

**ARTICULATIONS OF WOMANISM IN ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*  
AND EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD***

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that with the exception of the cited references, this work is a result of my own original research. It has not been submitted in whole or in part to any other university.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, the Father to whom there is no shadow of turning. I also dedicate this work to my father, Mr. Gordon Amartey, and my mother, Francisca Dosu. I also dedicate it to Jonas, Solomon, Patience, Salomey, Doris, Nancy and Awo, my siblings and my dearest Vivian. I cannot forget the motherly care of my aunty, Irene Dosu, and the friendship of my cousin, Mawuli.



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## ABSTRACT

*Womanism as a variant of African feminism provides the platform for a holistic analysis of the works of African female writers. In this work, Ogunyemi's womanist theory is read into the works of two Nigerian female writers, Chimamanda Adichie and Buchi Emecheta, authors of Purple Hibiscus and The Joys of Motherhood respectively. Undertaking a womanist reading of these two novels is aimed at ascertaining the different and similar ways these female novelists articulate womanist theory in the above mentioned novels through a comparative study. The work also aimed at finding out whether there is a continuity of womanist concerns between these two female novelists or otherwise. The conclusions drawn from this study are arrived at through a close reading of the two novels by looking at literary elements of characterization, narrative technique, tone, mood and setting. From the analysis of the two novels, it is clear that Adichie leans more towards challenging and usurping patriarchy while Emecheta valorizes traditional patriarchal society in her work. Adichie's Purple Hibiscus also resounds with womanist hope as opposed to the tragic end that befalls Emecheta's protagonist, Nnu Ego. However, both authors lean towards the ultimate womanist goal of unity and survival of males, females and children. The comparative analysis of the two novels only shows womanist continuity in of terms the two authors' commitment to the ultimate goal of womanism. Apart from this, Adichie is more aggressive in questioning, criticizing and subverting patriarchal authority as compared to Emecheta.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* are both womanist novels which propagate the womanist gospel. This gospel is particular to the needs of black/African people and accommodates men, women and children. It also looks at the struggles of African women from a holistic angle incorporating racial, cultural, national, economic and political issues alongside sexist issues with the ultimate goal of ensuring the survival and unity of all in black/African communities. Adichie and Emecheta embrace this womanist gospel in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Joys of Motherhood* respectively by tackling not just the sexist treatment of women but by also showing concern for racial issues, national politics, the patriarchal culture and the economic situation. This multi-dimensional approach to women's struggles in these two novels underscores the necessity for unity and survival of men, women and children at the end of these two novels.

African female writers normally focus on resistance to all forms of patriarchal behaviour and the belief that women can live their lives the way they want to and be responsible for their own livelihoods and future. The female novel as a protest novel against patriarchy shows the inequalities and abuses inflicted on women by patriarchal traditions whether they are Christian, Islamic or indigenous. In addition to the focus of these novels as a protestation against patriarchal dominance, they also portray the independent woman. African female novelists hold in high esteem womanist values which promote independence togetherness and survival. African

female writers such as Ama Atta Aidoo, Bessie Head, Calixthe Beyala, Mariama Bà, Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga and quite recently, Chimamanda Adichie have led the way.

### **1.1.1 Biography of Chimamanda Adichie**

Adichie was born on 15 September 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria. She grew up in Nsukka, in the house formerly occupied by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. Chimamanda's father worked at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Adichie completed her secondary education at the University's school. She went on to study Medicine and Pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the University's Catholic medical students. She later studied at Drexel University in Philadelphia for two years, and went on to pursue a degree in Communication and Political Science at Eastern Connecticut State University. *Purple Hibiscus* was released in October 2003. The book was shortlisted for the Orange Fiction Prize (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in 2005. Her other novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) is set before and during the Biafran War. Her collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, was published in 2009. Her third novel, *Americanah*, was published in 2013.

### **1.1.2 Biography of Buchi Emecheta**

Emecheta was born to Igbo parents in Lagos on 21 July 1944. She moved to Britain in 1960, where she worked as a librarian and became a student in London University in 1970, reading Sociology. She worked as a community worker in Camden, North London, between 1976 and

1978. Much of her fiction has focused on sexual politics and racial prejudice, and is based on her own experiences as both a single parent and a black woman living in Britain. She has written many novels including *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Joys of Motherhood* which is an account of women's experiences bringing up children in the face of changing values in traditional Ibo society. Emecheta is also the author of several novels for children, including *Nowhere to Play* (1980). In 1983 she was selected as one of twenty 'Best of Young British Writers' by the Book Marketing Council.

### **1.1.3 Tradition and Continuity**

Adichie and Emecheta are part of a body of female authors in West Africa who are not different in portraying womanist values as have their counterparts in other African and Black American cultures. While being responsible, natural as well as showing commitment to the survival of an entire people (African people) in their novels, they promote womanist values such as female autonomy and cooperation, values which make women show “outrageous, courageous or willful behaviour” (McEmrys, p.2).

A continuity of concerns in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Joys of Motherhood* will be traced with a view to establishing the generational similarities and differences in the womanist world views of these two West African women novelists who belong to different historical periods. This will lead to the question of whether the difference in generations affirms a difference in their womanist outlook, and how each of these womanist novelists shows their commitment to the ethics of addressing human suffering in their novels. A continuity of womanist critical concerns

will be established in the final analysis and the underlying variations in the novelists' womanist world views will also be clearly projected.

## **1.2 Feminism Universal**

Feminism throughout its long history has always been seen as “women’s conscious struggle to resist patriarchy” (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, p. 121). However, this definition of feminism does not mean that men cannot be part of feminism. The definition of feminism on the other hand raises the fundamental question of whether men can be feminists in the real sense because men benefit from the social organization of men which puts men in privileged positions over women. Men can be called feminists even though feminism has arisen out of the lived experiences of women in relation to oppressive patriarchal systems. Men have and do experience the effects of patriarchy in different ways from what women experience. Men can therefore be feminists as well as act as agents of feminism in helping to change patriarchal ways of organizing society. Njoku insists that men use the “ideology of patriarchy which emphasizes male importance, dominance and superiority” (195) as a way of enslaving women and making them second class citizens. Njoku’s definition of patriarchy does not capture the entire essence of patriarchy because patriarchy is not only ideology but also practice; it is lived out; it is a practice engaged in by men against women, children and other men.

The wave of feminist thought was firstly inspired by Women’s Suffrage movements across America and Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a way of advocating social, political and economic reform. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) is

recognized as the ground-breaking treatise on feminist thought within European and American circles. This was followed by a shift in thought from advocacy for social, political and economic reform to the “politics of reproduction, to women’s experience to sexuality as at once a form of oppression and something to celebrate” (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, p. 128). Most notable among feminists who advocated women’s experience and sexuality as the focal point of feminism was Kate Millet’s radical feminism termed *Sexual Politics* which saw patriarchal culture as a way of demeaning the female and treating her as an inferior human being. Millet’s *Sexual Politics* established ethnocentrism within feminist studies. “Educated, middle-class white women devised theories about middle class white women and gave them a universal stamp, thereby erasing or invalidating the experiences of majority of women who were excluded from one or both of these categories” (Jita Allan, p. 2). Feminism became ethnocentric, exclusionary, and controversial, and mirrored the same male social structures it decried.

Daves and Graves assert that both Western and African feminisms share the common focus of identifying gender-specific issues and recognizing women’s position internationally as one of second class status and otherness (Opara, p. 5). In her conceptualization of second class status and otherness, Helen Cixous presents a “hierarchical definition of ‘she’ in relation to ‘he’ in a psychoanalytical oppositional arithmetic in which ‘he’ towers above ‘she’ in every sphere of existence” (Adjei, p. 149). The crust of radical feminism (a la De Beauvoir, Millet and even Cixous) was and still is very Western in thought and outlook. Njoku contests that African women do not share a common identity with their Western counterparts (195). Western feminist thought and practice therefore sees all women as being involved with the same struggles, sharing the

same experiences and voicing the same oppressions meted out to them by men, to use Chandra Talpade Mohanty's term, "we are all sisters in struggle." Mohanty writes:

By women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the critical assumption that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis. This is an assumption which characterizes much feminist discourse (Mohanty, p.337).

In addition to this error of universally analyzing women's oppression and suppression, women are also characterized by much Western feminist ideology and praxis as victims of male violence and universal dependents. The characterization of women's experiences in families, women's experiences in relation to religious ideologies which suppress them, women's lack of opportunities to development is the same for women across borders as radical feminist discourse will have us believe, according to Mohanty (p. 338-46). This is what she refers to as 'methodological universalism.' Methodological universalism has serious shortcomings in portraying women's struggles and oppression, and therefore calls for a feminist analysis that correctively takes into account culture-specific challenges of women; a feminist analysis that recognizes that even though women may face similar struggles against patriarchal domination, these struggles are not identical.

### 1.3 Feminism in Africa

African feminism has been defined as an “abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and reliant” (Davies, p.561). It has emerged as a response to what has been referred to by Filomina Chioma Steady as “the dominant voice of the feminist movement” which “has been that of the white female” (p. 1). African feminism must be responsive to the needs of black/African women and must therefore take into account freedom from structures created by manifold oppressions. It must be “free of the shackles of Western romantic illusions” because the African woman lives for many things such as a sense of sisterhood and not just cultivating herself and enjoying sex. It also “tends to be much more pragmatic” (Buchi Emecheta, p. 554). Most significantly, “African feminism, unlike Western feminism does not negate men, rather it accommodates them. Men are central to their lives and so their continuous presence is assured” (In Maduka, p. 10).

Steady calls for an African feminism which “combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism thought through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual, beings. She defines African feminism as that ideology which advocates freedom from oppression that is based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual and class biases (p. 2). This definition by Steady shows that mainstream feminism has failed to theorize aspects of the struggles of black women and African women which do not affect white women. For example, white women only face the struggle of fighting for sexual equality in opposition to white men. On the other hand, black women/African women must contend with oppression from

their black/African male counterparts while also being suppressed economically, politically and racially by white patriarchal systems along with their men. She therefore calls African feminism “humanistic feminism” because it is dedicated to the total liberation of humanity. The majority of black women in Africa and the diaspora have developed characteristics of cooperation and rejection of male protection, though not always by choice (In Davies, p. 561).

Genuine African feminism regards self-reliance, cooperative work and social organization as values which must be treasured by African women while also, rejecting over burdening, exploitation and relegation of the African woman into a state of inhumane misery. It objectively looks at women in societies which have undergone the struggle for national reconstruction and encourages them to engage in another struggle against the African men they united with to fight for the liberation of their African countries. African feminism must also embrace traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women as it seeks to uncover other modes by which African women can access power other than the outward demeanours of submissiveness. The essence of African feminism is not antagonism towards African men, even though it prods African men to recognize the subjugation of women, but a common struggle with African men to remove the yokes of foreign domination and European exploitation. It boldly admits to the role played by colonialism in enforcing certain inequalities that existed in traditional societies and therefore addresses the realities of the lives of African women. The fact that African women have and will always address their own problems is a view strongly held by African feminists who also assert that some African societies have structures which give women equality. Institutions which promote the status of African women are given recognition within African feminism and those which do not are rejected. African feminism therefore sees usefulness in motherhood, polygamy

and traditions which have been distorted by colonialism and continue to be distorted by urban settings (Davies, p. 564).

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

This research employs womanist theory to articulate the concerns of two West African womanist authors, Chimamanda Adichie and Buchi Emecheta. A womanist analysis of the novels of these two authors is justified because womanism functions as a variant of African feminism, which emphasizes the basic idea of the survival of both males and females and cooperation and complementarity as necessary to Black/African feminism. It can be argued that Ogunyemi's womanism is just one of the many forms of African feminism including motherism, a theory propounded by Catherine Acholonu, which places motherhood, nature, nurture and respect for the environment at the centre of its theorizing ; 'stiwanism' which comes from "Stiwa," an acronym meaning "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa developed by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie ; and Obiora Nnaemeka's negofeminism, a feminism of negotiation and "no ego" feminism which captures central concerns in many African cultures – including negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, and collaboration. However, womanism when considered from both Alice Walker and Ogunyemi's overlapping notions of the term has an extensive reach and does not only include African and African American women but also women of colour as well. And so womanism is a social change perspective that is not only rooted in the unique and specific experiences of African women but African American women and women of colour as well. On the other hand, African feminism is solely focused on the experiences of African women and how to engender social change by involving both men and women. Womanism is

therefore appropriate in an analysis of these two West African novels in the sense that it can be applied within an African as well as an African American context without generalizing the experiences of women because the experiences are varied.

Ogunyemi, in her article, “Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English,” asserts that “ the ultimate difference between the feminist and the womanist is thus what each sees of patriarchy and what each thinks can be changed” (69). By this she gives a clear boundary between radical feminism and womanism. Radical feminism focuses on sexism as the only patriarchal system that subordinates and subjugates women, and by women, radical feminists mean white middle class educated women. This of course leaves out Black/African women. And so for the radical feminist, if sexism is challenged and changed, that is the victory for all women all over the world in different cultures. Apart from this shortcoming, radical feminism’s aim is a separatist idyllic existence away from the men’s world.

Womanism does not just focus on sexist treatment of black/African women. When white South African journalist Beata Lipman was quizzed about the state of women’s writing in South Africa she said that “Racism is a more urgent matter than sexism” (Ogunyemi, p. 67). This statement by Lipman gives womanism an extensive but also culture-specific coverage to include racism alongside sexism as the foci of black feminism, and to be specific, womanism. Womanism does not only dwell on sexism and racism but also incorporates cultural, national, economic and political considerations in challenging oppressive patriarchal systems. What the womanist sees of patriarchy is therefore not just sexism but racism, cultural, national, economic and political

subjugation of Black/African people by white patriarchal systems. What the womanist sees of patriarchy is the oppressive reality she encounters, first as a woman in relation to her Black/African male counterpart and second, together with her counterpart, as a people subjugated and taken advantage of politically and economically by the white race. In addition, womanism does not aim for exclusivity but togetherness in the sense that it advocates a sense of wholeness and unity which includes both men and women, and even children. It is not separatist and antagonistic towards men as radical feminism is.

Womanism re-echoes African feminist thought by highlighting the oppressive plight of African women and both have a complementary approach towards handling women's oppression. They are both complementary in the sense that African feminism includes female autonomy from dominant oppressive male control and cooperation with men if need be, in the same way as Ogunyemi (2003) and Walker (1984) advocate a womanism that is geared towards the universal survival of both males and females. This view is contrary to radical feminists' notion of explaining gender in terms of biological differences and psychological differences between men and women. Firestone concedes that women are oppressed because women's production has been controlled by men (Bhasin, pp. 25). Radical feminists' view of the sex class system as being solely responsible for the subordination of women again narrows the scope of looking at the specificity of oppression of women within different cultures (Bhasin, p. 25). Brownmiller is also of the view that men generally use their abilities to rape, to intimidate and to control women therefore maintaining dominance and supremacy over women. Some other radical feminists believe men are a ruling class and they rule through the direct use of violence which in time becomes institutionalized because their biology and/or psychology make them a separate class

from women (Bhasin, p. 26). On the other hand, Amazonian feminism focuses on physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look, or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Amazon feminists tend to view that all women are as physically capable as all men (amazoncastle.com).

Bell Hooks writes concerning the multiple oppressions of patriarchal dominance and sexism within Black communities:

Every Black person concerned about our collective survival must acknowledge that sexism is a destructive force in Black life that cannot be effectively addressed without an organized political movement to change consciousness, behavior and institutions. What we need is a feminist revolution in Black life. But to have such a revolution, we must first have a feminist movement. Many Black folks do not know what the word feminism means. They may think of it only as something having to do with white women's desire to share equal rights with white men. In reality, feminism is a movement to end all sexism and sexist oppression. The strategies necessary to achieve that end are many. We need to find ways to address the specific forms that sexism takes in our diverse communities (Hooks, p.124; in Elizabeth Torfs, p.21).

The above quote shows that it is not appropriate to apply mainstream feminism to Black/African women's struggles and predicament especially when black women perceive mainstream feminism as belonging to Eurocentric and ethnocentric white women.

Ogunyemi claims to have developed her womanist theory without being aware that Alice Walker had propounded the theory along the same lines as she did. Walker's womanist theory embodies both the frustration and promise of black feminist criticism. It shows black feminists readiness to reframe the sexual debate around culturally specific differences between white women and women of colour. The major themes of womanist epistemology within Walker's theory are: audacity, woman centredness and wholeness or community-centredness. These three core womanist values help to fashion a framework of feminist resistance to patriarchy (Jita Allan, p. 6). Walker's womanist theory is a critique of and challenge to radical white feminist theory and praxis.

According to Margaret Drabble, womanism is cross-cultural (1971):

The many-sided goal of womanism is geared towards a gender free Pan Africanism – the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women. This is a different goal to the idea of a Separatist, idyllic existence away from...men's world that preoccupies the white writer (In Jita Allan, p. 7). Unlike Drabble, Patricia Hill Collins draws out from womanism, a "humanist vision" born out of black women's struggle against multiple oppressions. Hill Collins demonstrates the womanist idea of "commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female as a recurrent theme among black women intellectuals (Jita Allan, p. 8). She establishes

womanist connections with womanists from Anna Julia to June Jordan whose “words and actions resonate with a strikingly similar theme of oneness of all human life (p. 8).

For the purposes of this study, I will employ Ogunyemi’s womanist theory as the framework for a womanist analysis of *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. She captures the focus of womanism in the following words:

Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand (In Maduka, p. 14).

In her view, womanism serves as the tool that binds black/African women together in seeking for the freedom that ultimately makes men realize that women are humans just as men are by challenging oppressive modes of thought and behaviour by men. It is however, embrative of men and children and seeks for a union between men, women and children.

Ogunyemi espouses the idea that a womanist writer recognizes the reality of incorporating racial, cultural, national, economic, political considerations along with her consciousness of sexual issues in her philosophy (Ogunyemi, p. 64). One is a womanist because of “her racial and sexual predicament (Ogunyemi, p. 79). Womanism is therefore grounded in the racial, sexist, political, cultural and economic realities of African women. It calls on African women to have a

holistic approach towards patriarchy and female subjugation and rejects the primacy of sexism as the main focus of female struggle against male domination.

She challenges the intelligent black woman writer to be conscious of the helpless state of black people within the face of white patriarchal culture and empowers her male counterpart because she believes in him; as a result, the books of the womanist writer end in integrative images of male and female worlds (Ogunyemi, ps. 68 – 69). Equality with black men is not the focus of the womanist writer because she aims higher than that. Instead, she knits the world's black families together to achieve black, not just female, transcendence (Ogunyemi, p. 69). Ogunyemi captures the difference between radical feminism and womanism:

If the ultimate aim of radical feminism is a separatist idyllic existence away from the hullabaloo of the men's world, the ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women (p. 72).

A womanist vision is radically conscious of the positive aspects of black life and also raises questions defined by the humanity of black African women.

Ogunyemi concedes that her notion of meaning of the term womanism overlaps with Alice Walker's, that is, a term which refers to the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to a sense of herself as a woman. For her, a womanist means a woman who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female (p. 72).

As a philosophy, Black Womanism celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life and gives a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself with black sexual power tussle as with the world power that subjugates blacks. It's ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a brother or a sister or a father or a mother to the other. Its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels (Ogunyemi, p. 72).

The depiction of womanist characters by womanist writers can be regarded as an anti-patriarchal statement on the author's part. Womanist writers demonstrate concern for the family, not for the Western nuclear family, but for the black extended family. Womanist writers also fill their novels with an affirmative spirit that is packed full of female achievement and this is as a result of the quest to grow independent black women. They also explore past and present connections between black America and black Africa.

Womanist characters in womanist novels can be found in the mold of amiable co-wives with invisible husbands as they work together for the good of their people. It is also the case that the black mad woman in novels written by black women knows in her sub consciousness that she must survive because she has people without other resources depending on her. She usually recovers, through superhuman effort, and aids others. After each mental upheaval (in the womanist novel) of a womanist character, there is stasis in the womanist novel when the black woman's communion with the rest of society is established, an agreement that expresses the black way of authenticity and transcendence. Madness therefore becomes a temporary abnormality preceding spiritual growth, healing and integration (Ogunyemi, p. 74). In womanist

novels, polygamy is seen as a positive practice as the demands of culture are put above those of sexual politics. Matrilineal and polygynous societies are dynamic sources for the womanist novel. Bad men are sometimes eliminated in womanist novels so that men and women can live together harmoniously. Also, ostracism and ethnicism rather than sexism cause the development of the strong woman (Ogunyemi, pp. 75-76). In addition, womanist writers prefer to tell of life as it is, sometimes of life as it is thought to be and rarely of life as it ought to be. Womanist novelists therefore concern themselves with the ethics of surviving rather than the aesthetic of living.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* will be analyzed within a womanist and the ethical universal framework with the aim of finding out the commitment of these two womanist authors to two theories which prioritize survival of men, women and children, and the concern for human suffering respectively.

### **1.5 Scope of Research**

This research is, first and foremost, based on a womanist analysis of two novels. It deals with how these women authors, Adichie and Emecheta articulate womanist ethos that also subscribes to the appeal to universal human suffering.

### **1.6 Justification for the Selection of Novels**

The two novels, which are womanist novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, have been carefully chosen to provide a comparative analysis of the womanist issues in them. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* provide the opportunity to

look at womanist concerns of female novelists from the Anglophone side of West Africa. Even though both authors are Nigerian, their selection is deemed right for the purposes of this work especially in terms of the different perspectives each womanist novelist articulates due to the difference in generations. The study is also justified based on Chris Dunton and Pius Adesanmi's work on the distinguishing features of first generation, second generation and third generation writers in Africa. Emecheta belongs to the second generation while Adichie belongs to the third generation (p. 9). This makes for an interesting womanist reading of the two texts. This study is also justified in the sense that it seeks to offer reason/s for the generational differentiation, if any, in these novels and also tackles the issue of a continuity of womanist concerns. The difference in generations from Emecheta to Adichie will provide answers to either a sense of continuity or a variation in womanist articulations. Finally, the generational gap between Adichie and Emecheta also provides the avenue to undertake an ethical universal analysis of *Purple Hibiscus* and the *Joys of Motherhood*. The ethical universal is based on Kwame Anthony Appiah's categorization of first stage and second stage novels in post-colonial Africa. The first stage novels, he says, carried one voice, the voice of nationalism. The second stage novels, however, challenge that legitimate national rhetoric and rather appeal to what he calls the "ethical universal," an appeal to human suffering (pp.149-52). It is therefore necessary to read the ethical universal thesis of Kwame Anthony Appiah, which applies to all post-colonial novels across board, into the special case of two womanist novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and the *Joys of Motherhood* to see how Adichie and Emecheta, both womanist who are concerned with the survival and wholeness of African men, women and children, appeal to human suffering through what may be termed as womanist ethical universal.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study will establish a continuity of womanist concerns between major womanist authors in West Africa. It is important to find out what has changed or otherwise in terms of the way these two authors address womanist issues. It is also critical to understand how two Anglophone writers, both of Nigerian birth, address the question of universal human suffering, especially when womanism has the aim of ensuring the survival of men, women and children.

### **1.8 Methodology**

The research is based on a close reading of the two texts. Particular attention will be paid to major female characters whose attitudes, behaviour and utterance articulate aspects of womanism if not all. However, major male characters cannot be left out of the analysis since it is their relationship with these female characters that causes the female characters' womanist attitudes to come to the fore. The major female characters will therefore be looked at in the light of who may be referred to as a womanist according to Ogunyemi's womanist theory. It will then be determined whether their womanist attitudes are a rejection of the celebratory outlook of first generation anti-colonial and nationalist novels but an affirmation to the idea of basic human suffering.

### **1.9 Organization of the Study**

Chapter one of this study gives a general background of feminism and feminism in Africa. It deals with the theoretical frameworks for this study: namely womanism and the ethical universal. The literature review, the justification for the study, the significance, the methodology, the scope of the research, the delimitations and the organization of the study are all in the first chapter. The

second chapter looks at how Adichie articulates womanist concerns in *Purple Hibiscus* and then I argue out my point of how, as third generation writer in Nigeria, she echoes the theme of universal human suffering. The penultimate chapter will look at how Emechata voices her womanist views. It also focuses on the extent to which she leaves the realm of legitimizing the nationalistic tendencies first stage post-colonial novels and enters into thematic concerns which deal with basic human suffering. The final chapter discusses these two novels to ascertain the continuities in womanist and the ethical universal concerns and the variations, if any, due to the fact that these two womanist authors belong to different generations.

### **1.10 Delimitations**

Ideally, two authors from two different Anglophone countries, or a comparative study of womanist writers from the Anglophone-Francophone divide would have captured a more representative picture of womanist writing in West Africa. However, I believe that studying two novels from two major West African female novelists (and to be specific Nigerian female novelists) provides a basis for a further discussion of how each womanist author addresses issues affecting West African women and women in general and whether generational differentiation affects womanist continuities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Literature Review of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Some scholars have made comparisons between the works of Chimamanda Adichie and Chinua Achebe. In his review, "Nigeria," Kwame Dawes suggests that *Purple Hibiscus* can be read as another salvo against colonialism and the attendant patriarchy that has been captured in much of West African fiction. He tells the reader of the quiet voice in *Purple Hibiscus* that bears the traumas of a tyrannical Catholic Father who abuses his family; a father who is completely predisposed towards Western colonial ideals. However, it is not his inclination towards Western colonial ideals that makes him beat his wife and children even though patriarchy is part of the legacy of colonialism but it is his domineering and violent attitude which makes him beat his wife and children and these qualities arguably could be considered as part of the end products of the legacy of colonialism. Dawes observes that Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* begins with Achebe's monumental narrative of a "clash of cultures" as the first sentence in the novel reads "things began to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja did not go for communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere." Dawes concludes his review by saying that what really falls at the end of the novel is the rigid Catholicism of Eugene Achike ; Catholicism immersed in abuse and hypocrisy. The things which come crushing down in the novel are the edifice of Catholicism and its attendant horrors of patriarchy.

Dawes observes that Adichie engages with ideological and political issues using metaphor and symbolism. These issues are central to the best of writings in Africa. *Purple Hibiscus* has a fresh

and compelling voice that mirrors, including other things, the theme of patriarchy just as *Things Fall Apart* does. Dawes' article uses *Purple Hibiscus* and *Things Fall Apart* to point to the brutalities and violence that have characterized African nations and families as a result of patriarchy.

Heather Hewett reviews the new generation of Nigerian writers who are rejecting the long silence imposed by dictatorial regimes. In her review titled, "Finding Her Voice," she notes that *Purple Hibiscus* is the coming of age of the trauma that leads to chaos in a family. This is because a father who seeks to dominate and subject his family to much violence sends the family into a period of trauma in which he dies, his son goes to jail and his daughter and wife have to find a way to patch the wounds that will not heal because the father sought to dominate according his own desires.

Hewett also emphasizes Dawes' argument that *Purple Hibiscus* resembles *Things Fall Apart* in the manner in which Adichie begins her monumental novel saying. She estimates that the parallels between the two books can be viewed from the angle in which Adichie breaks down the family unit into pressures of politics and religion under a domineering father. Achebe's story in *Things Fall Apart*, she says, is set in a time when Christianity has come to Igboland while Adichie's story in *Purple Hibiscus* begins when Christianity has gained roots in the midst of Nigerian Independence. Hewett's article also touches on the issue of a "god-like" father who controls the lives of his children and wife. Hewett sees *Purple Hibiscus* as a life story of Kambili, the restrictions she faces under a patriarch of a father and the new ways of life she

discovers in her Aunty's home. Kambili finds strength to tell of her experiences at home which mirrors the state of the Nigerian society; a society governed by patriarchs. These experiences can be compared to what we read in *Things Fall Apart* especially when we consider the role of the elders and of the tragic hero, Okonkwo.

Mas Khan's analysis of *Purple Hibiscus* titled, "No Hope in Nigeria," is quite different from Dawes' and Hewett's. The review informs readers that *Purple Hibiscus* is the story of fifteen-year-old Kambili whose country Nigeria is engulfed in political turmoil. In addition, she has a tyrannical father who cruelly beats up his wife and two children. Khan critically analyzes the coup in *Purple Hibiscus* which results in the change of environment for Kambili and her brother Jaja. Their temporary stay with their aunt Ifeoma brings a wealth of experience. Kambili "finds herself" and so does Jaja, her brother. Kambili and Jaja together experience a home where debate is encouraged. "No Hope in Nigeria" gives an insight into the political unrest and corruption which is crippling countries like Nigeria. Khan also proposes that the novel contains a strong plea for religious tolerance. In the end, the fate of the family is the fate of the country and Khan says that the novel is generally a depressing novel. In conclusion, Khan's article recommends that *Purple Hibiscus* should be read more widely in the wealthy first class world, so that issues of poverty and migration can be understood in a different light.

Ogaga Okuyade's article "Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" focuses on the role of the patriarch father, Eugene Achike. In this article, Okuyade portrays Kambili's father as a religious maverick whose

“bigotry and belief are anchored on the theological standards of Catholicism.” His life of rosary and crossing makes him carry himself with a donnish air of superiority as his over-zealous attitude and clipped religious tones reduce members of his family to midgets. It is true that Kambili’s father works hard but the home they live in is capacious yet stifling, the bedrooms are roomy yet stuffy emphasizing the deep sense of restriction in the home as a result of the patriarchal tendencies of the father. Okuyade confirms to us that the domineering attitude of Kambili’s father could be compared to what readers will find in the character trait of Okonkwo, the tragic hero in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.

## **2.2 Literature Review of Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood***

In her paper, “Representing the African Woman: Subjectivity and Self in the *Joys of Motherhood*,” Salome C. Nnoromele (2002) re-assesses and redefines the images of the African woman in *The Joys of the Motherhood*. Instead of seeing Enu Ego as the typical African woman, she asks the question, in what ways are Nnu Ego’s experiences and responses to the events in her life representative of conditions of African women? She also asks the question, to what extent do cultural expectations contribute to her plight. And finally, she tries to find out whether there is room for the contemplation of individual responsibility. All these questions, she posits, are meant to show that the *The Joys of Motherhood* is not a construction of a universal African motherhood. She makes this analysis by refuting the argument that Nnu Ego is the quintessential African woman (p. 182).

Lilian Temu Osaka in her paper “Madness in Black Women’s Writing. Reflections from Four Texts: *A Question of Power*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Anowa* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,” attempts to define madness in a literary perspective and analyzes the protagonists’ failure to cope with life and reality. She says that the selected texts above make it clear that madness is a common problem among African women while also claiming that migrations to new societies are the causes of madness of African women (p. 4). Osaka is of the view that madness is a recurring theme in African and African American women’s writing. She mentions Bessie Head, Ama Atta Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta and Alice Walker as among those who deal with the theme of madness in their novels.

Osaka's review is similar to Femi Ojo-Ade’s “Madness in the African Novel” (1979) which distinguishes between two kinds of alienated heroes. Her paper focuses on the second type of mad person described by Ojo-Ade, the heroine branded mad or insane by society (p. 5). She identifies Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* as an autobiographical work that deals with Head’s mental breakdown and subsequent recovery (p. 7). Osaka asserts that *Anowa* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* both deal with the theme of madness. Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* employs the theme of madness in the way she portrays Nnu Ego as a character who breaks down into madness. Nnu’s Ego's first break with reality occurs when she loses her first son Ngozi because she fails to fulfill the expectations of the society. It is Nnu Ego’s determination to fulfill roles of an African woman which drives her mad (p. 10). In “Madness in Black Women’s Writing. Reflections from Four Texts: *A Question of Power*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Anowa* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*,” patriarchy and migrations to new societies are the causes of madness for women who otherwise would have been powerful figures in society (p. 17). This is

the case for the first three novels *A Question of Power*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Anowa*. Osaka's reading of *The Joys of Motherhood* borders on how Nnu is dominated by Nnaife, and even her first husband Amatokwu because she cannot fulfill her role as a vessel for producing babies. Even when she does, she is turned into a male by the Igbo culture in the novel because she is the first wife of Nnaife.

In "Gendered Hauntings: *The Joys of Motherhood*, Interpretive Acts, and Post-Colonial Theory", Stephane Robolin examines Emecheta's novel as a feminist novel. According to Robolin, cultural, sexual, political, economic and religious forces affect the individual, with reference to Emecheta's protagonist Nnu Ego, in a colonial setting. She suggests that Nnu Ego's life reveals a narrative of pathos because she encounters many obstacles. Robolin suggests that Nnu is plagued spiritually by her chi while she also struggles economically. The first of her plagues is caused by her father, a patriarchal figure within the novel. Nnu Ego's gendered haunting is as result of her chi, the Slave Woman, who is treated badly by one of Agbadi's sons before she is buried with Agunwa, Agbadi's senior wife. The Slave Woman is Nnu Ego herself, asserts Robolin. The novel also demonstrates how the deep rooted hierarchy of power within society affects women (p. 84). Nnu Ego's chances of survival are drowned by a society that is patriarchal as men dominate women.

Howard (1981) reviews *The Joys of Motherhood* and *In the Ditch* from a sociological point of view (p. 133). She claims that the life of the "ordinary" English woman provided by nineteenth-century novels is a rather distorted way. In her view, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* presents heroines who are "representative of the lives of 'typical' African women". The novel,

therefore, presents “a fairly common story of many women’s lives in Nigeria” (p. 134). It conveys a sense of the enormous strength and love which so many ordinary women have, and which is the backbone of their own survival and that of their children. This is typical of African women who are sources of protection and care to their children.

According to Howard, *The Joys of Motherhood* reveals the superficiality of the myth to which some Western feminists subscribe that mere economic independence of women will remove them from the authority of their own husbands. The subordination of women, she writes, to men in traditional societies, she writes, is clearly maintained by other factors than those that are economic. She concludes that there are enough grounds in the novel to agree with this position. Interestingly, the subordination of women is deep-rooted in African culture that it does not take away the acquisition of wealth to erode it. It is suspected that education of women can make them empowered enough to be independent.

In her article, “Buchi Emecheta and the African Dilemma,” Louise O’Brien stresses that *The Joys of Motherhood* offers an interesting approach to dealing with the twinned forces of race and gender oppression. According to O’Brien, Emecheta does not treat multiple oppressions simultaneously; rather, the novel establishes a series of complex temporal and geographical displacements and divisions which ensure that the two discourses are kept separate from each other.

O' Brien, on the other hand, reads *The Joys of Motherhood* as a description of the misery of being a black woman in a society which discriminates against African women. The novel, she asserts, deals with the conflict by confining different discourses to different time frames and locations. It addresses colonialist ideologies by valorizing pre-contact rural African culture as authentic and ideal despite the fact that it is also sexist and patriarchal.

O' Brien also undertakes an analysis of gender and femininity as represented and constructed quite differently within contexts of traditional African culture and that of a post-contact colonial culture. Her discussion and comparison are confined to the character of Nnu Ego, as the only female character in the novel who is directly represented in both contexts. In traditional culture, women are defined firstly by the men in their lives: initially by their fathers, then by their husbands, then their sons. They are defined secondly by their sexuality and their maternity. The first hint the reader has that femininity, masculinity and the relationship between men and women are changing, that they are not fixed or static comes from Agbadi, as he contemplates the choice of a second husband for his daughter.

### **2.3 Summary of Literature Review**

From the literature on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, there are different foci of literary analysis of the novel. Achike's role as a patriarch figure who uses his own brand of Catholicism to dominate his family is predominant in the various analyses by Dawes, Hewett, Khan and Okuyade. Secondly, the use of silence as a patriarchal weapon of control and the trajectory of Kambili's

womanist growth also feature. The portrayal of the Achike home as a microcosm of the chaotic Nigerian nation is also given attention by these critics.

The critics of the *Joys of Motherhood* in this review show concern for the plight of the African woman. Nnoromele argues that Nnu Ego is not the typical African woman while Howard contends that Nnu Ego is representative of the typical African woman. Madness as a theme in *The Joys of Motherhood* and the cultural forces which lead to this madness are analyzed even as Emecheta's valorization of Igbo culture comes to the fore.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ARTICULATIONS OF WOMANISM IN ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

#### 3.1 Adichie's Womanist Articulations

This chapter discusses Adichie's womanist articulations in *Purple Hibiscus*. This is done through the lens of Chikwenye Ogunyemi's womanist theory. The chapter will focus on the various ways in which Adichie extends the womanist vision beyond sexism, to include racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations in *Purple Hibiscus*. This many-sided goal of womanism is aimed at arriving at the humanistic womanist vision of the idea of commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female, what Ogunyemi refers to as a free Pan Africanism.

Issues that qualify *Purple Hibiscus* as a womanist novel will be discussed in this chapter. The discussion will focus on the idea of the metamorphosis that occurs in the life of Adichie's adolescent narrator/protagonist Kambili. This will be done in the context of the womanist themes of audaciousness, self-realization and self-empowerment. The womanist quest for woman-centredness, the quest for freedom from sexism, male dominance and abuse will also be discussed. Adichie's accommodationist stance towards male dominance within the context of the novel, and the extreme male dominance of Achike will be addressed as the importance of the extended family is shown. Finally, I will conclude my analysis by critically looking at how Adichie brings to the fore the ultimate womanist aim: the survival of both males and female. All these discussions will

be underlined by the sexist, cultural, national, political and economic considerations of womanist theory.

The first sentence of *Purple Hibiscus* reads:

Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère (p. 3).

This first sentence of the novel is a womanist statement of intent. It is also a statement which shows Achike's masculinist tendencies at play. Loum suggests that "Masculinity covers a farrago of attributes, including physical power, sexual and functional roles, social status, emotional traits and intellectual qualities" (p. 273). What the reader encounters in this first sentence is Achike's exertion of his physical power and social status to bring his son into conformity with his prescribed masculine preferences. Achike exercises a form of social censorship that is religiously masculinist in nature on those around him: Beatrice, his wife; Jaja his son, Kambili, his daughter and even on Ifeoma, his sister. In this particular instance, he aims to censor Jaja's reasons for failing to attend Mass. The character who engenders the falling apart of the Achike home is Jaja. Even though this sentence reflects the audacious character of Jaja, the latent inspiration for Jaja's manly challenge to his father is their aunty, Ifeoma. Kambili, after Jaja's defiance of his father lies in bed and allows her mind to rake through the past:

I lay in bed after Mama left and let my mind rake through the past, through the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than with our lips. Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all; Aunty 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..." (p. 15).

It is important to realize that Jaja is not the only one whose life is changed by the democratic environment of Auntie Ifeoma's home in Nsukka. Kambili's metamorphosis is relatively drastic as the reader realizes an outspoken Kambili whose timidity in the early stages of the novel has given way to "A freedom to be, to" (p. 16).

Before I turn attention to tracing Kambili's growth from being a naïve, innocent girl to being a responsible audacious girl-woman, I discuss Adichie's skill of compressing all her womanist concerns into the first chapter of the novel

### **3.2 Adichie's Womanist Concern with Political, Social, Economic and National Issues in Nigeria**

Adichie titles the first chapter of *Purple Hibiscus*, "Breaking Gods, Palm Sunday." This title is symbolic and a reference to Jesus Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The first part of the title is a reference to how Achike breaks the figurines, an object of comfort for his wife whenever he physically abuses her, with his missal, which is a symbol of his Catholic faith. Breaking the figurines and destroying his missal marks the beginning of the falling apart of things in the Achike home. It is also a sign of oppression augmented by Catholic beliefs and doctrine. Kambili testifies to this when she says that, "Maybe Mama had realized that she would

not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw his missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything” (p. 15).

In addition, Adichie chooses an opportune womanist moment to situate Jaja’s defiance of his father. That moment is Palm Sunday, the day of Christ’s triumphant arrival into Jerusalem. It is a moment of freedom for the masses, freedom from the oppressive regime of the Romans as the Jews saw it. It was a moment of joy for the broken and battered. However, Jaja does not wish to be a part of this joy as he refuses to go to communion and later says that he would rather die than eat the “host.” Within womanist theoretical concerns, Palm Sunday becomes the day that begins the march towards freedom and independence for Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice from the abusive stance of their father. It is a freedom from the sexist stance of their father, Achike.

Adichie, from the onset, addresses one of the concerns of the African womanist writer, the quest to address a kind of White Christian cultural imperialism within post-colonial Nigerian society. Kambili speaks of the Catholic Father of St. Agnes Parish in Enugu and his cultural preferences. These preferences are situated within colonial and even national discourse; the fact that Father Benedict thinks of the Igbo language as not being appropriate or holy enough to become a medium for reciting the Credo and kyrie. Rather, he prefers that they be recited in Latin, a language that most of the people in the church will not understand. Apart from the underlying factor that Father Benedict thinks Latin to be a better and more sacred language than Igbo, there are also the underlying issues of enslavement through cultural imperialism – the quest to keep the African bound to cultures that are foreign.

Father Benedict also has a certain racial demeanor towards Igbo songs sung for worship in the parish. Though unspoken, Adichie's sixteen year old narrator, Kambili, is quick to notice his disposition towards Igbo songs. This is Kambili's observation:

Also, hand-clapping was to be kept at a minimum, lest the solemnity of Mass be compromised. But he allowed offertory in Igbo; he called them native songs, and when he said 'native' his straight-line lips turned down at the corners to form an inverted U (p. 2).

This attitude of insisting on the sacredness of Latin and showing little respect for indigenous languages is ingrained in Achike who prefers to speak English with a British accent in public as he criticizes Father Amadi for singing Igbo songs in the midst of a sermon and urges his family to pray for him (p. 29). Achike prefers white culture to his African culture. Adichie uses the observations of a sixteen year old girl to criticize Achike and others like him.

Adichie also provides a background of the economic issues at stake within the novel. Kambili gives the reader information about the capitalist mode of production in Nigeria through her father, Achike. He is the owner of a conglomerate comprising Wafer, Drink factories among others and a newspaper. This capitalist organization in Nigeria allows the protagonist's father to earn more and more as he also does not fail to donate to the church, charity and people both openly and discreetly. His wealth acquires him so much influence within the society, the church, his hometown and his home. He is referred to us "omelora, The One Who Does for the Community" (56). The underlying motivation for his benevolence can be attributed to his control

of so much wealth, which gives him the opportunity to do for the community what he does. Father Benedict preaches on the generosity of Achike:

On some Sundays, the congregation listened closely even when Father Benedict talked about things everybody knew, about Papa making the biggest donations to Peter's Pence and St. Vincent de Paul. Or about Papa paying for the cartons of communion wine, for the new ovens at the convent where the Reverend Sisters baked the host, for the new wing to St. Agnes Hospital where Father Benedict gave extreme unction... (p. 5).

Later on in the novel, Kambili will disclose her shock about the extent of control her father has over wealth. She says:

We do not talk about the huge checks we have written, for bribes to judges and policemen and prison guards. We do not talk about how much money we have, even after half of Papa's estate went to St. Agnes and to the fostering of missions in the church. And we have never talked about finding out that Papa had anonymously donated to the children's hospitals and motherless babies' homes and disabled veterans from the civil war (289).

At least Achike's control of so much wealth does not just benefit his immediate family, but also his extended family and the society. This womanist theme of survival of both men and women will be discussed as part of Adichie's womanist articulations on the ultimate goal of womanism in the final section of this chapter.

Lastly, Adichie draws womanist inspiration from the political climate in the novel. What is obvious is that this climate does not only affect the masses, the “crowds waving leaves” who “chanted at the Government Square after the coup” (p. 16) but it also affects Achike, his family, his workers and his loved ones. Adichie’s concern with the political climate lies within the womanist perspective of ensuring that society thrives and humanity survives. The rampant coups that mar the political climate of Nigeria are a concern to Adichie because they do not ensure the well-being of all. After compressing these womanist issues in the first fifteen pages of *Purple Hibiscus*, in the mouth of her protagonist, Adichie moves on to address the metamorphosis that occurs in Jaja and most importantly Kambili.

### **3.3 Kambili’s Womanist Metamorphosis**

The significance of Adichie’s subtitles in the novel cannot be underestimated. Her second chapter in *Purple Hibiscus*, “Speaking with our Spirits; Before Palm Sunday,” is a trajectory of the history behind Jaja’s defiance on Palm Sunday. It is a trajectory of the transformation of Kambili’s life from the “timid, girlish and voiceless” sixteen-year old to a bold, vocal and enthusiastic girl-woman by the time the novel ends. In his article “Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*,” Ogaga Okuyade explores “the growth process of the protagonist, Kambili, as she struggles to make her mouth function within the totalitarian temperament of her father’s home. According to Okuyade (2009), “the protagonist is involved in a crisis with religious and domestic stakes at the beginning of the narrative; she seems to be a mere observer and victim, but as the novel drags towards its denouement, she realizes her voice and role in the home after her awakening” (p. 1).

This growth process of Kambili is womanist in character and her awakening is that of a womanist awakening. Kambili tells the reader of a language she and Jaja have cultivated because of their father's totalitarian way of heading his family. She calls this language "asusu anya, a language of the eyes" (p. 297). The only language that is perfected in the Achike home is that of the language of speaking with their spirits and the eyes and both Kambili and Jaja become masters of this art of speaking. Silence becomes a means used by Achike to maintain his patriarchal control over his wife and children. Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1998, p. 75) observes that "Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure" (In Okuyade, p. 248). This assertion by Uwakweh is not entirely true in *Purple Hibiscus*. Silencing as a patriarchal weapon of control in the novel is not restricted to subverting females. Achike uses silence to subjugate his wife and children. The military, a national patriarchal weapon of control, also uses silence to keep the masses mute especially journalists such as Ade Coker (p. 202), and human right activist Nwanketi Ogechi (pp. 196-98).

Okuyade, quoting from different critics of African Literature, brings out the function of the African writer:

The creative art for the African writer is not just an art form that seeks to entertain the audience, it functions beyond that, it is more of a social document geared towards the reconstruction of the socio-political configuration of the African people. Helen Chukwuma (2003) contends that the novelist does more than simple story telling in a beautiful manner, "He arouses in the reader a

true sense of himself, evoking his past and linking it to the present” (vi). In the same vein, Samuel Asein (1978) cautions that “a writer should play a purposeful role in the human drama of his times (74). Invariably, when assessing the African writer, the critic should pay attention to the social context from which the creative art emanates. The African imaginative construct cannot be devoid from its social context, because it is the context that animates it. It is against this background that Oladele Taiwo (1986) argues that: “ for criticism to give a true reflection of the work of art, the critic must understand thoroughly not only the language of the author but also the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the work” (p. 2).

Adichie fulfills this role of the artist by creating the Achike home as a microcosm of the wider national trauma of chaos and silence imposed on the citizenry who defy the military’s tactics of oppression and subjugation to maintain an atmosphere of fear. Even before she addresses the growth of Kambili, Adichie gives a picture of the political climate in Nigeria, the social context that she situates the novel in is that of a chaotic society in which coups have begotten coups. Adichie’s weaving of Nigeria’s political story along with Kambili’s womanist growth comes from a womanist vision. The protagonist of *Purple Hibiscus* gives a background to the context within which the coup happens:

It was during family time the next day, a Saturday, that the coup happened. Papa had just checkmated Jaja when we heard the martial music on the radio, the solemn strains making us stop to listen. A general with a strong Hausa accent came on and announced that there had been a coup and that we had a new government. We would be told shortly who our new head of state was (p. 24).

The announcement on the radio ironically disrupts the family time of the Achikes. Adichie, through Achike's creation of family time on the schedules of Jaja and Kambili, paints a picture of what should be the womanist ideal of the togetherness and wholeness of families comprising men, women and children. She is, however, not a writer who will dwell in the world of illusion. Adichie is true to the womanist calling of telling of life as it is, sometimes as it is thought to be and rarely as it ought to be. As the announcement of the coup disrupts the Achike's family time, Achike proceeds to call Ade Coker, the editor of his newspaper, *The Standard*. He comes back to his family to talk about how Nigeria needs a renewed democracy. The irony lies within Achike's own strong arm leadership of his family. It lies in his failure to recognize that there is a thin line between how he rules his family and how the military rule the nation. There is also the paradox of Achike's newspaper representing one of the voices which openly criticize the military regime. And yet, he keeps his family under his own created aura and grace. Adichie's concern with the political climate emphasizes her concern for the entire Nigerian nation because not only does it affect the masses such as the market women or the beggars on the streets but it also affects influential and rich people like Achike.

Though Achike bemoans the chaotic and despotic character of the military, he does not recognize that he is the symbol of military dictatorship within his home. From the beating of his wife and children, deploying a mechanical and compulsory lifestyle for his children through time tables, insisting that his children do not sing Igbo songs to restricting his children's relations with members of his extended family such as her sister Ifeoma and her children as well Papa Nnukwu, Achike is a replica of military leadership in the novel. When Kambili repeats (three times) the incident of the soldier whipping the market woman in her mind, she does so because she is very

familiar with the brutal beating of the market woman. The military on the other hand murder citizens like Nwanketi Ogechi and Ade Coker, citizens who are outspoken on the corruption that engulfs Nigerian society; soldiers harass market women while the head of state dies atop a prostitute, a pointed image of how morally depraved the military is, which acts as a patriarchal weapon to oppress women, children and other men who exist as subjects in a hegemonic relationship to the military.

Kambili's formative years as an adolescent are full of things that she wishes she could say and yet she cannot say. They are marked by the wish to say things that will be approved of in the eyes of her father. She relates to the incident of Ade Coker's arrest, Achike's editor of his newspaper *The Standard*, when Achike tells his family of how the soldiers put out cigarettes on Ade Coker's back. Beatrice's response to this ordeal the soldiers put Ade Coker through is, 'They will receive their due, but not on this earth, *mba*,' Mama said.' Although Papa did not smile at her- he looked too sad to smile- I wished I had thought to say that, before Mama did. I knew Papa liked her having said that' (pp. 42). This character of always seeking for her father's approval will be tested by Amaka, Obiora and Chima, Kambili's cousins, when Jaja and Kambili visit their Ifeoma in Nsukka for the first time.

Apart from Kambili's lack of speech, she also lacks a sociable disposition as well being emotionally unexpressive. Kambili's emotional crisis is expected because her father's schedule for what she can do and cannot do is a symbol of who and what she is emotionally. Like the schedule, everything she wishes to say, everything she wishes she could be, is crammed inside

her. Her inability to socialize with her classmates earns her the nickname “backyard snob” in the eyes of her classmates and they question why she runs away so quickly after class hours are over when she can at least engage in chit chats with her class mates. Kambili, however, knows better than to be affected by her class mates’ cast-in-stone perception of who she is. She is not fazed by her class mates because as a girl-womanist, she is more concerned with her survival than living a surreal beautiful life to her class mates’ admiration. In her own words, “But I did not worry too much about *that* (emphasis mine, *that* referring to her status as a “backyard snob”) because I carried a bigger load- the worry of making sure I came first this term. It was like balancing a sack of gravel on my head every day at school and not being allowed to steady it with my hand” (p. 52). This character of Kambili is a show of womanist strength even at age fifteen. Despite seeing the print in her textbooks as a red blur, despite seeing her baby brother’s spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood in her textbooks, she devises a way of mastering this effect of her father’s beating of her pregnant mother and the subsequent dripping of blood that comes with it by memorizing what the teachers say in class. Her teachers become her instant source for knowledge in preparing for her exams and not her text books (p. 33 & p. 52). In taking responsibility for the outcome of her examinations at the end of the term, Kambili is distinguished from her “girlish” classmates into a “womanish adolescent” who takes responsibility for her actions as she shows bravery for choosing the method she adopts in studying for her examinations that term. Kambili is able to overcome the many difficulties she encounters both at home and in school. At the end of the term, when her report card is presented to her, she comes out on top of her class.

According to Jita Allan (1995, p. 10), womanish behaviour “is a gesture with which the black woman-child responds to the unequal distribution of power in society.” In Kambili’s situation, however, the motivation for her action is different. She psychologically and mentally crams up everything, like her father’s schedule, what her teachers teach without looking into her text book as a way of surviving within the dictatorial walls of her father’s home. Kambili’s womanist perceptions of survival cannot be underestimated. As a witness to the beating and flogging of market women in Enugu as well as the destruction of their wares, she repeats the incident three times in her mind. She confesses to the reader:

I thought about that woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I had not seen her face, but I felt that I knew her, that I had always known her. I wished I could have gone over and helped her up, cleaned the red mud from her wrapper...I thought about her, too, on Monday, as Papa drove me to school...He reminded me of the market woman in the dirt...(pp. 45- 46).

Adichie intentionally repeats this scene three times in the mind of a fifteen year old adolescent to outdoor Kambili’s coming of age as a womanist even before she goes through the epic transformation of becoming a girl-woman who does not speak with her spirit but speaks with her mouth. It is her coming of age because Kambili’s thoughts and feeling are geared towards the survival of the market women, not only the market women but also the man beggar she encounters on her way to school. Even before she endures the humiliation of her father pulling out a mirror right in front of her class and asking her to tell him how many heads she has (p. 46), “she moves creatively beyond the self to that of concern for the needs of others characteristic of adult womanists”(Ogunyemi, p. 72). The repetition of the incident signals Adichie’s concern for the reality of the African woman’s position as that of a subservient, oppressed, powerless and

trampled upon human being. Adichie portrays past military regimes in Nigeria as patriarchal institutions which make sure that women's rights are violated. As a skillful womanist writer, the killing of the head of state by a prostitute is a gesture of victory for women.

On the contrary, the killing of the head of state raises questions about the ultimate goal of womanism which to ensure the survival of men, women and children. This act could be considered utilitarian in the light of the social and economic circumstances- fuel hikes, striking lecturers, lawless soldiers, lack speech and injustice and ultimately the corruption and hypocrisy of the head of state- which prevail in the novel. The military leadership of the head of state aids in the sustenance of the disorder that engulfs the nation. The system is able to work for the military leader and his government to the detriment of the citizens. Even though Ade Coker and Nwanketi Ogechi are killed in brutal circumstances, the inhumane treatment of the market women by the lawless soldiers underscores the use of the military soldiers as “hands, legs and feet” of the patriarchal system in the nation. For Ogunyemi to theorize that bad men are sometimes eliminated in womanist novels is not to defeat the ultimate goal of womanism but rather to state the reality of the oppression of women in Africa. And that reality is that women, when pushed against the wall will act in self-defense, and not out of malicious intent. It must be emphasized that the killing of the head of state by the prostitute has repercussions for both men and women. It is an act that frees both men and women from the brutal power of the head of state. It is a statement by Adichie that shows the willingness of women to become sacrificial lambs in the quest to see progressive and harmonious African societies.

And so Kambili triumphs and escapes from her father's public ridicule after she regains her first position in class and sleeps well that night, and dreams of her father's voice telling her of how proud of her he was. She travels with her family to Abba for Christmas full of hope and encounters another womanist triumph by meeting her inspiration, Ifeoma.

Kambili's first impression of her Aunty Ifeoma is more in tune with the womanist vision of audaciousness, outrageousness and willful behaviour. Ifeoma questions and challenges patriarchal authority and domination within Achike's home and in the country as a whole. Adichie expresses her audacious womanist vision through the manner in which Kambili speaks of Ifeoma's disagreement and struggle with Achike's dominant posture of ruling his family. Kambili's first impression of Ifeoma is one which portrays her aunty as a confident and vocal woman. She makes the following careful observation:

She walked fast, like one who knew just where she was going and what she was going to do there. And she spoke the way she walked, as if to get as many words out of her mouth as she could in the shortest time (p. 71).

Later on in the novel, Kambili will give a more telling characterization of her Aunty. She says:

I imagined a proud ancient forebear walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots nursing babies until they walked and talked, fighting wars with machetes sharpened on sun-warmed stone. She filled a room (p. 80).

Ifi Amadiume, writing in *Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, religion and culture* (1997), contends that “the whole notion of a patriarchal paradigmatic monolithism is dismissed by my thesis of paradigmatic opposition to structural gender contestation, as a result of the presence of matriarchy in the fundamentals of the ideas of kingship in ancient and traditional Africa” (x). Adichie therefore portrays Auntie Ifeoma as woman who rules her family; as a woman who is fearless and will stand in opposition, if the need arises, to the dominant patriarchal system represented by her brother Achike. Kambili is therefore right in describing her as an ancient forebear; a forebear of matriarchal power and organization; this carries across a revisionist stance of womanism as Ifeoma does not conform to the dictates of Achike’s patriarchal behaviour. Ifeoma dismays Kambili in the way she speaks to Achike, Kambili’s object of admiration, as Kambili admires and yearns to be like her (p. 77). Their visit to Nsukka, which changes the lives of Kambili and Jaja, does not come cheap. It comes at the cost of womanist audaciousness put up by Ifeoma when she musters the courage to insist Kambili and Jaja visit Nsukka for a week. Achike agrees to Ifeoma’s request on the day of the celebration of the feast of Epiphany, a day on the Christian calendar which marks the visit of the Magi to celebrate Jesus Christ’s birth or in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the baptism of Jesus Christ. Both moments are moments of sudden realization and discovery. And so, to situate the feast of Epiphany on the day Achike agrees to allow his children to visit Nsukka is a signal of the beginning of new things for Jaja and Kambili. Adichie gives a foreshadow of the things to come through Kambili’s dream:

That night, I dreamed that I was laughing, but it did not sound like my laughter, although I was not sure what my laughter sounded like. It was cackling and throaty and enthusiastic, like Auntie Ifeoma’s (p. 89).

Kambili's state of mind in the above extract signals her self-discovery which will become evident in the period of her stay in Nsukka. It shows how Kambili must begin to accept who she really is as opposed to who she has been socialized to be. That period of transition, of struggling to find herself begins in Nsukka, in the home of Aunty Ifeoma.

### **3.4 Nsukka as a Symbol of Womanist Change and Audaciousness**

Ifeoma's home in Nsukka becomes the agent of Kambili and Jaja's metamorphosis in various ways. Every change that occurs in the lives of Kambili and Jaja is instigated by Ifeoma's liberalism and fierce character. Beatrice only completes the final hurdle of the supposed coup d'etat in Achike's household by poisoning him.

The womanist change that is engendered in *Purple Hibiscus* is initially instigated by Kambili's first encounter in Nsukka when she still has her eyes closed after Auntie Ifeoma has finished saying grace. Her Aunty says with a chuckle, "We do not say Mass in the name of grace like your father does" (p. 119). The most significant observation Kambili makes, however, does not have to do with how different Ifeoma's grace is from Achike's grace. She observes that

Laughter floated over my head. Words spurted from everyone, often not seeking, often not getting any response. We always spoke with a purpose back home, especially at table, but my cousins seemed to simply speak and speak and speak. (p. 120).

Kambili's reaction to this happening is almost unbelievable as she mentally disappears from what is going on at the dining table. She is only startled by Ifeoma's question of whether she appreciates the food. Ifeoma realizes that Kambili and Jaja have both been living within a domestic environment in which domestic silence is the only audible speech they are aware of. Kambili says that, "I had felt I was not there, that I was just observing a table where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished" (p. 120). This is a stark contrast to the presence of economical speech making in Achike's household. For Jaja, and especially Kambili, the only words they manage to say at dining in their father's house must be either three sentences of thanksgiving to "God, Papa and Mama" or a sentence approving one of the products from Achike's factory. To encounter words being used without purpose yet acceptable by her cousins startles her. This is how the transformation of Kambili's stuttering speech begins even though it takes time for her to muster courage to say what she really wants to say without seeking for approval from anybody. Kambili therefore likens her Aunty's role to that of a coach who fosters team work, unity, consensus and proper use of talent while also insisting on discipline as a recipe for success. She describes the way Ifeoma looks at her children whenever there is laughter and free speech as the "proud-coach-watching-the-team way" (p. 131). Kambili later realizes Ifeoma prays for laughter, something her father will not even pray for.

Apart from teaching and demonstrating to Jaja and Kambili how to laugh and be free minded, Ifeoma also teaches them to sing when they recite the rosary in Nsukka for the first time. When she questions them for not joining in the singing the answer she gets is "We don't sing at home" (p. 125), an answer that almost irritates their Aunty. This piece of information Jaja and Kambili

relay to their Aunty is very significant within womanist theory. The Igbo songs Aunty Ifeoma and her children sing for the recital of the rosary are not just songs but songs sung in Igbo as a way of appropriating African culture to Catholicism. They sing Igbo songs to affirm their conviction that Igbo is as good as English and the fact that Western culture is not superior to African culture. This is a different arrangement in Achike and Father Benedict's dislike for Igbo songs of worship. The lack of singing in the Achike family also renders Kambili and Jaja emotionally inflexible.

A very significant gesture by Ifeoma to 'educate' the children is to make Kambili read *Equiano's Travels*. This has implications for an analysis of the dictatorial, oppressive and inhumane atmosphere that exists within the Nigerian nation and the Achike home. The reference to this pioneering work of African literature also emphasizes the womanist idea of togetherness and inclusiveness in the sense that Ifeoma chooses to thrust a novel written by a male, and not that of a female, into the hands of Kambili. According to S. E. Ogude, Equiano's first name Oleudah meant "having a loud voice, and well spoken" (Edwards, p.xvii). The meaning of Equiano's name is the fundamental crisis of Kambili's teenage years, the fact she does not have a loud voice, cannot speak well and cannot say the words she really wants to say. Adichie places this detail in the novel as a way of inspiring Kambili to break forth from her silence, the silence that is sustained by brutalities unleashed without mercy, without fear and without compassion by her father. Equiano becomes an inspirational character for Kambili because he himself, a slave under difficult and inhuman conditions, lived, spoke against and fought for the abolitionist cause. Even though *Equiano's Travels* acts as a womanist propagandist tool to rekindle in Kambili the need to speak and be free, it also becomes a therapeutic tool for Kambili to gain strength and hope that

her father's oppression will come to an end someday. Like Kambili, Equaino is a Christian whose narrative is full of his belief and trust in God. It is his belief in God that sustains him in his survival of the inhumane treatment carried out against him. Kambili therefore acquires two weapons to stand against her father's ill treatment: the spirit to speak out and be free and the hope she must have in God in the midst of her traumatic experiences.

In contrast to the silence that exists in her life and that of her home in Enugu, Kambili sums up life under Aunty Ifeoma's care in this way:

Laughter always rang out in Aunty Ifeoma's house, and no matter where the laughter came from, it bounced around all the walls, all the rooms. Arguments rose quickly and fell just as quickly. Morning and night prayers were always peppered with songs, Igbo praise songs that usually called for hand clapping. Food had little meat, each person's piece the width of two fingers pressed close together and the length of half a finger. The flat always sparkled. Amaka scrubbed the floors with a stiff brush, Obiora did the sweeping, Chima plumped up the cushions on the stairs. Everybody took turns washing plates. Aunty Ifeoma included Jaja and me in the plate-washing schedule... (p. 139).

Apart from helping to transform the daily routine and emotional inflexibility of Jaja and Kambili, Ifeoma also influences Jaja and Kambili, ideologically. She gives Jaja a background to his name and goes ahead to tell him of the real import of his name. The name Jaja, she tells her children, resonates with Jaja of Opobo who was a defiant king. Adichie, through Ifeoma, gives a history of Jaja of Opobo in relation to colonialism and the fact that Jaja of Opobo did not give in to the

demands of colonial authority. The most important detail in that historical anecdote is Ifeoma's view that "Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes" because "Defiance is like marijuana- it is not a bad thing when used right" (pp. 143-44). The result of this positive side of defiance will begin to rear its head when Jaja questions his father's insistence of converting Papa Nnukwu to become a Christian.

As a religious liberalist, Ifeoma encourages Kambili and Jaja to see reason not to regard Papa Nnukwu, their grandfather as a heathen but a traditionalist. Kambili holds on to her conviction that Papa Nnukwu is a heathen until she witnesses her grandfather praying even for Achike his son, Kambili's father asking Chineke (God) to bless Achike. This inspires Kambili to hold on to Amaka's painting of Papa Nnukwu even as Achike kicks her continuously and whacks her with a belt for holding on to the physical symbol of the undying mental image of Papa Nnukwu, Amaka's portrait of Papa Nnukwu.

Adichie places Amaka as a contrast to Kambili from the initial stages of the story so that the reader can realize the transformation that takes place in Kambili's life. Kambili introduces Amaka to readers:

Amaka was a thinner teenage copy of her mother. She walked and talked even faster and with more purpose than Aunty Ifeoma did. Only her eyes were different; they did not have the unconditional warmth of Aunty Ifeoma's. They were quizzical eyes, eyes that asked many questions and did not accept many answers... (p. 78).

Amaka is a girl-womanist whose views on African culture are as mature as her mother's. She influences Kambili with her culturally conscious music. In doing so, she distinguishes herself from other teens of her age group who listen to American Pop music. Kambili narrates her encounter with Amaka's culturally conscious music:

She turned the cassette player on, nodding to the polyphonic beat of drums. 'I listen mostly to indigenous musicians. They're culturally conscious; they have something real to say. Fela and Osadebe and Onyeka are my favourites. Oh, I'm sure you're you probably don't know who they are, I'm sure you're into American pop like other teenagers.' She said 'teenagers' as if she were not one, as if teenagers were a brand of people who, by not listening to culturally conscious music were a step beneath her. And she said 'culturally conscious' in the proud way that people say a word they never knew they would learn until they do (p. 118).

By intentionally choosing to listen to indigenous musicians as opposed to foreign musicians, Amaka is used by Adichie to make a case for the womanist ideal of appreciation for black/African culture. She is careful of the temptation to put Western culture above African culture because African culture makes sense to her and the musicians who compose songs have something real to say such as Fela's style of delving into the politics of Nigeria with his songs. Amaka's cultural appreciation for African culture comes into the picture once more when she argues with Father Amadi on the issue of the reasons behind the appearing of "Our Lady" in Africa. Again her argument is what makes Europe a preferable place for "Our Lady" to appear in comparison to Africa. Simply put, she does not think Europe is better than Africa, whether religiously or culturally. Most importantly, she believes in the future of Africa, that despite the corruption and lack of development, all Africans should stay in their countries and strive to make

it better rather than board the next plane to greener pastures, an ideological argument she engages in with her younger brother, Obiora. To sum up Amaka's culturally womanist character, she refuses to take an English name for her confirmation despite pleas from her mother and father Amadi, the Catholic priest at the parish in Nsukka. According to Amaka, Igbo names such as Chiamaka (God is beautiful), Chima (God knows best) and Chiebuka (God is the greatest) all glorify God as much as "Paul" and "Peter" and "Simon" (p. 266). Kambili observes these womanist world views of Amaka and appropriates them to her life.

As Kambili continues to search for her voice, Nigeria also continues her search for self-definition and nationhood. Adichie employs a rhetorical device through which she interrogates the Nigerian socio-political situation as part of womanist critical discourse. Just like Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice, the Nigerian people continue to be subjected to silent spaces, a phenomenon Wole Soyinka (2003) describes as the art of stealing a nation's "most precious asset – its voice"(p. 8). The novel displays the imperceptibility and insensitivity of government to the plight of the people who continue to wallow in poverty and oppression. The people are subjected to different forms of subjugation, ranging from poor supply of potable water, unstable power supply to the shortage of petroleum products. They protest their deplorable plights through industrial actions and demonstrations of different forms (Okuyade, p. 251).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Achike's newspaper, *The Standard* becomes the voice of the people. With its scathing criticism of the government, the people create their own voice in industrial actions and incessant demonstrations where they make critical statements about the depravity of government.

In a bid to ensure the people's voices are drowned, the editor, Ade Coker, is intimidated with periodical abduction and incarceration. Okuyade writes:

The entire narrative conjures up familiar incidents during the regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, regimes reputed for the bureaucratization of murder. Ade Coker is killed via a letter bomb while Nwankiti Ogechi is killed by soldiers in a bush in Minna, and his corpse bathed with acid so that he does not resurrect. These two characters bear semblance with two martyrs who fought for political and economic emancipation and the inequitable distribution of resources- Ken Saro-Wiwa and Dele Giwa. They were slain by the most despotic regimes in the recent political history of Nigeria- despots who are so depraved beyond imagining. Just as Kambili is in a state of flux, Nigeria, according to Paul Beckett and Crawford Young (1997), remains in "Permanent transition" (p. 251).

In Enugu, Kambili gets exposed to Nigeria's decaying political state, through discussions between Ade Coker and her father and on some other occasions through *The Standard*. She, however, experiences the realities in the consequences of what she usually reads in the *Standard* when she visits her aunty in Nsukka. She experiences the immediacy of government depravity first hand, through violent demonstrations, fuel hikes and the abundance of Okada on the streets as a means of transportation for the masses.

### **3.5.1 Adichie's Commitment to Addressing Sexism within Nigerian Society**

In this section, I examine Achike's sexist oppression of his wife, Beatrice, and how she, together with Ifeoma, responds to such oppression.

Adichie's womanist commitment to addressing sexism, the unfair treatment of women just because they are women is captured in the following ways:

- a. Achike's Sexist Stance against Beatrice and other Female Characters
- b. Resistance to Patriarchy and the Subversion of Sexism
- c. Mutual Female Bonding and Acceptance

### **3.5.2 Achike's Sexist Stance against Beatrice and other Female Characters**

Achike's sexist oppression of his wife functions within a dominant patriarchal system. Patriarchy has been conceptualized as "rule by the fathers" (Okuro, p. 523). This definition conveys two ideas: that a father is regarded as the ultimate authority and rule within the family. His rulership means that he is the centre of the home while the other members of his family, the wife and children, sit on the periphery. To borrow Simone de Beauvoir's term, the father is the "One" while the wife and children are the "Others" (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, p. 127). The process of "Othering" by Achike is carried out in a subordinating way that shows disregard for the basic humanity of his wife.

In her work *Sexual Politics* (1969), Kate Millet defines patriarchy as "an institution used by men to subordinate females, children and even other men or treat the females, children and other men as inferior humans by exerting the power they have directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain wives and children (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, p. 131). Fundamentally, Achike is a patriarch because he is a male who dominates his wife, a female and his children. This idea is evoked by Gwen Hunnicut (2009) who asserts that "the core concept of patriarchy refers to systems of male domination and female subordination" (p. 553). Within this concept of

patriarchy is the image of gender hierarchies, -gender as socially constructed system- dominance and power arrangements. It must be understood that within the Achike home, there is a hierarchy which is gendered. He is the man who rules at the top of the family hierarchy and has the final say while his wife and children, especially his wife, must function subserviently within this hierarchy without questioning. The nature of the hierarchy within the Achike home means that he wields control and command over his wife and children. The question is how does Achike wield this power over his family? According to Millet, the patriarch's power is exerted "directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain women." This definition of patriarchy, however, leaves out the fact that the patriarch's power, within the context of *Purple Hibiscus*, is also exerted to constrain children and men as well and not only his wife or women. In Achike's home, the patriarch's power is exerted directly through physical violence (such as beating of his wife) and also forcing his wife and children to think like he does. Thus, Achike as a patriarch, does not necessarily have to be abusive since the ideas of dominance and subordination do not imply physical abuse only but also other forms of abuse that are emotional, mental and psychological. However, physical abuse is used by Achike in order to maintain his sexist stance towards a physically weaker gender, his wife.

In discussing the presence of sexism in *Purple Hibiscus*, it is important to mention that Achike, in the beginning of the novel, is portrayed as a man who cannot be broken by anything. His sexist position seems to have been consolidated by his wealth and position. He is a man who does for the community "Omelora." He pays the school fees of over a hundred children, he single-handedly sponsors St. Agnes Catholic church, he gives generously to people including his security man, and yet he remains ungenerous to his father, his wife and children. This leads my

discussion into the domain of Marxist feminists who extend the “analysis of class into a woman’s history of their material and economic oppression” (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker 133). It opens up the complex relations between gender and the economy and gives a history of the structural control patriarchy has exerted and still continues to exert in relation to women’s reproductive functions. The silent spaces within Beatrice’s life are critically used by Adichie to show the oppression of women who do not have access to a decent job or means of employment. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the power of material and economic reproduction rests in Achike’s hands. Beatrice has none of these. The chasm in the economic status and power between Beatrice and Achike consolidates the patriarch’s control and power. In a society in which Achike is able to disrespect even men older than he is, it is not a difficult matter for him to subordinate his wife and children to any form of treatment that suits him. How is it possible for a whole Igwe to visit the house of his subject at a time such as Christmas? How come Achike is able to tell his wife and children not to bow down in respect towards the Igwe, the overlord of the land? It is because Achike has excess wealth. His wealth is unimaginable and the society puts wealth and status above the dignity of man. Kambili gives an idea of the wealth Achike created when he was alive when she mentions that:

“We do not talk about the huge checks we have written, for bribes to judges and policemen and prison guards. We do not talk about how much money we have, even after half of Papa’s estate went to St. Agnes and to the fostering of missions in the church. And we have never talked about finding out that Papa had anonymously donated to the children’s hospitals and motherless babies’ homes and disabled veterans from the civil war” (p. 289).

Such immense wealth gives Achike an advantage over his wife. Jaja becomes a sacrificial lamb for his mother because the society would push Achike's death on Beatrice because of his wealth. A helpless Beatrice tells Ifeoma she has nowhere to go if she should leave Achike's house. Adichie portrays Beatrice's case as a helpless one by leaving out even a mention of Beatrice's relatives, not even her father or her mother. It suggests that Beatrice has been sold to Achike, who can do anything he wants to do with her. The economic situation in the Achike family favours Achike and he rightly takes hold of that privilege and uses it to oppress Beatrice and the children.

Achike's sexist oppression of his wife is to the extreme of limits. He is characterized as a husband who destroys or inhibits anything good that is birthed: Beatrice's unborn babies and Kambili and Jaja's social, ideological, and emotional growth. Achike is an author of destruction based on his brutal actions. Aware of his father's actions, Jaja tells Kambili that "we will take care of the baby: we will protect him" (p. 23). Kambili then follows instinctively with her belief that Jaja makes that statement in relation to their father. To protect an unborn baby from someone especially the father, is to imply that the father has the ability to harm the unborn baby.

Achike causes Beatrice to experience three miscarriages. The extreme physical beating of his wife leads to the miscarriages that plague Beatrice's failure to have more children. According to Molaria Ogundipe Leslie (2007), "It seems that the woman *is seen* as subordinated in her very essence to the man, in quality and specifically in marriage, which is a major site of women's subordination; her status and roles being multifaceted and varied outside marriage" (p. 209). The

sexist oppression of women is a major topic for discussion in *Purple Hibiscus*. For an uneducated woman like Beatrice, she has been brought up to believe that her very essence lies in her ability to produce children for her educated and wealthy husband, as the social norms that define the Igbo society determines a woman's worth by her ability to give birth to children, especially male children. Within Igbo patriarchal culture, sons are seen as much more important than daughters. Beatrice tells Kambili of her appreciation towards Achike for not succumbing to pressure from kinsmen to marry another wife because she was not "producing" more children (p.20). However, Beatrice knows that her inability to bear more children has been hindered by the beatings she has endured and has to endure in Achike's hands. He carries out his own kind of abortion by breaking a table on Beatrice's belly killing her unborn baby in the process. She laments to Ifeoma as she turns to Kambili, "You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly"... "My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes" (243). Beatrice is less treated as a human being and a woman. What makes the whole situation undignified giving credence to the loss of her essence for living is Kambili's observation- "Mama slid down to the floor. She sat with her legs stretched out in front of her. It was so undignified, but I lowered myself and sat next to her; our shoulders touching" (p. 243). Beatrice's sitting posture suggests a sense of despair but most importantly it suggests that she seems to have lost everything that makes her a woman unlike like her sister-in-law, Ifeoma.

Ifeoma on the other hand is an example of a woman whose role is multifaceted outside of marriage. This means she does not see herself as a woman who can only live a meaningful life by virtue of the fact she is married to a man and bears children for him. She does not only exist

to give birth to babies or fulfill domestic needs. The woman whose roles are multifaceted outside of marriage can make a career for herself, contribute to discourse on the state of the nation and society, freely express her opinion on critical issues without mincing her words and rule her family as well, more beautifully than what a man can do. She faces no constraint from any man, not even her brother, Achike. She takes every decision of the family by herself and will not succumb to her brother's demands even if she is in need. She resists the dominant male society by resisting Achike's abusive actions. Ifeoma's control over her home with her promotion of laughter and freedom contrasted to Achike's control over his household emphasizes the direct patriarchal dominance of the man within the family setting.

The patriarch within the home in *Purple Hibiscus* therefore, comes across as a man who is not able to manage his anger well enough and allows it to break loose causing extreme physical pain by the use of either his hand, legs or any object capable of not only harming but also destroying lives.

### **3.6 Resistance to Patriarchy and the Subversion of Sexism**

Catholicism is one of the instruments used by the patriarch, Achike, to rule and dominate his household. So his son, Jaja finds it appropriate to use his father's obsession with Catholicism to resist every form of ill-tempered dominance. Jaja's refusal to go for communion is worsened by the utterances meant to argue out his reasons for not attending the communion service. At the heart of Christianity is the opposition to most things that are secular. Jaja, knowingly or unknowingly, makes use of this firm belief by de-emphasizing the importance of the Christian

elements of worship. The answer he gives to his father upon the latter's questioning of his refusal to go for communion mirrors his subversion and devaluation of Christian doctrine. Jaja calls the "host," "wafer," a term that is too secular for Achike's liking as it does not capture the essence and the sacredness of Christ's body. This act of subversion by Jaja is made complete when he claims that the "host" nauseates him. Achike's reply is strictly religious- "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord Jesus. It is the death, you know that" (p. 6). The significance of this background within the first few chapters of the novel is to show that the patriarchal system can be subverted when the dominated are driven to an extent to which the only reasonable action is to undermine such authority. In the phrase, "Things started to fall apart at home," Adichie, through Kambili's narration, signals a disintegration of the patriarchal authority within the home of the Achikes; a course which is also charted by Beatrice, Achike's wife.

The subversion of the patriarch's sexist stance by Beatrice is not as direct as that of Jaja's. Perhaps, it is an indication of her lack of boldness to question the status quo, a quality possessed by Jaja. She decides to use a lethal but subtle means to eliminate the patriarch by poisoning his food and drink. This is very significant when compared to Jaja's defiance which is very direct. This brings to the fore the concept of patriarchy espoused by Kate Millet who says that the patriarch's "power is exerted, directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain women" (Raman Selden, p. 131). The direct or indirect ways of showing the presence of the patriarchal oppression as mentioned by Bhasin (p. 3), are through discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression and violence, all applying to women. Within Achike's home, the primary patriarchal tool of dominance used by the patriarch is violence. Beatrice, out

of frustration and the need to survive poisons the patriarch slowly until he is found dead in his office.

The poisoning of Achike by his wife is not a sign of cowardice but a realization and utilization of her strength, a woman's strength. I am arguing in this regard because the patriarch also uses his strengths: physical strength, wealth and money, to abuse his wife. Beatrice on the other hand also realizes that she is the one who supervises everything that has to do with food within the Achike home. Eugene's death is no coincidence within womanist theory because bad men are *sometimes* (emphasis mine) eliminated in womanist novels so that men and women can live together harmoniously (Ogunyemi, p. 75 – 76).

The poisoning of Eugene, however, is not as simplistic as it seems because the ultimate goal of womanism is not to take lives but to sustain and restore it. Beatrice's act must be subjected to the ultimate goal of womanism in the light of Achike's brutal force of oppression. Beatrice as a woman must contend with the patriarchal system of authority not just in her home but in the society. First and foremost, her prime role in the home, as fashioned out by the society, is for her to give birth to children. In conforming to the system in which women are seen as reproductive vessels rather than human beings, Achike's family members put undue pressure on him to find another wife for himself because it is not enough for him to have just two children. Secondly, Beatrice does not have any means of economic sustenance. Her economic well-being is tied to Achike's wealth therefore she is economically dependent on her husband. This makes her dwell in a marriage in which she is regarded as an unequal human being. As a result, she is not willing

to quit the marriage despite being constantly beaten and battered by her husband. Also, tied to Beatrice's continual stay in the Achike home is her fidelity to Achike because he does not consent to calls from his family to bring home a second wife. Moreover, the reality of not having any relations she can turn to in case she is sacked from her marital home coupled with the fact that the whole society proclaims Achike as the "one who does for the community" means that she has run into a cul-de-sac pathway in her marriage. It would be ironic and impossible for Beatrice to break that system of benevolence Achike has created around as he is seen as a good and kind man. Thirdly, Beatrice does not have any form of education which can give her an opportunity to challenge her husband unlike Auntie Ifeoma whose education gives her the power to earn a living through her work as a lecturer. Auntie Ifeoma's education however, gives her much more than a source of livelihood and she remains vocal and critical of Achike's treatment of her family, a trait she may have acquired through the journey through the education system that women are as human as men. She therefore shows this unrelenting and unyielding quality in dealing with the family members of her late husband, who accuse her of killing her late husband.

Considering all these factors which stifle Beatrice's well-being as a woman, the obvious routes of escape from a wife-beating husband are not many. It is either she decides to stay in the marriage and gets beaten until she dies or she abandons the marriage and leaves her children behind. From the above discussion, it is obvious Beatrice as a human being, first and foremost, and secondly, as a woman, cannot choose either option. She therefore chooses the remotest and extremist of solutions which results in the poisoning of her husband. The death of Achike, thus, is in line with the womanist writer's preference to tell of life as it is, sometimes of life as it is thought to be; life in the real world of human relationships. Beatrice chooses the ethics of

surviving over the aesthetic of living. Adichie, therefore, seems to suggest that the poisoning of Achike by Beatrice is not the ideal situation. However, considering the fact that one of the couple must live to survive in life and bear the consequences of each other's actions, Beatrice chooses to end her sufferings in marriage by killing her husband. This is not an easy choice even as she struggles to hold herself together mentally, psychologically and emotionally as she becomes 'almost' a mad woman who goes about telling people she killed her husband. The killing of Achike is a unique case in womanist theory where bad men are sometimes eliminated for other men, women and children to survive. It is therefore a case of the reality of women's oppression in society rather the overthrow of the ultimate goal of womanism.

The subversion of the patriarch is instigated by the patriarch himself. In both cases (Jaja and Beatrice's), the subversionists are driven to the extremes of resistance by the brutal actions of the patriarch. Jaja is able to critically observe the tranquility that exists in the home of his aunty, Ifeoma. He observes how Obiora is able to keep Ifeoma going even when Papa Nnukwu dies. Jaja witnesses how Obiora talks to the security men who budge into Ifeoma's apartment- "How you go just come enter like dis? Wetin be dis?" and Kambili notices that the fear in Obiora's eyes was not "quite shielded by the brazen manliness in his pidgin English" (p. 225). Even though Kambili observes such fear in Obiora's eyes, it must be acknowledged that Obiora acts like a grown up man. As a result, Jaja also decides to question the authority of his father. Jaja's questioning of the so called authority, however, takes on a defiant form. He returns from Nsukka and demands his room keys from his father. He is not afraid to speak his mind on the nature of the "host" telling his father that the wafer gives him bad breath. Ultimately, he becomes the "sacrificial lamb" for her mother's hand in the death of Achike. Beatrice on the other hand acts

in desperation and in self-defense. She poisons the patriarch for fear of suffering a predicament worse than the miscarriages, bruises and wounds she suffers. It therefore comes to the question of who dies first, whether it is the patriarch or she.

Again, Achike's death must be subjected to a thorough womanist analysis. Womanism calls for a holistic change that is geared towards survival and well-being. This change encompasses cultural, national, economic, political, racial and sexist issues that must be tackled to enhance survival and well-being. These are the various parts of patriarchy the womanist sees as it aims to advocate a sense of wholeness and unity which includes men, women and children.

In serving as the tool that binds or seeks for a union between men and women, womanism also encourages women to challenge oppressive modes of thought and behavior of patriarchal society. Beatrice, in killing her husband pierces a considerable big hole in the womanist's self-embracing umbrella of hope and survival. This goes against the womanist aim of unity. On the other hand, the act also represents a challenge against patriarchal power exerted via the medium of Achike's constant violent behavior.

Therefore, the only character who is absent at the end of the story in *Purple Hibiscus* is Achike. He misses out on the nearly integrative ending of the novel. His absence raises questions with regard to the womanist writer's aim of ensuring that her novel is filled with an integrative ending. Integrative endings in womanist novels must involve both male and females because it

takes the male and female worlds to produce an all-embracing womanist world. However, only one part of that womanist world is alive by the time the novel reaches its conclusion. This negates the authenticity of the womanist claim to ensuring a community that encourages male and female integration. As a result, the whole fabric of womanism is rendered incomplete because the presence of Achike, the man of the house is necessary to achieve black transcendence.

Ultimately, the poisoning of Achike also contributes to the discussion of the humanity of the African woman, who in this instance is Beatrice, Achike's wife. It is hard to fathom why a humane husband would want to break a table on her pregnant wife's belly. This act registers as one of the most cruel of acts that can be committed against women; an act, committed by a man who walks in the gendered and sexist path of being a husband and father. As Jones puts it:

Whether we are women or men, all the selves we are and could be are organized and sometimes constrained and warped by the various layers of culture in which we live. For most of us, this culture is one which construes difference as an indication that one must be right, or superior and the other wrong, bad or inferior, so that those who find themselves in positions of influence, choice and attributed power often use these to exploit, ignore, diminish and control others (Loum, p. 273).

Achike's position of influence, choice and attributed power make him exploit, ignore, diminish and control Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili. Most significantly, his acts of exploitation, diminishing and overtly controlling his family with a heavy hand draws the consequence of his death, an act

that renders Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* a novel that has questions surrounding its ultimate womanist goal of survival and well-being.

In contrast to the quiet submission to the authority of the patriarch within the Achike home, there exists a vibrant activism against the military leadership within the nation inspired ironically by Achike on one hand by virtue of the fact that he owns a newspaper (*The Standard*, with Ade Coker as its editor), and on the other hand the outspokenness of Nwanketi Ogechi. These are two groups who speak against the patriarchal abuse of the military regime earning their place as martyrs in their own right.

Even though Ade Coker and Nwanketi Ogechi are murdered by the military regime, they inspire a subversion of the military leadership as the military leader is found murdered, lying on top of a prostitute- "they say he died atop a prostitute, foaming at the mouth and jerking" (289). This bit of detail is a big statement regarding the state of the patriarchal system, a system that is disgraceful, shameful, unattractive and powerless. The image of a whole head of state dying atop a prostitute is to show the morally decadent patriarchal system which only exploits women and ends up being subverted. It is therefore an indication that women can subvert patriarchy and embarrass the system, if they so wish.

It is widely acknowledged that patriarchy subordinates women. However, the patriarch in *Purple Hibiscus* is given a two-fold portrayal; one that makes him domineering and ruthless and

another which makes him weak and vulnerable. Before the subversive acts against the patriarch take place, Adichie seems to say that behind the patriarchal abuse of his family, Achike is not the strong man he seems to be. On the outside, it seems that he is strong-willed but, often, his moments of emotion in the novel do not portray him as a strong patriarch. In a moment, he fumes with rage and abuses his family but in the next moment, the reader finds him showing remorse. This brings to the fore the question of whether Achike is a hypocritical Catholic or a man who struggles to live a life of perfection because of the high standards he has set for himself, or even a man haunted by his past and the fear of the unseen. It is misleading to think that Achike has changed and repented only to find him committing an offence which is worse than the previous act.

There are two things Achike alludes to on occasions he physically abuses his family, especially, his children. The first is his “heathen” father and the other is the abuse he endured in the hands of the Catholic Priest who educated him because his father could not take him to school. Achike is afraid that his children will not make use of the opportunities they have in life considering the wealth and influence he has to make them successful people in life. For him, success in life is tailored to becoming a success through education. He demonstrates this to Kambili when he drives her to school one morning:

Why do you think I work hard to give you and Jaja the best? You have to do something with all these privileges. Because God has given you much, he expects much from you. He expects perfection. I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone. I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was a houseboy for the parish priest for two years. Yes, a houseboy. Nobody

dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school. I was a gardener for the priests while I attended St. Gregory's Secondary School (pp. 47).

The extract above shows that Achike is afraid his children will not make use of the privileges they have, privileges he never had the opportunity to enjoy. Most importantly, he sees his father, Papa Nnukwu, as a failure; a similar situation with Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo who saw his father as a lazy man, a woman and a failure. Unlike Okonkwo, however, Achike feels that his father's failure can be attributed to his worship of gods of wood and stone. His children must therefore work hard if they are to become successful. Through this, it is realized that "Patriarchy is an imbalanced, fear based, war like and truly insane structure because only a patriarchy is on top, obsessed with control and completely inhumane to everything below. What it fears, it wants to control; what it can't control, it wants to terrorize and destroy" (Means, p. 516). The result of this moment of realization by Achike is his utter dismay of seeing the weak foundation he has struggled to lay, through abuse, give up on the building that looks very strong to outsiders, who are full of admiration for such a building. Jaja's defiance in this instance shows that the foundations that support Achike's patriarchal character, especially religion, are not strong enough. Therefore he becomes a weak patriarch who stands on weak ideological beliefs and doctrine.

The patriarch in *Purple Hibiscus* is portrayed as a man who dominates his family including his wife and children. His dominance is supported by religion, culture and a societal system which believes in the superiority of the man and the inferiority of the woman. The subordination of the

woman takes the forms of violence, control, disregard, insult and exploitation, all aiding in maintaining the patriarchal status quo. I have also argued that Achike is not the only one guilty of perpetrating patriarchal acts of violence but the military regime is also responsible for upholding a system which abuses women, children and other men as well. However, there are frailties that the patriarch must contend with, frailties that have not been highlighted by the theoretical framework of patriarchy, which has been conceptualized as a male dominating system devoid of weaknesses. It is in this regard that I argue that weaknesses lying within patriarchy must form part of the entire notion of what patriarchy really stands for. To support this notion, I conclude this discussion by making reference to Kambili's statement:

I had never considered the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die. He was different from Ade Coker, from all the other people they had killed. He had seemed immortal" (p.28).

Kambili's statement underlies the fact that patriarchy on the outside seems to be a self-sufficient system that has ultimate power. It is even seen as an immortal institution with immortal male figures. This is not so as Kambili realizes that her father was just a man, a man who dominated his family amidst his weaknesses and flaws.

### **3.7 Mutual Female Bonding and Acceptance**

The idea of mutual female bonding and acceptance is conveyed through the Igbo cultural ideology in the word "nwunye, m" which means "my wife." This word appears four times within the space of two pages (pp. 72-73). Ifeoma calls Beatrice by that name.

The background to this tradition of a woman calling her brother's wife "my wife" is provided by Kambili who also mentions her father's disgust of such traditions calling it remnants of ungodly traditions. To quote Kambili, the real import of the word "nwunye, m" is this, "Papa said it was the remnants of ungodly tradition, the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife..." (p. 73).

Ifeoma's belief in this tradition means that womanism does not throw away culture but draws from positive aspects of culture which promote the empowerment and well-being of women. However, there is more to this cultural belief as it shows that womanism is not about individualistic female pursuit of independence, self-fulfillment and happiness but recognition of a communal body of women in a struggle against patriarchal domination. Beatrice's response "I am her wife, too, because I am your father's wife. It shows that she accepts me," (p. 73) places emphasis on many issues: she loves Ifeoma and Ifeoma loves her (non-sexually); the fact that they are in the struggle together, the struggle against Achike's sexist behavior and patriarchal society; it also outlines the idea that Ifeoma shares the husband responsibilities with Achike and the fact that the marriage will work through cooperation, male respect, fair treatment and a rejection of any abusive tendencies; the word also means that Ifeoma shares in Beatrice's struggles of wifeness, motherhood and, ultimately the struggle to be women. "Nwunye, m" in this regard represents Ifeoma's acceptance of Beatrice as her brother's wife but also as a woman who deserves to be treated humanely.

The word, "nwunye, m" which is used by Ifeoma several times in reference to Beatrice is not expressed just verbally or ideologically but also comes to the fore when Beatrice is faced with

the many difficult situations. When Achike's family tells him to take another wife, it is Ifeoma who stands by Beatrice and fights against it. Achike is urged to take another wife because Beatrice cannot give him more children than the two she already has. His "umunna" is oblivious of the fact that his physical abuse of his wife is the main reason for Beatrice's failure to bear more children. More importantly, this demand by Achike's family magnifies the negative cultural perceptions attached to womanhood; the assumption that a woman's importance and essence can only be found in her capacity to give birth to more children and, preferably, male children. Ifeoma stands against such unwarranted imposition of culture and does not see the reason why Beatrice should be grateful to her for standing behind her because she is her "nwunye, m." At a crucial point of the novel when Achike breaks a table on Beatrice's stomach, and kills her unborn baby, Ifeoma again comes to her rescue and encourages her to leave her brother since she cannot endure the suffering for long. Even though Ifeoma accepts Beatrice and vice versa, it is quite contradictory to see them having opposing views on the state of being a woman.

That is, even though both have a positive belief in certain positive aspects of Igbo culture, Beatrice believes certain negative ones too. For example, she holds on to the cultural ideology that a woman without a husband is no woman at all. She tells Ifeoma "a woman with children and no husband, what is that?" (p.75). She believes that Ifeoma's refusal to marry another man after her husband's death does not make her a woman. Ifeoma's firm womanist values show up when she insists she does not need a man to survive with her children. After all, she has a good job at the university that is able to provide for her family. And even when she does not have the affluent means as Beatrice has by virtue of Achike's wealth she will not beg or ask for help from

a man because she believes in female independence. This is what Beatrice refers to as “university talk” (p. 245). But it is not. Rather, it a refusal to conform to the negative cultural ideology that “a husband crowns a woman’s life” (p. 75). Ifeoma does not just hold on to her position of asserting her independence as a woman but she also sympathizes with the women who allow men to crown their lives thereby buying their independence from them. Her sympathies lie with such women, especially her female students because the political and economic leadership provided by the “military tyrant” (p. 76) has rendered most women vulnerable to accept male dependence in exchange for female independence.

Although, they have differing beliefs on the state of women and how women should view themselves, the re-occurrence of the word “nwunye, m” makes room for the argument that they believe in each other and hope for a turning around of the plight of women in Nigerian society. Despite the differences in their educational backgrounds, their sense of mutual female bonding and acceptance goes beyond educational laurels or economic difficulties. They recognize a womanist calling to shared struggles and survival.

### **3.8 The Ultimate Womanist Goal in *Purple Hibiscus***

The ultimate aim of womanism is to engender change that will lead to the survival of males, females and children. Adichie does this by creating an integrative ending to her novel. She creates a world full of hope rid of any patriarchal oppression, even if momentarily. The African family setting becomes a haven for hope, recuperation, self-healing and revival. Upon the chaos

and destruction that is created within the Achike home and the Nigerian society, *Purple Hibiscus* comes to a womanist ending. Before this happens, those who lead the patriarchal system in perpetuating oppression must suffer the consequences of their actions by facing death. Their death is necessary for the realization of the womanist vision of survival of males, females and children even though it also undermines the womanist ideal of harmony and unity. So, Achike and the head of state are poisoned, by two women, a wife and a prostitute.

Even though the nation is rid of the dictatorial head of state, the Nigerian nation faces uncertain days ahead. On the other hand, Jaja becomes the sacrificial lamb for her mother. He goes to prison and withdraws within. Beatrice dwells on the brink of madness telling people she poisoned her husband, the real truth, and yet the society feels her admission to being the one who killed her husband is because she has been mentally affected by the loss. Among the three surviving members within the Achike family, only Kambili is a source of hope and inspiration. She provides support for her mother and brother. She is responsible for making sure that Jaja's release is secured by paying bribes to judges and justice officials until Jaja is released from prison.

Kambili's source of womanist inspiration, Ifeoma, also heads out of the country with her three children for pastures anew. Despite their relocation to the US, they still form a permanent part of Kambili through the letters and tapes they send to Kambili. Kambili's other inspiration at Nsukka, Father Amadi, also leaves for missionary work abroad and still maintains contact with her.

As the novel comes to an end, four major things happen. The first is the death of Achike, the second is the death of the head of state, the fourth is Jaja's release from prison and the last is the coming together of two families, that of Aunty Ifeoma and the Achikes. The last two paragraphs of *Purple Hibiscus* are significant for a womanist analysis:

We will take Jaja to Nsukka first, and then we'll go to America to visit Aunty 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. Above, clouds like dyed cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. The new rains will come down soon (p. 298).

These last words of Kambili bring out three womanist themes: the survival and unity of Kambili, Beatrice and Jaja together with Ifeoma and her children; self-healing and self-integration of Beatrice and Jaja; and the theme of hope, regeneration and rebirth partly aided by Achike's wealth and partly aided by Ifeoma's womanist character. Achike becomes a part author of this womanist awakening because it is his capitalist wealth which provides the foundation for the rebirth that his family goes through. It is from his wealth that Kambili pays the bribes to the judges. It is from his wealth that Kambili donates to the charity organizations. And his wealth will give Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice the opportunity to visit America.

Kambili is a symbol of womanist metamorphosis and transformation, a symbol of womanist audaciousness and challenge. Kambili as a symbol of womanist freedom thrives in the post-despotic Nigerian society based on Achike's capitalist accumulation of wealth. It is within this

access to money and power that Adichie places her protagonist who will now inspire womanist change in other young girls like her to have the “freedom to be, to do” (p. 16).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **ARTICULATIONS OF WOMANISM IN EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD***

#### **4.1 Emecheta's Womanist Articulations**

This chapter examines the womanist articulations in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Emecheta's womanist stance is scrutinized through Ogunyemi's womanist theory which extends beyond sexism to include national, political, cultural and economic considerations. This is basically a project for the demand of holistic change in the lives of African women. Despite this call for change and resistance to patriarchal domination, Emecheta does challenge patriarchal authority but only in the creation of the character Ona, who dies before Emecheta's protagonist, Enu Ego, is introduced. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta creates sparse moments of challenge to patriarchal authority, but that challenge does not come with change. Rather, her challenge to patriarchal authority is heavily augmented by conformity to and acceptance of the system of male dominance. Despite her inability to challenge male dominance and cause a change in such a system within the novel, Emecheta's commitment to the ultimate womanist aim of the survival of males and females is unquestionable. My discussion of the womanist articulations in *The Joys of Motherhood* will begin with a look at the audacious but conforming womanist character of Ona, Nnu Ego's mother.

#### **4.2 Womanist Audaciousness Lacking Change**

The narrator of *The Joys of Motherhood*, in the beginning of the novel, after giving details of Nnu Ego's predicament of having found her child stiff and dead in their room and her subsequent

failed attempt at committing suicide, uses the technique of flashback to reveal a certain ironical detail. This concerns the respect that Agbadi, lover of Ona and father of Enu Ego, and the men of his time attached to arrogant and conceited women. Submissive women were not given the due respect of men. Women like Ona, who refused to give into male demands or cower under male authority had the appreciation and awe of men. The narrator relays the following details:

He had a soft spot for those from big houses, daughters of chiefs and rich men. He knew from experience that such women had an extra confidence and sauciness even in captivity...In his young days, a woman who gave in to a man without first fighting for her honour was never respected. To regard a woman who is quiet and timid as desirable was something that came after his time, with Christianity and other changes (p. 5).

The above extract confirms the changes in perception men in Agbadi's time have towards women as compared to those which men like Nnaife, Nnu Ego's husband, have towards their women. These changes, the narrator mentions, have been effected by Christianity and other issues. Nonetheless, the extract fits the character of Ona, lover of Agbadi. She is presented to the reader within the light of Agbadi's renowned personality. He is described as a wealthy local chief, a great wrestler and someone who is glib and gifted in oratory. He is also described as possessing physical prowess and a born leader. These attributes of Agbadi could persuade any woman he wanted to marry as evidenced by the seven wives he had. Ona did not see things the way these women saw it. She would not be any man's possession like all the other women who had been sunk into domesticity, servitude and motherhood by Agbadi.

Ona's desirous and audacious womanist character comes to the fore when the narrator mentions that:

Though she was always scantily dressed, she frequently made people aware of being a conservative, haughty presence, cold as steel and remote as any woman royally born. When she sat, and curled her long legs together in feminine modesty, one knew that she had style, this only daughter of Obi Umunna (p. 8)

Ona therefore comes across as a "priceless jewel" within a womanist framework that calls for challenge and change to male dominance even though she does not fulfill the later calling. She is recognized by her society as a bad woman who openly treated the man everybody worshiped with disdain, "a woman who was troublesome and impetuous, who had the audacity to fight with her man before letting him have her: a bad woman" (p.18). She is the exact opposite of Agunwa, Agbadi's first wife, a woman who is proclaimed a good woman because she is "unobtrusive, so quiet" (p. 19). Ona throws a challenge to Agbadi, who is a symbol of male dominance by refusing to marry him and thereby also refusing to be commodified through the payment of her bride price. However, she concedes to her father's wish for her to remain unmarried as well as his wish for Ona to provide him with an heir, a male child. She, however, cannot be blamed since she is caught between two men, her father and the other her lover. Despite her steely character, Ona accepts the demands of these two men concerning the baby she carries. She also shows her vulnerable part to Agbadi when he fatally gets injured and becomes unconscious for some days.

Ona's concession to male dominance appears to be a chess game in which she is the chess and the men, her father and lover acting as the players. Her father's desire for her not to marry any man and have a male child for him is part of the patriarchal system which privileges male over

female offspring. On the other hand, her promise to give the baby to Agbadi if the baby is a girl also implicates her in failure to carry out her challenge to refuse Agbadi's control over her as he uses the baby girl as an excuse to lure Ona into moving in to leave with him.

In her final words to Agbadi Ona says:

You see that I was not destined to live with you. But you are stubborn, my father is stubborn, and I am stubborn too. Please don't mourn me for long; and see that however much you love our daughter Nnu Ego you allow her to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman (p. 26).

First and foremost, these words by Ona confirm that she loses her life because she does not fulfill the demands of culture by allowing Agbadi to pay her bride price and yet, moves in to stay with him. Even though she affirms her stubbornness even in death, it is not enough to topple the system of male privilege over female independence. In death, Ona realizes she has not been a woman. Her perception of who a woman is, however, does not conform to her strong-willed character and personality. Her insistence on Agbadi allowing Nnu Ego to be a woman defeats her refusal to bow to male authority. This is because her plea to Agbadi to allow Nnu Ego to allow their daughter to have a life of her own which means being married maintains the balance of power in the hands of people like Agbadi and Nnaife who treat women as commodities. Unfortunately, any strong womanist challenge fades away considering the name Emecheta chooses to give to the protagonist of the novel; that name is Enu Ego and it means "twenty bags of cowries" (p. 23). Nnu Ego therefore lives her life as a commodity in the hands of two men, Amatokwu and later, Nnaife.

### **4.3 Sexist Treatment of Women in *The Joys of Motherhood***

The unfair treatment of women takes centre stage in the novel in many ways. The first is the treatment of women as existing to produce only children especially male children. The second is commodification of female children as objects of exchange to fuel male privilege and status. The masculinization of the first wife and the abusive treatment of wives are also discussed in this section.

The treatment of women as vessels for the production of children is one of the ways in which women are treated as commodities. When Ona pleads with Agbadi to allow Nnu Ego to be a woman, she actually seeks for a different character trait for her daughter than the one she had. Nnu Ego is a character fashioned by Emecheta to possess some of the characteristics of her parents. “She was more polite, less abusive and aggressive than Ona and, unlike her, had a singleness of purpose, wanting one thing at a time, wanting it badly. Whereas few men could have coped with, let alone controlled Ona, this was not the case with Nnu Ego” (p. 35).

She is more or less bought by her first husband Amatokwu by virtue of the fact that he pays her bride price. As she is thrown into this marriage by her father, her ability to bear children becomes the social control mechanism upon her life. Her failure to bear children will mean that she will also be called a failed woman. Her culture deems a woman successful by her child-bearing exploits. Unfortunately, Nnu Ego’s failure to bear children pushes her to the mercy of the patriarchal system that imposes child bearing as a necessity to determine womanhood. In fulfilling the dictates of this system, Amatokwu upon pressure from his father goes for a second wife to bear children for him thereby Nnu Ego loses her status as the senior wife because she

cannot bear children. In her desperation to have children, a defining quality of women within her culture, she incurs the wrath of Amatokwu, her husband:

On the eve of the day Amatokwu's second wife was giving birth, the pain hit Nnu Ego with such force that she could stand it no longer. When she thought no one was looking, she took the boy and went into her own inner room, forgetting to lock her door. She began to appeal to the boy to either be her child or send her some of his friends from the other world. Not knowing she was being watched, she put the child to her breasts. The next thing she felt was a double blow from behind. She almost died of shock to see her husband there (pp. 33-34).

Nnu Ego's desperation to have children of her own defines her life as a woman as she descends so low to beg the infant child who does not know what she is saying to be her child or give her one of his friends as her child. Her plight is not accidental but an answer to her mother's wish and the reality of a woman's life within Igbo society.

Enraged by Amatokwu's unfair treatment of her daughter, Agbadi runs to the aid of his daughter. He presides over her life and discusses with his friend Idayi, his next move concerning a second attempt at marriage by Nnu Ego. Nnu Ego, through this system of her father deciding who she would marry, and when, becomes a pawn in the hands of these men. Her father rejects suitors until he makes a shrewd but wise decision to send her from Ibuza to Lagos, to a man called Nnaife. The perception of women as vessels of production within the novel is rife. The problem with this perception is that even the women in the novel believe their lives are lived to produce children.

Nnu Ego therefore sets off to Lagos with the hope of producing a string of children for her new husband to her father's approbation. Even though she finds Nnaife unattractive, she does not care so far as this new husband is able to give her children. The realization of that desire becomes apparent when she finds out she is pregnant and later she grows to love Nnaife as she gives birth to her first son Ngozi, a proof that she is not a barren woman, considering the social stigma attached to it. The joys of her motherhood come to an abrupt end when her first child dies. Regarding herself as a failed woman, Nnu seeks to end her life. Emecheta appropriately titles this part of the novel "A Failed Woman" because in the eyes of the society, Nnu Ego is a failed woman because she does not have children.

This belief of a failed woman sits deep within Nigerian society especially as the gathering of the crowd who gaze with shock and amusement at Nnu Ego's attempted suicide may come from different tribes. Even if not, the presence of people from the Igbo and Yoruba societies at the scene supports the notion of a failed woman, a woman who cannot or does not have children. This is because "they all agreed that a woman without children for her husband was failed woman" (p. 65). Having pushed such notions of womanhood down the throat of women, that same society would not allow Nnu Ego to commit suicide as Emecheta insists through authorial intrusion, that a thing like suicide is not permitted in Nigeria because the spirit of communalism presides over individual goals. Clearly, Emecheta gives the momentum of control and dominance to males when Nwakusor becomes the rescuer of Nnu Ego. However, he does not just rescue Nnu Ego but reminds her of allegiance to her father, her people and her sons and these are all part of the system of patriarchy. In Nwakusor's eyes, Nnu has shamed her womanhood because she refuses to live to the benefit of a male dominated society.

In line with this social stigma attached to barrenness, Emecheta creates the platform for her protagonist to have another chance at fulfilling the culture's definition of who a woman is. The arduous task of fulfilling such cultural dictates is highlighted by the fact that a woman must not just produce children but specifically, male children. In the Igbo culture, as projected in *The Joys of Motherhood*, sons secure immortality for men while daughters help in immortalizing men (p. 185). And so Nnu Ego is met with grace and approval by her husband when she gives birth to male children. On the other hand, Nnaife does not show any interest whatsoever when his wife gives birth to female children. For women like Nnu Ego, the real woman and mother is the one who can produce male offspring. By extension, what this means is that male children help to perpetuate selfish patriarchal actions and ideologies as is the case with Nnu Ego's eldest sons, Oshiaju and Adimabua, with the name of the second son meaning "Now I am two" – emphasizing Nnaife's importance as a man. The birth of his sons is therefore met with merry making and enjoyment. On the other hand, the birth of his daughters does not bring regret, pain and disappointment to only Nnaife but Nnu Ego also participates in such disapproval towards the birth of her girls.

Nnu Ego's participation in de-emphasizing the importance of female offspring becomes apparent when she conceives and gives birth to her first set of twins. Her reaction surprises her co-wife Adaku: "Your first set of girls, senior wife,' Adaku said by way of congratulation" (p. 140).

Enu Ego replies: "Hm, I know, but I doubt if our husband will like them very much. One can hardly afford to have one girl in a town like this, to say nothing of two". (p.141)

Within a womanist framework, Nnu Ego must be happy she has female children to balance the male children she has. This is not so because, for Enu Ego, there is nothing victorious about having female offspring. Her reason is that she cannot afford to bring up female offspring when the culture demands from her male offspring. Nnaife, who is a symbol of that culture which looks down upon female children, is not amused by such an uncalled for gesture of two girls at a go.

In the ensuing discussions between Adaku and Nnu Ego, the former chastises the latter for being more traditional than the Ibuza people who live far away from Lagos. What Adaku means by this is far more than the word “traditional.” Adaku’s statement reflects Nnu Ego’s willingness to act in conformity with patriarchal authority by rejecting her own female children. She is pre-occupied with pleasing her husband and father, functionaries within male dominated society. As expected, Nnaife is not pleased with the arrival of the twins. He rebukes Nnu Ego: “Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep, eh? What will they eat?...’He did not even suggest their names’ Nnu Ego moaned” (p. 141).

Nnaife’s questions render the girls as ordinary things that have no use. His second is a chastisement of his senior wife for not fulfilling the standard of producing male children. The third and fourth questions also demarcate the favours that go for male children as he suggests that male children will always have a place to sleep and food to eat in his house but not female children. Most importantly, Nnaife’s refusal to name the twins is a statement of purpose to women to show that female children are not accepted and recognized by the society. By refusing to name the twins, Nnaife also refuses to accept responsibility for their livelihood.

In her determination to drive home her point of compliance with patriarchal order, Emecheta's only outspoken female within the novel, Adaku, gives birth to a son but loses him. One would expect that Adaku, by branding Nnu Ego as traditional, will not be hit hard by the loss of her son. The contrary happens: "The death of the baby sent Adaku into deep depression. She became almost impossible to live with. She blamed everybody and everything for her loss" (p. 142). She also cries out: "...O God, why did you not take one of the girls and leave me with my male child? My only man child" (p. 142).

Adaku's mental, psychological and emotional breakdown is a sign to show that Emecheta toes the line of non-confrontation with patriarchal order. Adaku would even gladly have her female child killed in exchange for having just one male child. Emecheta therefore drives home her point. No female, no matter how outspoken she is, can challenge and change the patriarchal system. And so, whether outspoken or submissive, all women must participate in conforming to the male dominated system visible in this case through the preference for male children.

The value and importance Adaku places on a male child is evident in the usefulness attached to female children. Within Adaku's culture, the bride price of females is used to further the progress of male children, academically or otherwise. Female children are pawned for money as soon as they start showing any signs of growth from the age of twelve. That seems to be the only consolation for Nnaife as he refuses to accept the arrival of his girls. Adaku tells him: "In twelve years' time, when their bride prices start rolling in, you'll begin to sing another tune," Adaku put in, smiling broadly as if she did not mean to hurt anyone" (p. 141).

Due to this commodification of the girl child as an item of exchange for a bride price between two families, she also loses some privileges including formal education because her upbringing is tailored towards training her to become a submissive wife within the culture. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, all the female children do not receive any formal education to the highest level except for basic reading, writing and arithmetic. These include Taiwo, Kehinde, Obiageli, Malachi except for Adaku's girls who are privileged because their mother decides to break the norm and send her girls to school.

While she will not give equal educational opportunities to her girls, Nnu Ego makes it difficult for her girls by constantly reminding them of who they are after Taiwo complains about the unfairness in granting the boys privileges over the girls. Nnu Ego insists that the boys, "They have got to go for their lesson, Taiwo; and stop moaning. You are a girl" (p. 195). Taiwo's response is: "I know that Mother. You remind us all the time" (p. 196).

Emecheta repeats this same ideology sustaining male education and privilege through female hardwork within the space of two pages (p. 197). Perhaps, in being true to the educational opportunities of the female child in a colonial setting in the early 1930s, Emecheta is being her womanist self as she paints the situation as it is without trying to make it look any better. However, to keep on repeating the idea that girls do domestic chores and hawk items on the streets while boys go to school and come back home without doing anything attests to the fact that she is inclined to side with male dominance which derails the progress of the girl child. It also shows that she supports the idea of girls putting the boys into good positions in life

believing that the boys will help the girls later on in life. This assumption by Nnu Ego leaves her disillusioned when she realizes that her two sons are nothing but selfish boys who think about themselves and their well-being.

Because girls are “reared” for the purpose of bride price within the patriarchal society, Nnaife puts his hopes on receiving the bride price of his first set of twins, Taiwo and Kehinde. He is however undone by this expectation when he finds out that Kehinde has chosen to marry a man of her choice. Nnaife is rattled because the implications of Kehinde’s choice dent his hopes of landing a big bride price for her daughter. The first implication is that Kehinde’s choice of husband is a Yoruba man and the Yorubas do not pay huge bride prices. The second implication has nothing to do with the bride price but the fact that the Yorubas call the Igbos cannibals. By raising this issue, Emecheta speaks on the ethnic tensions between these two tribes through Nnaife’s refusal to accept a Yoruba man as his son-in-law. Nnaife swears: “I shall kill you. No child of mine is marrying a tribe that calls us cannibals. A tribe that looks down on us, a tribe that hates us,’ Nnaife growled, struggling in the hands of his captors” (p. 237).

Driven by these two motivations, Nnaife takes the law into his own hands and deservedly ends up in jail. He attests to the suspicion that his rash actions are fueled by his conviction that the Yorubas do not pay well for a wife. Instead they just give the father a “bowl of drink and buy the bride a few lappas...no, not enough for all the food the child has eaten since she was born...”(p. 243).

This twist in the novel creates a womanist puzzle within *The Joys of Motherhood*. Emecheta, so far, apart from the character portrait she gives to Ona and the visible individuality of Adaku, has yielded to the expectations of Igbo culture. However, Kehinde's refusal to marry a man chosen by her father, whose actions consequently land him in prison, seems to be a desperate measure by the author to assert female independence in the latter stages of the novel. Emecheta's stance is ambiguous as Nnaife is released after serving for a few months in prison. Her attempt at recovering womanist audaciousness fails as Nnaife walks into Ibuza a free man.

The masculinization of the senior wife is also visible in *The Joys of Motherhood*. The society that Ona leaves behind after her death is a society which turns the senior wife into a man. Nnu Ego, unlike her co-wife Adaku, is not allowed to think like a woman, talk like a woman or behave like one. This restriction on her being is not self-imposed. Rather, it comes from the way the culture she lives in is organized. The long absence of Nnaife from home after she has a quarrel with him troubles her. It is worsened by Adaku's fear that their husband is dead. As the senior wife of Nnaife, she is not supposed to entertain such fears. She quickly moves to silence Adaku's fears:

'Shh...' Don't talk that way. He is not dead. You musn't say things like that.' But her voice was far from convincing; she too was close to tears. She was frightened as well but her culture did not permit her to give in to her fears. She was supposed to be strong, *being the senior wife, to behave more like a man than a woman*. As men were not permitted to open grief, she had to learn to hide hers as well (p. 156, italics mine).

Emecheta's protagonist is expected to behave more like a man even though she is a woman. This forceful take-over of her womanly attributes defeats the creation of Ona as a woman who defies

male-dominated society and wishes that her daughter would be allowed to be a woman except for the fact that she meant her daughter should be allowed to behave more like a man. As Adaku bursts out into tears, the narrator says that “she envied her freedom” (p. 156). Nnu Ego envied Adaku’s freedom to cry and express her emotions and she wishes she were a second wife so that she can be a woman.

Not only does Nnu Ego have knowledge of her real status as a senior wife. She is also told and reminded to fulfill her role of behaving like a man by Adankwo, a woman who sits in that position herself. That reminder comes at a point when Nnaife is at the war front fighting for the British, Nigeria’s colonial master. According Adankwo, the position of senior wife has been bestowed on Nnu Ego by no other person than her *chi*, her personal god. Since Nnu Ego’s *chi*, constitutes the centre of her life, she has no other excuse than to fulfill the obligations of her *chi*. Adankwo does not stop there. She reiterates what she means “You are the senior wife of your husband; you are like a male friend to him...” (p. 177). The wife, culturally, is a male friend to her husband. She has been masculinized by the society. Either she rejects it or accepts it. Nnu Ego as submissive and conforming as she is accepts and runs back to Lagos to tend her husband’s home and supervise his younger wife because she is not complete without her husband, another defining ideology of Igbo culture.

The selfish nature of patriarchal society in masculinizing senior wives and making it an enviable position is a thread that runs through Nnu Ego’s outward submissiveness to male dominated ideologies. The culture of senior wife is created by men in order to carve a non-resistance path for them as senior wives will do anything to have that position. As part of her authorial intrusion,

Emecheta's narrator observes the undeserving treatment Adaku receives at the hands of Nwakusor and Ubani, Nnaife's friends. The truth is Nnu Ego knows that she is in the wrong for treating Adaku's visitor with disrespect because the norms of courtesy within Igbo society forbid a visitor to be treated in such a manner. The problem created here is that this social norm exists within the confines of patriarchal authority and so, the men can uphold it or render it useless. In this instance, Nwakusor and Ubani disregard such a norm for their selfish gain and expose the double standard behavior of men within the patriarchal system. The narrator observes:

...The men had been unfair in their judgement. She, Nnu Ego, had been wrong all the way, but of course they (the men) had made it seem that she was innocent just because she was the mother of sons. Men were so clever. By admonishing her and advising her to live up to her status as senior wife, they made it sound an enviable position, worth any woman's while to fight for... (p. 187).

Even though Nnu struggles in a patriarchal society, she benefits from it when she has a quarrel with her co-wife. The doubly sexist notions of production of male children as a woman's essence and the masculinization of the senior wife come to her aid as Nwakusor and Ubani use these to put Adaku in her rightful place within Igbo culture. The sense of judgement of the two men tells Adaku that once she is a senior wife and has male children, she will be defended even if she is wrong. She, however, knows that she does not have any of these requirements of defense by male society. Uncharacteristic of the expectations of the culture, Adaku breaks free and defies cultural notions of a good woman. I discuss this in the next section.

#### 4.4 Adaku's Defiance of Cultural Notions of a Good Woman

Emecheta juxtaposes Adaku's character with that of Nnu Ego's character to show the difference between them. Nnu Ego fulfills cultural expectations of Igbo society by being submissive and subservient even against her will. She lets go her ego to feed male dominance. She gives her husband male children to immortalize him and struggles through hardship to make them survive. In the eyes of Igbo culture, she is a good woman. Adaku, on the other hand, is none of these. She is outspoken, self-assertive and will not compromise her will. She puts Nnaife's ego in its rightful place anytime he attempts to dominate her. Moreover, she is not a senior wife, and neither can she be and she has no male children. Within Igbo culture, Adaku is not recognized as a woman. Pushed to the limits of female conformity to the male dominated culture, Adaku breaks free to become a woman of her own. She does so knowing fully that there are consequences of her actions; that societal perceptions of her and her children will linger on. When she feels unfairly treated by Ubani and Nwakusor, who side with Nnu Ego for being rude to Adaku's cousin, she decides to leave the marriage and carve out a living for her-self. These are her words of frustration and freedom in a conversation with Nnu Ego:

'Everybody accuses me of making money all the time. What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. I think that will benefit them in the future. Many rich Yoruba families send their daughters to school these days; I shall do the same with mine. Nnaife is not going to send them away to any husband before they are ready. I will see to that! I'm leaving this stuffy room tomorrow, senior wife.'

To go to worship your *chi*?

'My *chi* be damned! I am going to be a prostitute. Damn my *chi*! She added again fiercely (p. 188).

Before Adaku makes these utterances which mark her breaking away from the system of male domination, the impression she gives of herself is one of self-assertiveness. In a conversation with Nnu Ego after the former delivers her first set of female twins, she tells Enu Ego to calm her fears about their husband's backlash as she sees her senior wife to be more traditional than those living in Ibuza. In fact, her independent way of thinking does not go unnoticed by her senior wife who tries to find out in her mind reasons why Adaku is so different from her. Surprisingly, Adaku does not limit her emancipated way of thinking to conversations between the two wives but tries to point out reason to Nnaife concerning the birth of the twins. Again, Nnaife also notices Adaku boldness in quiet.

Adaku is full of questions underlined by male privilege. She does not understand why their husband should stay out every night drinking and having fun with money which could be used to cater to the needs of the family. She moves a step forward above questioning by convincing Nnu Ego to make sure that none of them cook for their husband until he gives them more housekeeping money. The wives' demand for more housekeeping money seems legitimate since Nnaife only drinks to his pleasure. The description Emecheta gives to these women, however, does not make it appear the women are only demanding their right. She calls them "rebellious women chasing and berating their husband" (p. 151). Even in the eyes of a womanist writer like Emecheta, her women characters cannot rightfully claim what is theirs. Therefore, Emecheta, as a womanist considers the economic status of Nnaife's wives because the economic independence or otherwise of Adaku and Nnu Ego will ultimately lead to an improvement in the lives of the whole family. By this, it obvious that economic dependency of women is a goal of womanism

since it will give an opportunity for women, children and men to have better prospects of survival.

As expected, Emecheta shifts the balance of power and puts it in Nnaife's hands when Nnu Ego quickly uses all the money she has to Adaku's dismay. Her excuse is she cannot watch her children starve while she lives emphasizing her commitment to see her children survive. In this situation, Nnu Ego becomes the pragmatist womanist because she has many children to feed while Adaku has only two mouths to feed. Faced with such betrayal from her fellow woman, Adaku must choose between economic well-being and social approval. She chooses economic well-being and sets off into her own world to define her own destiny, to live by the meaning of her name "daughter of wealth" (p. 190). Her decision is inwardly approved by Nnu Ego who contemplates the wisdom in Adaku's decision to be a dignified woman:

Why should she deceive herself? The woman was better off as she was; she would only be socially snubbed. Nnu Ego said to herself, 'I may not be snubbed, but can I keep it up? I have no money to buy food, let alone abadas in which to attend meetings and church (p. 191).

Faced with the reality of witnessing Adaku's economic independence, Nnu Ego forgets the cultural belief she is inclined to hold on to, that a woman's children are her wealth. These beliefs and other notions of womanhood are undermined when Adaku chooses to become a prostitute. I now turn to an analysis of Adaku's utterance before she finally says she will become a prostitute.

She begins her complaint by referring to the social system which gives priority to women who have children. As a result of this, a woman who is economically independent does not have the respect of society. Her economic independence will be used to give her children a good

education, something that is unheard of within the Igbo culture. She, however, alludes to Yoruba families who take their girls to school. She also refuses to allow Nnaife to marry them to men before their time, neither will he be able to claim the bride price of the two girls. Finally, she declares herself a prostitute to Nnu Ego's disgustful reaction. These are the ways in which Adaku defies the patriarchal culture. Her actions are motivated by her refusal to be turned into a mad woman as is the case of Nnu Ego at the end of the novel. Adaku sacrifices herself for her girls and breaks the cultural code of conduct. Nnu Ego sacrifices herself for her children but toes the line of conformity to patriarchal culture. Both decisions come with dire consequences and the two women face them as they should. As Nnaife is thrown into jail, Adaku comes to sympathize with Nnu Ego and the following conversation takes place:

...Nnaife still owns us, does he not?

'I'm afraid even that has changed. Nnaife does not own anybody, not in Nigeria today. But senior wife, don't worry. You believe in tradition. You have changed a little, but stood firm by your belief' (p. 246).

Adaku sticks to her views of freedom for women while Nnu Ego still sticks to her belief that a husband owns a wife. In pondering over the unfortunate jail sentence that befalls Nnaife, Nnu Ego concedes that "she had been brought up to believe that children made a woman" (p. 247). This belief ruled Nnu Ego's life until she dies an unfortunate death. Emecheta's womanist commitment to the survival of both males and females can be extracted from Nnu Ego's belief because she holds on to it until she dies.

#### 4.5 The Ultimate Womanist Goal in *The Joys of Motherhood*

The ultimate calling of the womanist writer is for her to show commitment to the survival of males, females and children; the willingness to show that the independence of women lies not in their breaking away from and rejecting the presence of men in that struggle but encouraging cooperation and unity to promote a world built on communal values rather than individual pursuit. Emecheta, it seems, pre-occupies herself with this chief womanist theme and neglects the issues that derail female progress.

In her article “Feminism with a Small ‘f!’” Emecheta writes:

I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f. In my books I write about families because I still believe in families. I write about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable... (Olaniyan & Quayson, p. 553).

In describing herself as an African born woman who writes about the little happenings of everyday life, Emecheta sets the agenda for her work to be characterized as womanist. Her work centres on the African woman as such, she shuns away from original agenda of mainstream feminism, radical feminism in this instance, which primarily focuses on women’s struggle to attain equality with men. To call herself a feminist with a small f implies that the concept of womanism, an outgrowth of feminism had not been espoused at the time of writing *The Joys of*

*Motherhood* as such the only way to state her primary role as an African woman writer was to distance herself from the rigorous nature of radical feminism which was eurocentric, exclusionary and controversial. It can be argued that Emecheta's use of the phrase "a feminist with a small f" is synonymous with the term womanist considering the issues she claims to write about in her work: her belief in African families and the fact that African women must strive hard to hold their families together as well as her addressing of sexual inequality and oppression in Nigerian society. These issues are all womanist centred and so, even though Emecheta calls herself a feminist with a small f, what she actually ends up doing is her evoking of the womanist spirit in her works.

Emecheta's insistence on shying away from feminism leads her to brand herself a Feminist with a small "f". This means that she is not willing to participate in any individualistic pursuit of women's empowerment. In my opinion, the term Feminist with a small "f" is an indication of her womanist ideology, the very fact that she believes in families also signals her commitment to the general well-being of society rather than individual well-beings. She also claims that she writes about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. This point is a testament to the characterization she gives to her protagonist, Nnu Ego.

At the centre of Nnu Ego's thinking and struggles is her commitment to see her family survive, especially her children. As a result, she compromises her right to certain things with regard to Nnaife. This character trait of Nnu Ego is a sharp contrast to the way, Adaku is portrayed in the novel. For example, when the two women decide to demand more housekeeping money from

Nnaife, Nnu Ego later changes her mind because of her love for her children. She is not ashamed to admit to her co-wife, "...I'm not going to play strike with my children's stomachs" (p. 154). Her love for her children, who are also children of Nnaife, is apparent in her decision to choose her children over money and clothes because she was trained to believe that children are parent's wealth.

Nnu Ego's womanist vision makes her lose sight of her sense of disappointment she feels after realizing that her hope, Oshia, has a different agenda of his own, to further his studies in America. And yet, the narrator reveals her contentment, having been able to help her son reach the heights of education in colonial Nigeria. The narrator tells the reader:

Her joy was to know that she had brought up her children when they had started out with nothing, and that those same children might rub shoulders one day, with the great men of Nigeria. That was the reward she expected (p. 227).

This shows that Nnu Ego does not only contribute to her son's success story but also contributes to the population of national elite who take over the reins of government after colonialism comes to an end in Nigeria. Nnu Ego's contentment is, however, challenged by her second son, Adim, who poses a question which is at the centre of womanist discourse. Adim questions her mother, "But, Mother, could he not have helped in any way?" (p. 240). He, however, forgets that the basic problem is not his mother's words in defence of Oshia but the fact that "All men are selfish. That's why they are men" (p. 156). Therefore Adim is wrong in questioning his brother's decision even so when he travels to Canada and forgets about his mother, just like his brother, Oshia.

Even though Nnu Ego's contribution to her children's upbringing is vital in discussing Emecheta's womanist vision of the survival of men, women and children, I argue that Nnaife also plays a role in ensuring the realization of this aim. In a patriarchal culture that sees Igbo men act in ways that are detrimental to women and children, Nnaife decides to take a different path at a crucial point in the novel when he is forced to fight for the British. Even though he has been portrayed until now as an ugly, verbally and physically abusive man coupled with his washing of Mrs. Meers' panties, he decides to give the money for his toils in the military for looking after his children. It can be argued that Nnaife had his two sons in mind when he made Nnu Ego the one to disburse the money. For Nnaife to have entrusted the money into Nnu Ego's hands, is an indication to commit to the welfare of his family while he is away. He is even committed to educating his brother's three sons. For him, it is an opportunity to pull his family from poverty so, he risks his life and reputation because going into military service is not approved by the culture.

In contrast to Nnaife's decision, his friend Ibekwe selfishly tells his wife to go back to the village as he entrusts his military money into the hands of his parents. His decision is born out of the selfish nature of male society, the willingness and desire to keep women submissive. By taking such a course, Ibekwe risks the survival of his wife and children oblivious of what his parents will do with his money. Ibekwe is just like the officer who insults Nnaife for sending sixty pounds to his family. The officer shouts in abuse, "Women! Some of our men are so foolish, giving all that money to an illiterate woman" (p. 200). On the contrary, Nnu Ego is not just an illiterate woman but a woman committed to her children, her husband and her community.

Despite her commitment to the ultimate womanist aim, Nnu Ego's concedes that she finds it difficult to change from the subservient position given to the woman within Igbo culture. She finds it hard to re-orient herself that woman's essence is not based on her ability to give children, especially male ones. She poses the question: "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" (p. 209). In reflecting on what she has gained from fulfilling her role as a woman within the culture, she seems to say that she has gained nothing from her toils to see her children become better people in future. This is because her ability to nurture her children for them to become successful people in the future does not guarantee that she will be given a standing ovation by patriarchal Igbo society. Emecheta's protagonist therefore becomes a prisoner of her "own flesh and blood", her children. She also questions the ideology that only male children bring hope to a family. However, Nnu Ego remains the same character as she only contemplates womanist change without action. She is true to her traditional self in every way that gives her opportunity to contribute positively to her family's survival.

Despite her contemplation of womanist change, Nnu Ego's commitment to her family resonates in her life to a very large extent as she impacts her young co-wife, Okpo, with such a vision.

Okpo says:

Yes we shall all work to see my little husband Adim through the nice school; and when he has finished, he will take care of his little brother here, and the one here will be his cook, and my husband, my little husband Adim will pay for his education. And my baby will do the same for his children. Is that not our philosophy, Mother? Is that not what you and my big husband and father Nnaife have been trying to teach me all these years? (p. 221).

The question – “Is that not our philosophy, Mother?” - is an indication of the unified and harmonious womanist community. For Okpo, this womanist community is made of herself, her children, Nnu Ego and her children, and Nnaife. She is therefore thinking of a family in which everyone is each other’s keeper. Such a vision could have only been imparted to her by Nnu Ego, who is a champion of such a cause.

In the final analysis, Nnu Ego carries out her utmost belief in society’s recognition of the essence of helping each other to survive. Her hopes of seeing her male children cater for her needs and that of the family is dashed as they refuse to keep in touch with her. She therefore goes mad and later dies by the roadside, a death not befitting the sacrifices she makes for her children. At her funeral, many in the society agree that Nnu Ego is an ardent champion of sacrifice and dedication for the sake of communal whole being and survival. Her actions in death confirm this. Even though a shrine is built for her, she does not answer prayers for children because her sacrifice and commitment were not tailored towards a decent funeral for her. Her sacrifice was about the need for children, especially sons, to realize that the well-being, survival and wholeness of the family be put above that of selfish and individualistic ambitions. And so, even in death, Nnu Ego would not grant children to those who pray to her because her own sons Oshia and Adim have lost the essence of communalism, the same quality that characterized her quest to see her family survive.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A COMPARATIVE WOMANIST ANALYSIS OF *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*.

This chapter focuses on comparative study Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* by looking at the different ways in which both authors deploy the elements of characterization, style (which includes language and diction, tone, mood etc) and how these elements portray the distinctiveness of their writing style. A continuity of womanist concerns is established from Emecheta to Adichie.

#### **5.1. Characterization**

Adichie and Emecheta employ the literary element of characterization to deploy their womanist stance. The characters in these works, especially the protagonists, function as the two authors' womanist aspirations and aims. Adichie's female characters resonate with her womanist vision of challenge and change in their dealings with dominant patriarchal society. This is not the case with Emecheta, whose womanist aim of promoting the survival of males, females and children takes over the portraiture of her female characters, especially Nnu Ego. However, the male characters in the two novels all portray the dominance of patriarchal Igbo culture, except one character in *Purple Hibiscus*, Father Amadi.

Adichie chooses a sixteen-year-old girl, Kambili, as her protagonist as well as the narrator of the events in *Purple Hibiscus*. Even though she is young, she undergoes a womanist metamorphosis as her perceptions of life and attitude to the things around her change. By portraying Kambili in this way, Adichie fulfills one of the features of womanist writing: the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to a sense of herself as a woman. Due to this element of metamorphosis, it is realized that Kambili is not the same timid, shy, voiceless and emotionless person that she is when she begins to narrate the history of events in the Achike household which lead to Jaja's defiance in the opening chapter of the novel. The maturity that comes with her womanist growth is evident in the way she sees the state of affairs in her family after Jaja refuses to go for communion. This is because it only takes girl-woman to realize that the things happening in her family actually symbolize a falling apart of things, of the family and of their lives (p. 1). For example, Kambili perceives the difference between the silences in her father's house in Enugu as against the laughter that resonates in the house of Auntie Ifeoma in Nsukka. Adichie's protagonist metamorphoses from the unsociable backyard snob of her class to become the sociable girl she wants to become, who is not afraid to tell a priest she loves him. Most importantly, Kambili sets the example of defiance and resistance when she holds on to her grandfather's portrait amidst the kicking of legs and belt knuckles from her father. She looks for an opportunity to set herself free and does so at the cost of her life. In the end, she becomes a source of inspiration for her emotionally troubled mother and imprisoned brother. She becomes the link that keeps the bond between her father's family and that of her Auntie's. She is the one who looks to the future with hope as her mother and brother follow her example.

Emecheta's protagonist does not have any of these womanist qualities possessed by Kambili. Emecheta's protagonist, Nnu Ego, first and foremost, does not go through any form of womanist metamorphosis. She is portrayed as an adult woman who is aware of her surroundings and realizes the social restrictions on women and the cultural impositions of ideal womanhood. She is a flat character who finds it hard to change as opposed to Kambili, who is a round character. While Kambili inspires womanist change in *Purple Hibiscus*, Nnu Ego is laid back and will not challenge the dominant male culture, not even her husband. She is submissive and loyal to male culture even when her life is at stake. When Nnu Ego gives birth to her first set of twins, she concedes to her co-wife, "The trouble with me is that I find it difficult to change" (p. 141), change here referring to her unwillingness to challenge the culture's preference for male children as opposed to female children. There are a few times in the novel that Nnu Ego challenges the abusive behaviour of her husband. Emecheta gives a positive image of polygamy by allowing it to function within Nnaife's household as the demands of culture are put above sexual politics. However, she quickly recoils into her shell and allows Nnaife to have his way. Her subservience within her home drives her to madness as she dies a sacrificial death. As a wife, she fails to subvert the authority of Nnaife. This is, however, not the case with Beatrice, Kambili's mother.

Nnu Ego's madness is a recurring theme in African literature. In "Madness in the African Novel" (1979), Femi Ojo-Ade affirms that:

The African novel in dealing with the question of alienation has depicted two types of alienated heroes: the one who has managed, in spite of overwhelming pressures of his situation, to stay on what could be termed 'the right side of the fence'; that is he does not belong to the mainstream of social order, he is a 'stranger', albeit a 'sane' stranger. On the other hand, there is the hero who goes over board, so to speak. Finding it totally impossible to adjust to inhuman situation existing

in his society, not satisfied with mere utterances of protest or with a fairly 'sane' life on the fringe of society, he pushes himself mentally to the limit, and even beyond it, and finally reaches a point where society ostracises him and deems it fit to put him away in a madhouse (Ojo-Ade, p. 134).

Nnu Ego is the second type of heroine who goes mad. Driven over board by her love and devotion to her children especially her sons, she puts all her hopes in them. When her sons neglect her, she is caught in a sense of disillusionment as she loses touch with reality. On the contrary, she is not driven to madness because she is not satisfied with "mere utterances of protest" or "with a fairly 'sane' life on the fringes of society. Nnu Ego pushes herself mentally to the limit because she cannot understand why society should define her womanhood based on her ability to produce male children. Her plight is that it is these same male children who fail her.

Even though Adichie finds womanist resource in the family, she does not put the demands of culture above that of sexual politics in *Purple Hibiscus*. When Kambili begins to narrate the trajectory of the events in the Achike home, Beatrice comes across as a very submissive and compromising wife who defends the actions of Achike, even if these actions are harmful. She is grateful to Achike for refusing to bring in a second wife as demanded by the culture. She also praises Achike for living up to his title "Omelora," the one who does for the community. As a result, she endures the physical abuse and torture in the hands of Achike who is the cause of her many miscarriages. Until she poisons Achike, her portrayal does not give any indication of her willingness to subvert Achike's patriarchal authority. This is however, the case as she no longer wishes to bear Achike's brutal force. Beatrice does not engage in a visible sexual power tussle as she recognizes Achike's power, both physically and financially. She chooses the option of poisoning him slowly, a path Nnu refuses to tread. It may be argued that Nnaife's patriarchal

character is not as brutal as Achike's. But for Nnu to refuse to leave the marriage like Adaku does, or challenge Nnaife's authority makes her different from Adichie's Beatrice. On the other hand, both women believe that a husband crowns a woman's life and gives her social and cultural recognition.

Within the two novels, there are two women characters whose responses and attitudes towards patriarchal culture contribute to addressing sexism within African literature. These characters are Ifeoma, in *Purple Hibiscus*, and Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood*. They both question and defy patriarchal authority in different ways within the two novels. Ifeoma challenges Achike's control and lordship over Kambili and Jaja. She does not understand why her brother will not allow his children to meet her children. Moreover, she does not understand why Achike crams his children's lives into a schedule. Adichie uses Ifeoma to speak against the cultural pressures exerted on women who are not married. In Ifeoma's estimation, she would rather be unmarried than to be married. This is because she sees marriage as a means by which men exert their control over women even though she has been married before. As she registers her dislike for her late husband's family for treating her with disrespect after her husband's death, she creates an independent path for herself through her education and her access to a good job. These will give her the necessary resources to look after her children. Her engagement in sexual power tussle in the novel is carried to the extreme when she vehemently insists that Beatrice break up her marriage with Achike, Ifeoma's brother. It therefore does not come as a surprise when she provides the womanist inspiration for Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice to challenge and subvert Achike's authority.

With regard to Adaku, her challenge to and break away from patriarchal domination is carried to the extreme as she seeks an individualistic path for herself and children. Filled with ambition and purpose, Adaku breaks away from patriarchal culture by becoming a prostitute. This decision comes immediately after she is disgraced by Nnaife's friends, Nwakusor and Ubani for confronting Nnu Ego, a senior wife turned male by the culture, on the issue of her lack of hospitality towards Igbonoba's wife, Adaku's cousin. In Adaku's thinking, she either crows under submissiveness under these men who are representatives of Nnaife, or refuse to be a part of a culture which drives women mad as is the case with Nnu Ego. In becoming a prostitute, Adaku does not only assert her independence as a woman but she also gains economic independence, a reality which offends Nnaife's friends. In making Adaku rebel against the expectations of the society, Emecheta seems to be pushing for feminist view that encourages prostitution as a valid choice for women. She pushes for a sex work perspective which sees prostitution as a legitimate form of work for women faced with an option of bad jobs or the outlaw perspective which views prostitution as an opportunity to a better career or future life prospects. However, Adaku's situation could also be analysed from the perspective of the anti-prostitution feminists who argue that women cannot consent to prostitution in the actual sense because no human being will willingly consent to oppression. Adaku's decision seems forced rather a wilful desire to become one of the women on Montgomery road. She is forced by her inability to produce male children made visible by the scornful treatment meted out to her by Nwakusor and Ubani, Nnaife's friends as well economic deprivation that will face her children because they are girls. In the final analysis, Emecheta, shows the extent to which Adaku's decision causes a stir in the Lagos community as well as in Ibuza suggesting that Adaku and her children will be stigmatized by the

patriarchal society for the rest of their lives, again showing the ambivalence of the author to stick her neck out for such women like Adaku.

Adaku is therefore like Ifeoma, realizing that a woman with economic independence can achieve anything without a man. Apart from taking this bold decision, Adaku also comes across as a character who is ready to speak her mind and indeed does speak her mind without any apologies challenging the culture of approval for male children but refusal and lack of recognition of female children. Adaku inspires change, but it is her own change that only riles patriarchal culture and does not push it down.

The male characters portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Joys of Motherhood* either function to promote patriarchal culture or refuse it. Sometimes, they portray their ambivalence towards patriarchal culture. From the perspective of the family, the two novels portray two patriarch figures with different motivations for acting the way they do. Adichie portrays Achike as a capitalist whose wealth gives him power and influence within Igbo culture. Achike acts as the ruler of his family through abuse and coercive force brutalizing his wife and children. And yet he appears amiable and responsible in the eyes of the church and the general public. The ambivalence of his character is compounded by the fact that he owns a newspaper which speaks against the chaos caused by the military regime. He also balances his brutal treatment of his family with remorse and regret towards them. Despite his shortcomings, he provides the financial wherewithal for his family and this becomes the foundation for the womanist hope that resonates at the end of the novel. Nnaife is very different from Achike. He is not a capitalist, neither is he wealthy. Nnaife is also not an influential member in the church. He is just an

ordinary servant feminized by colonial rule. Though he beats his wives, he is not as brutal in carrying out the act as Achike does. However, Nnaife's patriarchal thinking takes precedence in *The Joys of Motherhood*. He holds on to the ideologies of Igbo culture by using them to subjugate his wives. He believes that a woman's ability to give birth defines her role in the society, more so her ability to produce male children. As a result he verbally abuses Nnu Ego constantly reminding her to be appreciative because he salvaged her from societal disgrace and shame by giving her children. He also contributes to Nnu Ego's hard and arduous life by pushing the responsibility for catering to the needs of their children claiming it is a woman's responsibility to feed their children. Emecheta portrays Nnaife as a man who always does a job that is not highly regarded by the culture. He first starts out with washing Mrs. Meers underwear and is later forced into the military to fight for the British. Ironically, he secures to a certain extent, the well-being of his family when he doles out most of his military earnings for his family's upkeep and survival. This is his contribution to womanist survival and hope in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Adichie's stance towards men within the novel seems quite favourable as compared to Emecheta's portrayal of the male characters in her novel. Jaja contributes to the change that occurs in the Achike home after he defies his father's authority by undermining his Catholic beliefs by calling the body of Christ, wafer instead of the host. His most outstanding womanist character is his willingness to sacrifice his life for his mother's crime. Jaja's sacrifice is used by Adichie as a way to show that the works of the womanist writer ends in integrative images of male and female worlds. The picture created at the end of the novel is the unity of two families,

and a friend. Adichie then achieves the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing as the extended family becomes part of this healing process.

Father Amadi is also given a good portrayal within *Purple Hibiscus*. He is a liberal Catholic whose beliefs are parallel to the ones held by Achike. He is the reason for Kambili's emotional transformation as he encourages her to break free from her speechlessness. In the long run, Kambili falls in love with the Catholic priest who is faced with either choosing to remain true to his Catholic calling or fall in love with Kambili. He chooses the former and undertakes his missionary journey to Papua New Guinea. Nevertheless, he becomes an integral part of Kambili's life through the letters they exchange.

Through characterization, Adichie and Emecheta engender integrative endings in their novels. While Emecheta's protagonist goes mad and dies at the end of the novel, Adichie's protagonist Kambili becomes the source of recovery for her mother and brother. However, what is evident at the end of the novel is the fact that there is spiritual growth, healing and integration into society in the lives of Kambili, Beatrice, Jaja, Auntie Ifeoma, her children and Father Amadi. Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* does not match up to the integral ending which resonates in *Purple Hibiscus*. Nnu Ego's children give her a decent burial after abandoning their mother. Her eldest son borrows to give her a decent burial and spends three years paying for that loan. In death, Nnu Ego refuses to honour prayer requests for children because of her children's inability to realize that survival of families must be put above selfish ambition. In the end, Nnu Ego's family seems scattered. Nevertheless her commitment to the womanist aim of the survival of males, females and children cannot be questioned.

## 5.2 Style in the Two Novels

Adichie and Emecheta have different writing styles. Adichie sets off in *Purple Hibiscus* by connecting the way she writes to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. She does not just seek a connection with Nigeria's literary great but she infuses *Purple Hibiscus* with proverbs and allegories, just like Achebe does. For example, when Eugene shows disregard for Anikwenwa and orders the old man to leave his house, the old man retorts, "You are like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave" (p. 70). But for a person like Achike, this proverb means nothing to him because he does not value anything traditional, if that even means barring his father from coming to his house because he is a traditionalist and giving him meager sums of money as he deems fit. Stylistically, apart from Anikwenwa's use of this proverb, all other proverbs and allegories are used by Papa Nnukwu, Aunty Ifeoma and her children by dint of their closeness to Papa Nnukwu. The story of why the tortoise has a cracked shell is told Amaka, Obiora, Chima, Kambili and Jaja as a way of opening up their minds to the lack of integrity within society as people would always act selfishly and greedily. When Papa Nnukwu dies Aunty Ifeoma and Obiora speak of his death in figurative language. Aunty Ifeoma shouts, "Ewu, he has fallen asleep. He has fallen asleep", while Obiora comforts his mother, "He has joined the others" (pp. 180-81). Adichie makes her work authentic within the eyes of Igbo culture as her characters mix Igbo words with English sentences. She uses Igbo words either at the beginning of her characters' sentences or at the end. For instance, Aunty Ifeoma calls out to Beatrice "Nwunye, m, come and sit down. You look tired. Are you well?" (p. 73). When Achike beats up his wife and children for desecrating the Eucharistic fast, he turns to Beatrice and says "You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharistic fast, maka nnidi?" (p. 102). Igbo words such as "Biko", "O' maka", "O' gini", "Nne", "Nekwa", "Makana", "O nkem", "Okwia" are used

in *Purple Hibiscus*. These are instances of the phenomenon of code-switching in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Emecheta's style is different. Hardly does she make use of proverbs and allegories in her work. She uses a few Igbo words like "chi" and "Nnua" in *The Joys of Motherhood*. This style is direct and suggests that she is not pre-occupied with giving too much attention to the language and folklore of Igbo culture.

One of the features which distinguish Emecheta's writing style from Adichie's style is the element of authorial intrusion and ambiguity (Jita Allan, p. 96). This is because she frequently moves between rebellion and submission through her protagonist Nnu Ego. Emecheta uses Nnu Ego to give her consent to the Igbo culture which subjugates women. Nnu Ego becomes her mouthpiece as she is not willing to engage in great ideological issues like male children as the defining yardstick for womanhood. Adichie is not ambiguous in any way as her first sentence in the novels shows that she is interested in the falling apart of patriarchal system which privileges men over women. As such Kambili does not coil within her shell when she has to defy and usurp Achike's patriarchal authority. Ifeoma and Beatrice act in likewise manner to defend their rights as women.

### **5.3 Narrative Technique**

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie makes use of different levels of anachronies: analepsis and prolepsis i.e. flashbacks and flashforwards. The second type of anachrony, prolepsis, which is an

anachronological movement forward of future events is disclosed textually in the text before its time, sets the novel in motion. It is used to portray Jaja's defiance of his father by refusing to go for Communion service. The chapter which is titled "Breaking Gods, Palm Sunday" is a reference to the falling apart of things in the Achike home. After revealing the silence and numbness in the Achike home as a result of Jaja's defiance, Adichie's narrator and protagonist Kambili says "But my memories did not start at Nsukka. They started before, when all the hibiscuses in our front yard were a startling red" (p. 14). This opening scene in the novel is, however, not the present. It comes just before the present happenings in the novel.

Adichie moves on to make use of an analepsis, which refers to an event that comes earlier in the story but is related later in the text, in the second part of her novel and for more than two hundred pages; Kambili narrates the incidents preceding Jaja's actions. The kind of analepsis used is called a homo-deigetic analepsis which carries information about the same character or the same event or storyline as has been presented just before the preceding text. Adichie also employs the element of external analepsis as she takes the reader back in time prior to the opening of the text. These incidents relate to Kambili's struggles with speech and emotions, Achike's dominance and brutal treatment of his family, the coups that mar the progress of the Nigerian nation, Kambili's audacious Aunty, the change of environment for Kambili and Jaja when they visit Nsukka and the drastic impression it makes on their lives. Adichie's second chapter titled "Speaking With Our Spirits, Before Palm Sunday" ends on a note of defiance after Jaja and Kambili return to Enugu from their first visit to Nsuka.

The next chapter of *Purple Hibiscus*, “The Pieces of Gods, After Palm Sunday,” symbolically refers to the figurines on the *étagère* that are broken into pieces by Achike’s missal. This is because the missal represents Eugene’s strong and heavily bounded brand of Catholicism just like his “heavy missal” (p. 3). This chapter is a continuation of the Jaja’s defiance in the opening chapter. And so, Adichie continues with the motif of things falling apart as Kambili narrates “Everything came tumbling down after Palm Sunday” (p. 251). This chapter also marks Kambili and Jaja’s second visit to Nsukka, Kambili’s coming of age story as the chapter ends on a victorious note for womanism. Achike is eliminated from the novel through death so that other men and woman can live together harmoniously in *Purple Hibiscus*.

*Purple Hibiscus* ends on a note of womanist hope as the dominant patriarch is eliminated by poisoning, the same way that the head of state is killed. It echoes a “A Different Silence”, and that different silence is the absence of the abusive patriarch, Eugene Achike. As Ifeoma and Father Amadi travel abroad for different reasons, Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice are on the verge of revival signaled by the coming of rain which hung, “Above, clouds like dyed cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. The new rains will come down soon” (p. 298).

Buchi Emecheta opens her novel with a prolepsis as the reader encounters Nnu Ego in distress and utter shock after she finds her son Ngozi dead in their room. Emecheta’s protagonist runs from their room, across the compound, into the streets and heads straight to Carter Bridge to commit suicide as a way to confront her *chi*, her personal god for taking away her son. In the same manner as Adichie does, Emecheta’s narrator gets into the head of Nnu Ego as she

kaleidoscopically goes through the incidents that have marred her life. However, Emecheta goes beyond Nnu Ego's life to the beginnings of her mother's relationship through the technique of analepsis.

Through this technique, the reader encounters the audacious and proud Ona, Nnu Ego's mother. She finds herself in a relationship with Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father and a great local lord of Ibuza. Other characters such as Idayi, Agbadi's friend and Obi Umunna, Ona's father. The importance of this flashback going on in Nnu Ego's eyes is used to establish a contrast between Ona's character and that of her daughter. It also provides Emecheta with the only character who comes close to throwing down patriarchal authority but succumbs in the end. Ona's story is a story in which she finds herself caught between two men, her father and her lover, both icons of the patriarchal culture. Nnu Ego's kaleidoscopic experience at Carter Bridge also features her mother's tragic death, her failed marriage to Amatokwu and the beginnings of her marriage to Nnaife. Up until this point, her life seems to have taken the right course as she sees herself fulfilling the wishes of her father with the birth of her first son Ngozi. The history of her life ends on the note of her shock at beholding Ngozi's stiff dead body.

Emecheta's omniscient narrator then reverts back to the present and it is in this vein that the story comes to an end after Nnu Ego has had three sons and four daughters as a way of fulfilling the dictates of the patriarchal society. The novel, comparatively, does not end on a note of womanist hope as it happens in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* because Nnu Ego's struggles to keep her family united and surviving is not realized even as she dies in the end. What ensues at the end of the novel when Nnu Ego's children led by Oshia organize an expensive funeral for her is

an African predicament whereby family members refuse cater to the needy in their families and then wait to organize expensive funerals for them when they have passed away. Questions can be raised from the attitude of Nnu Ego's son's with regard to their understanding of the sacrifice their mother makes to give them not just a means of survival but also a future that brims with hope.

#### **5.4 Tone and Mood**

The tone in these two novels also draws out the womanist aims of Adichie and Emecheta. The former packs her novel with a serious, sarcastic, satirical and ironical tone which continues until Achike is poisoned by Beatrice. She combines these different levels of tone in her quest to criticize, question and usurp patriarchal authority through the characters she portrays and the situations they find themselves in. These levels of tone are also meant to show the chaotic state of Nigerian society as the nation's progress becomes stunted through the selfishness and greed of its leaders. The various combinations of tone in *Purple Hibiscus* create an atmosphere of anger, shock, disbelief and abhorrence for the chaos that engulfs both the Achike family and the Nigerian nation. However, the reader is also filled with admiration for Kambili's growth, Auntie Ifeoma's outspoken character and Jaja's bold decision to take the punishment for a crime committed by his mother.

On the contrary, Emecheta adopts a subdued seriousness in *The Joys of Motherhood*. This is appropriate for her to create her stance of compromised conformity to patriarchal culture. Her tone is filled with agreement and contentment with the lot of women in colonial Nigeria. It is

possible that Emecheta's tone is much in line the womanist writer's preference for telling of life as it is, sometimes as it is thought to be and rarely as it ought to be. The tone in her work shows that she is more concerned with the ethic of surviving than the aesthetic of living. On the other hand, the mood in *The Joys of Motherhood* is solemn and sad as the reader encounters Nnu Ego going through the hardships in life just to give her children a better chance of success in the future. Sadly, her hope placed in her two sons fades as they neglect her only to organize an expensive funeral for her.

## 5.5 Setting

First and second generation writers tended to valorize rural setting in their works as these works also sought to deconstruct the master narratives of colonialism. The works of Achebe, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clarke, Femi Osifisan and Niyi Osundare bear witness to these qualities of first and second generation writers. According to Adesanmi & Dunton (2008):

The new critical, theoretical, and ideological contexts of creative practice have obvious implications for third generation textualities. The imperative of historical revisionism transformed colonialism into the master narrative whose claims first and second generation writers sought to deconstruct and this led to a traditionalization of creative space and idiom, spelt out in the valorization of rural settings in the fiction of Achebe and Elechi Amadi or the privileging of rituals in the drama of Soyinka and John Pepper Clark. Although a certain radical Marxist bent distinguishes their work from that of the first generation, second generation writers such as Osofisan and Niyi Osundare operated principally from the perspective of the traditionalist ur-text.

The departure from this ur-text is, arguably, the most significant distinguishing feature of Nigeria's third generation poetry and fiction. Harry Garuba captures this brilliantly in his essay by discoursing the absence of the "ritualist centre" of first and second generation textualities from the ever-expanding third generation corpus. The absence of a "centre" constructed on a foundation of historical and traditional totalities makes for a much more expansive creative space, fluid plot, faster-paced narrative, and language shorn of the domestication-impulse of the first and second generation writers. Setting is almost always urban and ambience is equally euromodernist. The investment in urban experience... is what ultimately positions Nigeria's third generation texts at the cross-current of transnational textualities of the Black world in particular and the global south in general (p. 15-16).

Emecheta and Adichie find themselves in this divide of second and third generation writers with the former belonging to the second generation and the latter, a third generation writer. As a second generation writer, Emecheta sets her novel in two place settings, the first is rural and the second is urban. Ibuza functions as the rural setting where life is traditional and simplistic. The economy in Ibuza is agrarian and the houses are built with clay. Early portrayal of Ibuza also brings out a peaceful society governed by the lords of the land with Agbadi as one of them. In contrast to the serene environment in the village of Ibuza, the second place setting in *The Joys of Motherhood* is Lagos. It appears from the novel that Lagos seems to be a no-man's land with the presence and predominance of at least more than two tribes. It is also the seat of government for colonial authority in the early 1930s. For the fact that *The Joys of Motherhood* ends in a rural setting, Ibuza, is an indication of Emecheta's preference for traditional and rural ways of living as opposed to modern ones.

Adichie sets her novel in mid-1990s urban Nigeria where capitalism rules the economy. Enugu and Nsukka are the two major place settings in *Purple Hibiscus* even though Abba also appears momentarily. The houses are modern and life is modern. This kind of setting is an indication of the growth and sophistication of colonized societies. Adichie's urban settings also indicate the fact that most third generation writers in Africa spend their lives living abroad. As a result, they would hardly be conversant with how life is lived in rural communities.

### **5.6 Continuity in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Joys of Motherhood***

This section looks at the idea of continuity or discontinuity in the two novels. Such an approach is justified as it will lead to establishing whether the gap in time frame and age between these two authors results in a continuity of womanist critical concerns or otherwise.

Adesanmi and Dunton (2005) have also observed that:

The second generation were also born into the colonial event but their formative years were mostly shaped by independence and its aftermath of disillusionment and stasis... writers like Sony Labou Tansi, Williams Sassine, Alioum Fantoure, Mariama Ba, and Buchi Emecheta also belong in the second generation. The mid-1980s witnessed the gradual emergence in Africa of a new generation of writers born mostly after 1960, the emblematic year of African political independence from colonialism. This generation, the first in Africa to be temporally severed from the colonial event - except in cases like Zimbabwe and South Africa - came to be identified as writers of the third generation in Anglophone and Francophone critical traditions. The initial third generation names to come into international reckoning were not Nigerians: Uganda's Moses

Isegawa, Ghana's Ama Darko, Zimbabwe's Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga, Cameroon's Calixthe Beyala and Djibouti's Abdourahman Ali Waberi became the canonized international icons of third generation writing at a time when the phenomenon was still largely confined to poetry in Nigeria (p. 14)

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* swings between resistance of male domination and cooperation. Adichie, however, is assertive with how Beatrice subverts male dominance. It must be, however, emphasized that this radical reaction for change takes time but finally becomes visible. Nnu Ego resists male dominance to a certain extent, even if it is limited to complaints. Her only bane is her inability to go beyond complaint into action that brings change and transformation. On the contrary, Beatrice is moved to act after she is fed up with her husband's brutalities. Central to the reactions of these two women is the womanist commitment to the survival of an entire people. She is therefore not a separatist except periodically, for health reasons. The difference between these two womanist characters is not their dedication to make sure that their families and the people around them survive. Rather it is their awareness/consciousness of shifting into a separatist mode just to make sure they survive. Beatrice, when she is pushed to the wall, does this by poisoning Achike; Nnu Ego on the other hand will neither leave her husband nor abandon her children because of the cultural education ingrained in her consciousness. She therefore becomes a sacrificial lamb for her husband, sons and daughters, for the social arrangement that privileges male children over female off spring.

### 5.7 Possible Areas of Research

A comparative study of womanist concerns between womanist writers from both the Anglophone and Francophone divide of Africa seems to be a good research area. A womanist analysis could also be undertaken between the major Ghanaian women writers to find out if they subscribe to the ethics of womanism. A comparative study could also be undertaken between Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* to differentiate between Walker's womanist ethos within an African American setting and Adichie's womanist within an African community as well as the womanist similarities that lie therein.

### 5.8 Conclusion

Womanism, as a variant of African feminism, gives a holistic view of works of literature by African women writers. With values embedded in communalism as opposed to individualism, it incorporates cultural, racial, national, economic and political issues alongside sexist issues.

The analyses of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* undertaken in this study portray Adichie and Emecheta as womanist writers. Their womanist aspirations and values, however, differ. While Adichie is committed to the womanist goal of survival, she is also committed to challenging patriarchal culture. She imbues her female characters with strength, resilience, and courage while undermining patriarchal authority. The final analysis of her novel shows how womanist hope permeates her agenda as Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice get another opportunity to begin their lives anew, afresh; a rebirth.

On the other hand, Emecheta fails to confront and challenge patriarchal society in her work. Her protagonist is filled with a desire to compromise and the willingness to be submissive to patriarchal authority. Even though she creates two female characters in Ona and Adaku, the agenda in her novel is seen as that of agreement with culture of male-dominated society. Her novel, even though it also ends on a note of survival of the family based on Enu Ego's sacrificial life, cannot be said to be imbued with womanist hope as compared to Adichie's.

It is also the case that the generational differences between the two womanist writers generate different womanist outlooks. All in all, Adichie and Emecheta remain committed to the unity and survival of African men, women and children all under one umbrella. This conclusion is drawn based on Chikwenye Ogunyemi's womanist theory; a theory that is black centred and highly regards the freedom of women while seeking for a meaningful union between black women, black men and black children as well encouraging men to change from their sexist stand.

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