freedom. To continue to enjoy this freedom, nature must not be left out. In her words,

“We’ll take Jaja to Nsukka first, and then we’ll go to America to visit Auntie Ifeoma, I say. “We’ll plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscus, too, and I’ll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers.” I am laughing. I reach out and place my arm around Mama’s shoulder and she leans towards me and smiles. (310)

In the end, the collapse of patriarchy and its elements signaled by Eugene’s death ushered in an aura of peace and freedom in his hitherto restraining and oppressive environment. With Eugene out of the way, nature through the rain in its own way cleansed the environment. The toxic fruits that sprouted under his patriarchal watch will give way for fresh fruits of peace and mutual understanding. As Kambili observes, ‘[o]utside, the rain came down in slants, hitting the closed windows with a furious rhythm. It would hurl down cashews mangoes from trees and they would start to rot in the humid earth, giving out that sweet-sour scent’. (292). Considering the protagonist’s observation above, we can infer that although Eugene’s absence created a vacuum in the family, the family is however better off without him, hence the sweet-sour scent. Consequently, all elements that would remind the family of his once upon a time presence were avoided. This invariably informed Beatrice’s decision to put all of his personal effects away and to mourn her husband only with her immediate nucleus family, her children.

## Conclusion

This study has been able to demonstrate that there exist a strong and an undeniable relationship between Adichie’s female characters and elements of nature *Purple Hibiscus*. From the symbolic title, the implications of the roles of nature through its elements as well as other non-human entities as have been examined is that no full interpretations of the novel should by-pass the role of nature in the lives of the characters. As such, classifying the novel as overtly ecofeminist and not just feminist is not out of place. All indices as explicated in our analysis points to the notion that patriarchy and nature are two parallel lines, they can never meet. This justifies the ecofeminist postulation that there cannot be an end to the exploitation and oppression of nature

without an end to the exploitation of women and other oppressed groups which often than naught is orchestrated and authorized by patriarchy.

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