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THE JOURNEY MOTIF IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZIE ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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Abstract

In her debut novel, Purple Hibiscus, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie concerns herself with the theme of patriarchy and its attendant evils of oppression, intimidation, domestic violence and the repression of the individualistic spirit of agency. This paper argues that Adichie's narrative, which is essentially the experiences and growth of two adolescent children of a typically bourgeois family, is structured around a series of journeys, and that these journeys, besides being the basis for narrative development, provide the youthful protagonists with an alternative worldview, an awareness of the intrigues and intricacies of human society outside and beyond their wealthy but closeted family home, as well as the impetus for a more assertive agency that ultimately negates the institution of patriarchy.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, journey motif, African novel, patriarchy.

Introduction.

A journey is the physical movement of characters from one place to another in the course of a narrative. In literature this movement is a strategy that helps to develop the plot, characters and themes of the story,

A motif is a detail, an image, an event or action that recurs throughout a work of art and serves to illustrate and reinforce the larger themes of that work. Sometimes certain motifs may be found in the entire corpus of a particular genre, or in the literature of a particular period, and thus serve to illustrate the theme of that genre or period. In his study of "The Journey in the African Epic", Daniel Kunene has noted that the journey motif is widely used and exploited in traditional

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African narratives and folktales, in which we find a hero undertaking a perilous journey into the lairs of an adversary, a usurper or an oppressor. Such a journey, Kunene argues, takes the form of a rite of passage as it signals the hero's initiation into the complex world beyond his immediate surroundings: the movement across physical space is also a movement into self-discovery and of the rediscovery of identity. Similarly, Mortimer has pointed out that the journey motif is an important technique in African oral narratives of the itinerant hero as well as in Western literature. He writes that "the voyage holds out a promise of transformation, of broader horizons and deeper knowledge" (169). Mortimer further argues that the physical movement of characters "represents an intellectual and emotional initiation to maturity" that empowers the travelling characters "to rejoin the community and to enjoy a heightened status." (171).

The journey motif has been used in Western literature since the time of Homer's *The Odyssey,* where Odysseus sets forth from his homeland of Ithaka to fight the ten-year Trojan wars. His return to Ithaka in itself is a ten-year long and perilous journey. The important point here is not in the physical journey itself, but the experiences that enrich and change the protagonist's consciousness in the course of that journey. In light of *The Odyssey,* Mariusz Rosik (2008) has written that "this is the motif of the cyclical journey that, having been formulated by Homer, returned later in many classic Greek works and in Hellenistic literature" (166). What Rosik refers to as the "cyclical journey" is the topographical or geographical composition of a work in such a way that "the story ends in the same place as it began but with the characters changed by what transpired. Their consciousness is usually altered by occurrences that take place somewhere else than the starting/finishing locale" (165).

Sheme Mary Pu has noted that "journey has always been an important theme in literature", pointing out that Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* "is set on the background of a journey" (175). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* written in 1899, is structured on a journey undertaken by Marlow up the Congo River in search of Kurtz and also to discover Africa. Marlow's journey along the river is also symbolically an exploration of the dark depths of the human heart, leading to self-discovery and insights into human nature. Charles Nnolim has also noted the importance of the journey motif in Western literature, citing as

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examples Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* Rabelais' *Garguantua,* Voltaire's *Candide,* and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones.* He argues that:

> From the earliest novels in Western literature, it has been in the nature of the novel genre to record the protagonist as being on a journey or a quest, in which he ends up learning quite a few lessons about himself, about human nature in general, or about the nature of the world. Ignorance gives way to experience. Wide-eyed naiveté yields to sophistication and wisdom in the ways of the world. The protagonist usually moves about spatially . . . . But concurrent with this physical movement is a metaphorical one (experience and maturation are gained (183).

This paper aims at exploring the use of the journey motif in Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* as a narrative and structural device by which the larger themes of parental suppression, adolescent growth and liberation are explored.

The Journey Motif in *Purple Hibiscus*

In *Purple Hibiscus* Adichie employs the journey motif as a means by which the plot of the narrative moves forward. The novel is centred on the family of Eugene Achike, a wealthy businessman, publisher of the *Standard* newspaper, and a Catholic man who adheres dogmatically to his religious doctrines. His wife, Beatrice Achike, is a dutiful and extremely subservient woman, perpetually bullied by her husband into submissiveness and timid reservation. Chukwuka Achike (nicknamed Jaja), is their seventeen-years old son, and Kambili Achike, the central character and narrator of the story, is their fifteen-years old daughter. The story is set in Enugu where the family has a typically bourgeois home.

Eugene Achike, commonly called Papa by his household, has provided his family with all the material luxuries that his wealth can afford. His two children attend the most prestigious schools in the society, and he expects them to always come first in their respective classes. In fact, Kambili recalls that "When I thought of heaven as a child, I visualised Papa's room, the softness, the creaminess, the

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endlessness" (41). Despite all this opulence, a constant sense of fear, oppression, insecurity and uneasiness pervades the family because of Eugene's domineering, peremptory and exacting character. The children live regimented lives, their daily activities governed by clearly written schedules which must never be broken. Both the wife and the children are severely rebuked or beaten for the slightest infractions against religious doctrine or for an ill-timed or misguided comment. None of them has the courage or inclination to much as hazard a suggestion or disagree with him. The highest level of decorum is expected of them all; they dare not laugh or smile out of season. This sprawling, opulent mansion that is intended to be a heaven on earth is paradoxically a living hell for Beatrice Achike and her children. Like Charles Dickens' Mr. Gradgrind in *Hard Times,* Eugene Achike lays stress on intellectual development and famishes the emotional, psychological, and imaginative drives of the children.

One of the narrative techniques Adichie uses to illustrate the irony of oppression and insecurity in the midst of opulence is vividness of description. The infant and naïve vision of Kambili misses no detail in this suffocating home, as she tells us at the beginning of the novel: "Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated. The off-white walls with the framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me" (15). A little later on, her description underscores the fact that their sprawling and beautified mansion cuts them away from the human realities outside, a prison of sorts:

> I opened my eyes and pressed my forehead against the window louvres to look outside. Our yard was wide enough to hold a hundred people dancing atilogu, spacious enough for each dancer to do the usual somersaults and land on next dancer's shoulders. The compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires, were so high I could not see cars driving by on our street (17).

Against this background of heavy-handedness and stifling suppression, the intelligent Kambili grows up to be withdrawn and reclusive, socially misfit, and awkward in conversation. Mistaking her

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reserved attitude for class snobbery, her classmates call her a "backyard snob" (57).

While they are in this "haven", insulated from all forms of social intercourse and misled into the most hypocritical and bigoted religiosity, Kambili and Jaja cannot question or doubt their father and his ideas. It is only when they have travelled out of this asphyxiating environment and been exposed to another worldview, an alternative living condition where self-expression is unbridled, that they can return to challenge and question the authority of their father. Journeying out of their home becomes thus an occasion for learning about human reality and forming their own independent judgements; it is an opportunity for growing up and breaking out of the cocoon of their father's schedules and doctrines.

The first opportunity for such a journey is the Christmas season, when they have to visit their ancestral hometown of Abba. Sister Veronica calls this season "the yearly migration of the Igbo" (61). This journey serves some purposes in the narrative. It serves to further highlight Eugene Achike's material aggrandisement in the midst of general poverty. His house in Abba is just as sprawling and opulent as the one in Enugu. On arrival here, Kambili is quick to note that: "Our house still took my breath away, the four-storey white majesty of it, with the spurting fountain in front and the coconut trees flanking it on both sides and the orange trees dotting the front yard" (63). A little later on she is still preoccupied with the needlessly gargantuan and ostentatious nature of the house: "The wide passages made our house look like a hotel, as did the impersonal smell of doors kept locked most of the year, of unused bathrooms and kitchens and toilets, of uninhabited rooms. We used only the ground floor and first floor, the other two were last used years ago, when Papa was made a chief and took his *omelora* title" (66).

The Abba journey also affords Kambili and Jaja the opportunity to meet with their "heathen" grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu. Eugene Achike has avoided his own father for a very long time, and has prevented his wife and children from familiarising themselves with him, because the old man has stuck to his traditional beliefs and refused to be converted to Christianity. Papa-Nnukwu has never set foot in his son's house because, as Kambili tells us, "when Papa has decreed that heathens were

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not allowed in his compound, he had not made an exception for his father" (70-71). Eugene Achike neither greets nor visits his father, although he sends "slim wads of naira" to him as Christmas bonus, slimmer wads than he gave his driver. He had, however, offered to build him a house, buy him a car, and hire him a driver on condition that Papa-Nnukwu converted to Christianity. Now he has asked the children to pay their grandfather a visit, decreeing that the visit is not to last longer than fifteen minutes, and that while they are there they are not to eat this heathen's food or drink his water.

The children come now to their grandfather with the impression that he is different from the rest of them who are Christians, an old man unworthy of a son's care and love. But their innocent eyes cannot help remarking the old man's miserable condition in contrast to their father's extravagant opulence. Kambili describes Papa-Nnukwu's compound as they enter into it:

> Jaja swung open Papa-Nnukwu's creaking wooden gate, which was so narrow that Papa might have to enter sideways if he ever were to visit. The compound was barely a quarter of the size of our backyard in Enugu . . . . The house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and Aunty Ifeoma growing up here. It looked like the pictures of houses I used to draw in kindergarten: a square house with a square door at the centre and two square windows on each side (71).

It is also noted that Papa-Nnukwu's "enamel bowls contained flaky fufu and watery soup bereft of chunks of fish or meat" (72). Kambili's apparently innocuous but sensitive observations are sufficient indictment of a man who wallows in opulence and yet fails to cater for his aged father; they inadvertently query the religious principles that cannot accommodate differences in religious worship. Eugene Achike had catechized his children against non-believers like his own father, propagating intolerance and disdain against "heathens" who would not convert to Christianity. On close-up engagement with their grandfather Jaja and Kambili fail to see any difference in the man; they can only see

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their common humanity debased by poverty and neglect. Kambili writes that:"I had examined him that day, too, looking away when his eyes met mine, for signs of difference, of Godlessness. I didn't see any" (71). Despite their father's protestations, Papa-Nnukwu does not seem to be different after all. The reality before them contradicts everything their father had told them about heathens. The journey from Enugu to Abba is thus the beginning of an intellectual journey, during which the children will begin to see the world as it actually is, and to form their own judgements and conclusions that will necessarily be different from the lies and half-truths their father had fed them with.

The journey to Abba also offers Jaja and Kambili the opportunity to meet their aunt, Ifeoma Achike, and her three children, all of whom will be a wholesome influence on the protagonists. Aunty Ifeoma is a foil to her brother Eugene Achike. A lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, she is an example of the intellectual, liberated woman, fettered neither by tradition nor by religion. She carries about her an air of freedom, laughter, joy and warmth in contrast to her brother's solemnity, his insistence on formality, schedules and religious dogmatism. What immediately strikes Kambili about Aunty Ifeoma is her hearty laughter, her courage to speak her mind to anybody at any time, even if the person is the redoubtable Eugene Achike: "Every time Aunty Ifeoma spoke to Papa, my heart stopped, then started again in a hurry. It was the flippant tone; she did not seem to recognise that it was Papa, that he was different, special. I wanted to reach out and press her lips shut" (85). Although a widow living on lean resources, she has brought up her children in that same spirit of free speech, liberty, and laughter. "They all laughed alike: throaty, cackling sounds pushed out with enthusiasm" (86). Kambili is also struck by the fact that her cousins relate warmly and happily with Papa-Nnukwu, compared to the self-consciousness that stalks their own relationship with the old man. It is quite a revelation to Kambili to hear Aunty Ifeoma say that her children are being diverted by their grandfather with "one of his stories", adding: "You know how he likes going on and on" (80). Kambili admits to herself that she did not know that "Papa-Nnukwu liked to go on and on. I did not even know that he told stories (80).

The journey to Abba thus brings the Achike family together and provides them the rare opportunity to know each other. In an artistic sense, it is a strategy deployed to portray, develop and contrast the

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characters of the Achike family. More importantly, coming to Abba and meeting Aunty Ifeoma provides the motivation for a second and more significant journey—the journey to Nsukka where Aunty Ifeoma and her children live.

Aunty ifeoma has managed to convince her brother to allow Kambili and Jaja to visit her at Nsukka for five days. It is at Nsukka that the children's learning process is to reach critical maturation. Kambili has observed in a moment of hindsight that if they had never gone to Nsukka their lives would never have changed: "Papa called Aunty Ifeoma two days later. Perhaps he would not have called her if we had not gone to confession that day. And perhaps then we would never have gone to Nsukka and everything would have remained the same" (112). Kambili's observation here recalls us to an earlier remark made at the beginning of the novel, adumbrating the role that the journey to Nsukka was to play in uplifting their spirits and inspiring them with liberty and resistance: "Nsukka started it all; Aunty Ifeoma's little garden next to the veranda of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom. . . . A freedom to be, to do" (24). Ogaga Okuyade has emphasised the role of Aunty Ifeoma as a mentor to Jaja and Kambili when he argues that:

> Ifeoma is able to discern the unhappy lives her callow nephew and niece are leading. She observes that Kambili's expressions are glacial, unlike her children who possess the strength to initiate and sustain conversation inside and outside their home. In order to offer a different perspective in their lives, she prescribes a trip to Nsukka for Kambili and Jaja, a trip that begins to erode Eugene's unbridled religious hegemony (152).

If Abba is the preparatory ground for the educational process of Jaja and Kambili, Nsukka is the site of initiation into the adult world. Aunty Ifeoma's house in Nsukka provides a striking contrast to Eugene Achike's house in Enugu. It is without doubt a spare and threadbare house, not nearly as plush as her brother's, and the observant Kambili is quick to register this contrast:

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> Aunty Ifeoma still held on to me as we entered the living room. I noticed the ceiling first, how low it was. I felt I could reach out and touch it; it was so unlike home, where the high ceilings gave our rooms an airy stillness. . . . I sat down on the brown sofa. The seams of the cushions were frayed and slipping apart. It was the only sofa in the living room; next to it were cane chairs, softened with brown cushions (121-122).

But this unadorned house reverberates with laughter, and for Kambili, it is the school for liberty and emancipation. Kambili is surprised to find that free speech thrives here even at the lunch table:

> I looked down at the jollof rice, fried plantains, and half of a drumstick on my plate and tried to concentrate, tried to get the food down. The plates, too, were mismatched. Chima and Obiora used plastic ones while the rest of us had plain glass plates, bereft of dainty flowers or silver lines. Laughter floated over my head. Words spurted from everone, often not seeking and not getting any response. We always spoke with a purpose back home, especially at the table, but my cousins seemed to simply speak and speak and speak. . . . I had felt as if I were 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. . . . I did not say anything else until lunch was over, but I listened to every word spoken, followed every cackle of laughter and line of banter. Mostly, my cousins did the talking and Aunty Ifeoma sat back and watched them, eating slowly. She looked like a football coach who had done a good job with her team and was ssatisfied to stand next to the eighteen-yard box and watch (127-129).

Amaka, Kambili's cousin of same age, is visibly irritated by Kambili's conversational awkwardness: "Why do you lower your voice? . . . You lower your voice when you speak. You talk in whispers" (125). Kambili is unable to engage in small talk with Amaka's two school friends when

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they visit. Alhough she enjoys and envies their worldliness and spirited sense of freedom, she cannot relate or enter into discourse with them. One of the girls asks Kambili if her hair is natural, or just attachment; Kambili, as usual, cannot find the words to express herself:

> I wanted to tell the girl that it was all my hair, that there were no attachments, but the words would not come. I knew they were still talking about my hair, how long and thick mine looked. I wanted to talk with them, to laugh with them so much that I would start to jump up and down in one place the way they did, but my lips held stubbornly together. I did not want to stutter, so I started to cough and then ran out and into the toilet (149).

That evening Kambili overhears Amaka expressing her fears to Aunty Ifeoma that there is something wrong with Jaja and Kambili: "Are you sure they're normal, mum? Kambili just behaved like an *atulu* when my friends came" (150). Heather Hewett explains Kambili's inability to clearly articulate herself as Adichie's feminist concern with the voicelessness of the silenced woman in a predominantly phallocentric world. Following Gayatri Spivak and Carole Boyce Davies, Hewett argues that "silence and voicelessness" result from the muteness of the subaltern woman, the failure of her male oppressors to hear her, and their tendency to mis-hear her. According to him, Kambili suffers because "she cannot articulate herself—her father's patriarchal rule has subsumed her individual identity almost entirely, and his abuse rends her from her own ability to speak" (85). Ogaga Okuyade, too, underscores the search for a voice as the dominant trait in Kambili's character. He argues that:

> If the psychological, cultural and the religio-graphic limitations of Kambili are summed up, what emerges is an empty silence. Invariably, the most important aspect of her transition or rite of passage is the quest for a voice. In order to attain her voice, she must transcend and traverse her geographical limitations. . . Silence in Eugene's home is magnified to the extent that it could be touched. The function of Kambili's tongue is constricted so that her struggle to

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> express herself usually terminates with a stutter (2011:147-148).

Aunty Ifeoma's house provides Jaja and Kambili with an alternative, liberated world. Here, Jaja and Kambili are encouraged to speak freely until they cure themselves of their customary reticence and tongue-tied nature. When Kambili hears her brother speak very freely for the first time in his life, she is baffled: "How did Jaja do it? How could he speak so easily? Didn't he have the same bubbles of air in his throat, keeping the words back, letting out only a stutter at best? I looked up to watch him, to watch his dark skin covered with beads of sweat that gleamed in the sun" (153). Aunty Ifeoma insists that Kambili must learn to speak up, to talk back to her cousin Amaka who is in the habit of sneering at her: "Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her" (177). And when Kambili finally learns to speak up, Amaka herself is delighted: "So your voice can be this loud, Kambili" (177). This is the beginning of what Okuyade describes as "the journey towards the retrieval of her voice" (150).

In Aunty Ifeoma's house the children are not governed by rules and schedules, as in Enugu; and Aunty Ifeoma is amused to find that Jaja and Kambli have come to her house with their books and the schedules that their father had written out for them to follow strictly.

> Aunty Ifeoma stared at the paper in Jaja's hand. Then she started to laugh so hard that she staggered, her tall body bending like a whistling pine tree on a windy day. "Eugene gave you a schedule to follow when you're here? . . . Aunty Ifeoma laughed some more before she held out her hand and asked for the sheet of paper. When she turned to me, I brought mine, folded in crisp quarters, out of my pocket (132).

It is interesting to note that Aunty Ifeoma suspends their schedules until they should return to Enugu, saying: "if you do not tell Eugene, eh, then how will he know that you did not follow the schedule, *gbo*? You are on holiday here and it is my house, so you will follow my own rules"(132). Henceforth, Jaja and Kambili begin to appreciate the

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meaning of liberty and self-expression, of being free to do and say what they like, to laugh and sing according to their impulses.

It is also at Nsukka that Kambili gets introduced to the world of music by her cousin Amaka, who incidentally is a connoisseur: "I listen mostly to indigenous musicians. They're culturally conscious; they have something real to say. Fela and Osadebey and Onyeka are my favourties" (126). Music was never part of Jaja and Kambili's schedules back home at Enugu: "I sat still on the edge of the bed, hands clasped, wanting to tell Amaka that I did not own a cassette player, that I could hardly tell any kinds of pop music apart" (126).

The journey to Nsukka brings Jaja and Kambili out of the corseted world of materialistic crassness and religious bigotry into a world where there is intimate contact with nature and human reality. Jaja devotes his time in Nsukka to the self-fulfilling task of tending to Aunty Ifeoma's garden. Kambili records the psychological influence of the garden on her brother: "I had never seen his arm move this way, never seen this piercing light in his eyes that appeared when he was in Aunty Ifeoma's garden" (153). She begins to notice certain features and qualities in Jaja that had hitherto been suppressed. It is not only the "piercing light in his eyes", but also the dimples: "Jaja smiled so widely I saw dimples I did not even know he had" (155). Although Eugene Achike's compound in Enugu is bedecked with flowers, the children had never been able to pay particular attention to them. The flowers there, like everything else in that house, have an impersonal existence.

It is at Nsukka that flowers, insects, the rain, the sun and the natural environment assume a profound significance on the Eugene achike's children. Kambili appreciates and pays attention to the minute details of nature. Rainfall leaves her with a feeling of exhilaration and even lusciousness, as seen in the following passage:

> I went out to the veranda and stood by the wet metal railings, watching the rain thin to a drizzle and then stop. . . . There was the smell of freshness in the air, that edible scent the baked soil gave out at the first touch of rain. I imagined going into the garden, where Jaja was on his knees, digging out a clump of mud with my fingers and eating it (223).

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The spectacle of falling termites is described with poetic exuberance: "The air was filling with flapping, water-coloured wings. . . . Some children . . .squatted down to watch the ones that had long wings crawl on the ground, to follow them as they held on to one another and moved like a black string, a mobile necklace" (223). Her interest in nature even includes the earthworm:

> An earthworm was slithering in the bathtub, near the drain, when I went to take a bath in the morning. The purplish-brown body contrasted with the whiteness of the tub. . .. Obiora said he liked to study the worms; he'd discovered that they died only when you poured salt on them. If you cut them in two, each part simply grew back to form a whole earthworm (237).

It is in Nsukka that Kambili gets such intimate and personal relationship with everything around her. In the following passage, there is an affective blending of human characters and the natural environment:

> I pulled my scarf off and sat next to Aunty Ifeoma, watching the insects crowd around the lamps. There were many tiny beetles with something sticking out of their backs, as if they had forgotten to tuck in their wings properly. . . . Her friend was silent a long time after Aunty Ifeoma finished her story. The crickets seemed to take up the conversation then; their loud shrilling seemed so close although they well might have been miles away (247).

The journey to Nsukka is the beginning of Kambili's journey into the romantic world. Father Amadi, a friend of Aunty Ifeoma's family, discovers in Kambili a gem burrowed deep in the dark recesses of a tender but brutalized heart. On first meeting her, Father Amadi observes that Kambili neither laughs nor smiles throughout the conversation with the family members. He resolves to take her out to the stadium where he engages her with play and conversation until she drops her guard of timid reservation and fear. That session at the stadium remains a memorable milestone in her adolescent life, as she recounts:

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> I laughed. It sounded strange, as if I were listening to the recorded laughter of a stranger being played back. I was not sure I had ever heard myself laugh. . . . That afternoon played across my mind as I got out of the car in front of the flat. I had smiled, run, laughed. My chest was filled with something like bath foam. Light. The lightness was so sweet I tasted it on my tongue, the sweetness of an overripe bright yellow cashew fruit (186-187).

Father Amadi is so caring and engaging to Kambili that she feels an intense emotional attachment to him. He becomes for her "the one whose voice dictated my dreams" (242). When eventually she confesses her innocent love for him, his reply is magnanimous and fatherly: "You are almost sixteen, Kambili. You are beautiful. You will find more love than you will need in a lifetime" (280). Even much later when Father Amadi has travelled overseas, Kambili still carries his letters around because, according to her, "they remind me of my worthiness, because they tug at my feelings" (307). Father Amadi fills an emotional emptiness in Kambili's young heart; he satisfies the yearning for love and attention she had always expected, but never received, from her father.

Kambili and Jaja get a new and fresh perspective of religion from Aunty Ifeoma and Father Amadi, They have learned that Christians can be tolerant and large-hearted, accommodating the shortcomings and beliefs of other people. Papa-Nnukwu's visit to Aunty Ifeoma at Nsukka completes this re-educating process, begun at Abba, of Jaja and Kambili on a purported religious Otherness. At Abba, during their brief visit to their grandfather, they had begun to doubt the heathen Otherness of Papa-Nnukwu; but here in Nsukka they become convinced that their grandfather has more humanity than their intolerant and bigoted Christian father. Sophia Ogwude has pointed out the significance of Jaja and Kambili's contact with these "alternative and wholesome values", arguing that:

> Their grandfather whom they had been taught to distance themselves from, they had now had the golden opportunity to see at very close quarters. This close proximity proved illuminating. First, they could see that

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> he is loved by their aunty and first cousins, all of whom are themselves Christians. Moreover, they witness that he is on his part, and in contrast with their father, large hearted enough to remember to pray for his misguided son, whom the old man believes, is under a curse. Ironically, his hypocritical and self-righteous son lacks the gentleness, patience, fortitude and dignity of the purported heathen (116).

The journey from Enugu to Nsukka is thus a journey from emotional and spiritual emptiness to fulfilment, from impersonality to empathic involvement, from oppression to self-expressive liberty, from the naivety of childhood to adolescent maturity, and, more importantly, from voicelessness to finding a voice. The movement over space is a metaphor for widened horizons and the growth in consciousness that attends such a spatial movement. This psychological maturation in the protagonists could never have been possible if the characters concerned had not travelled out of their enclave. Jaja and Kambili, in that short stay at Nsukka, have learned a few important and life-changing lessons: the freedom to speak up against oppression, the need to be independent minded, the essence of common humanity, the joy of laughter, the meaning of happiness and fair treatment. With their new-found voice and a more mature insight into life, the children are now primed to resist the undue authority of their cast-iron and misguided patriarch. Heather Hewett underscores the role of Kambili’s newly claimed voice in challenging patriarchal authority:

> Kambili must challenge her father’s Manichean monologue and claim her own voice. She must cast off the chains on her hands . . . . In the struggle to free herself from her father’s stranglehold, she finally comes to bear witness, through language, to her experience of the world. Only in escaping his grasp can she become the author of and witness to her own life; only in narrating her life story can she begin to heal the traumatic dismemberment between her voice and her consciousness; only in speaking out can she begin to exist as a whole person with a future as well as a past (88).

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It is not only the spirit of liberation and defiance that the children bring from Enugu: Jaja brings with him stalks of the purple hibiscus from Aunty Ifeoma's garden, which he plants in their father's garden. Kambili returns with her the half-finished painting of their grandfather which her cousin Amaka was working on before the old man died. The undertones of symbolism in the purple hibiscus that obsess Jaja are unmistakable. Speaking generally of the symbolic use of flowers in African fiction, Theophile Munyangeyo observes that "as flowers have a decorative function and are essential precursor to fruits, they are inevitably a source of expectation", and that they "foster a set of hopes and dreams" (570). Andre Kabore has pointed out that the purple hibiscus in Adichie's novel is symbolic of "sought freedom", arguing that "Jaja builds up his courage slowly in the same rhythm as the purple hibiscus he planted takes its time to grow. In fact, the day he started to defy Papa by refusing to go to Communion is the day preceding his remark to Kambili that 'the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom' . . . because he himself was blooming" (36).

It is also noteworthy that on returning to Enugu Jaja demands to have the key to his room. Their father had always kept the keys to his children's rooms, but now Jaja returns from Enugu feeling sufficiently grown-up to keep his own key. He tells his baffled father: "The key to my room. I would like to have it . . . because I would like to have some privacy" (198). As Jaja asserts himself his parents begin to reconcile themselves to the fact of his maturity. No longer does his mother "sneak Jaja's food to his room wrapped in cloth so it would appear that she had simply brought his laundry in. She took him his food on a white tray, with a matching plate" (261-262). On Palm Sunday he fails to go to communion because, as he explains to his father, "the wafer gives me bad breath" (14). On the day after Palm Sunday he pushes his study desk against the door, locking it against his father who came out to ask him to join the rest of the family at the dining table: "But Jaja did not come out of his room, and Papa said nothing about it while we ate" (262). And as Easter Sunday approaches, Kambili is full of apprehension for her brother: "I dreaded Easter Sunday. I dreaded what would happen when Jaja did not go to communion again. And I knew that he would not go; I saw it in his long silences, in the set of his lips, in his eyes that seemed focused on invisible objects for a long time" (264).

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When Aunty Ifeoma calls to intimate them that she has been issued with a notice of termination by the university authorities, Jaja again asserts his independent mindedness. He resolves immediately to travel to Nsukka with his sister, without seeking his father's opinion. He simply tells him: "We are going to Nsukka, Kambili and I. . . . We are going to Nsukka today, not tomorrow. If Kevin will not take us, we will still go. We will walk if we have to" (265). To Kambili's amazement, their father consents without question to Jaja's self-willed decision. Jaja has shown that at last he and Kambili have broken the psychological reins their father had imposed on them.

Another thing that Jaja has learned from Aunty Ifeoma's household is a sense of responsibility towards women, the need for men to protect the womenfolk, instead of ridiculing and brutalising them as his father does his mother and sister. He admires the way his cousin Obiora provides support for his widowed mother and comes to the realisation that he should have been standing up for his mother against the barbarities and insults of his father: "I should have taken care of Mama", he says to his sister. "Look at how Obiora balances Aunty Ifeoma's family on his head, and I am older than he is. I should have taken care of Mama" (293).

When his mother murders their father, Jaja takes full responsibility for his mother's action and goes to prison. The prison experience marks the final stage of his journey into the adult world. Rejecting his father's parochial world of religious fanaticism and mercantile largesse, Jaja now confronts and accepts the existential realities by willingly serving time in prison, and his experience of the world and journey to adulthood is complete. Kambili assumes authority over family business and the household as their mother shows signs of mental distraction.

Another dimension of the journey motif in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* concerns Aunty Ifeoma herself. Spirited, liberated, assertive, and outspoken, she is blacklisted by the authorities of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, for her activism and protestations against the institution's blatant ineptitudes, its conservatism and oppressiveness. She finds the university environment, like Eugene Achike's home, stifling and unproductive. As Lawal and Lawal have noted, the University establishment that Adichie portrays is symptomatic of the larger Nigerian society with its frustration, disaffection, revolts, industrial actions, lack

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of water supply, power outages, and student unrest. When her appointment at the university is unduly terminated, she journeys to the United States of America with her children where they get re-settled. Her intellectual and psychological development, it is here suggested, having been repressed and stymied in the Nsukka environment, requires a change of space or environment (like her cousins had needed) in order to attain fuller growth and self-expression.

If one reads *Purple Hibiscus* as a *bildungsroman,* as a novel of growing up, then the idea of growth as a journey becomes pertinent—the protagonists' growth from the naïve and simple world of adolescence into the adult world of complex human experiences. Such definitely is the situation of Jaja and Kambili, as Daria Tunca has cautiously observed when he writes that: "Because Kambili matures as the novel progresses, some scholars have described Adichie's book as a *Bildungsroman.* . . . While not all critics have explicitly categorised the novel as such, few have denied that the main character develops from an introverted, acquiescent girl into a more self-assured young woman" (122). Ogaga Okuyade entertains no doubt that the novel is a *bildungsroman*. According to him, while the first generation of African writers concerned themselves with political and cultural nationalism, and the second generation with the overwhelming socio-political and economic aberrations of the post-independence era, the third generation of writers, especially of Nigerian writers where Adichie belongs, "deal distinctively with the growth of their protagonists" (142). Okuyade writes that "the development of protagonist is usually physical and psychological, each stage corresponding to major areas of abode in the novels because the environment in which they find themselves influences their worldviews at any given time" (142).

Conclusion

In *Purple Hibiscus* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has explored the theme of patriarchy within the domestic circle of an Igbo family in Nigeria. Eugene Achike, the patriarchal head, is a successful technocrat, but he upholds the oppressive and domineering values of patriarchy which emasculate and stymie the freedom and individualism of his wife and two adolescent children so that in spite of success and wealth, his family

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home in Enugu is ironically a citadel of oppression and intimidation. His wife and children are emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and socially famished.

It is only when Kambili, the protagonist narrator, and her brother Jaja have had the opportunity to travel out of their home for holiday that they are exposed to other possibilities of human life; they thus come into contact with the contrasting worldviews and lifestyle of their exuberant and libertarian Auntie Ifeoma whose home, although by contrast of middling financial means, is an epitome of happiness and expressiveness. It is here that they learn to express themselves freely, to speak their minds, to stand up against domestic oppression and intimidation. It is only when they have travelled out of their home that these two adolescent characters begin to grow emotionally, socially and psychologically so that by the time they return to their home in Enugu, they can now decide and choose what is good for themselves, even when their decisions and choices run counter to the views and opinions of their father.

As a narrative strategy, the journeying experience is an opportunity for the adolescent protagonists to compare and contrast human values and to make their own choices. Adichie has built and developed her narrative upon the structure of a series of brief and local journeys, using irony and contrast to imbue her young protagonists with a new vision of human existence and, thus, with the possibility of growth and maturity. This growth and maturity also entails the power of protest and rebellion against the suffocating values of patriarchy.

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