



SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND EMPOWERMENT IN CHIMAMANDA N. ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of women's disempowerment and empowerment as the result of their childhood experiences. To this end, it draws on Chimamanda N. Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. In this novel, Kambili and her brother Jaja have experienced the lifestyle of three different towns and village; Enugu, Abba and Nsukka. Enugu, their home place has been oppressive to them whereas Abba and Nsukka, their village and their aunt's place, have favoured their empowerment. The focus is on the way Kambili's transformation has taken place as a result of her contact with Abba and Nsukka. This experience has allowed her to compare her lifestyle to Amaka's and her mother to Aunty Ifeoma. She feels that she has not received the right education and needs to change. She is now open up, expresses herself freely and takes responsibility. Kambili's progress conforms with Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism which confronts the family as a site for social transformation as far as gender relations are concerned.

Keywords: Childhood, disempowerment, empowerment, environment, feminism, Stiwanism

Résumé

Cet article explore le phénomène de déresponsabilisation et d'autonomisation des femmes comme conséquence des expériences de leur enfance. A cet effet, il s'appuie sur le roman *Purple Hibiscus* de Chimamanda N. Adichie. Ce roman raconte l'histoire de Kambili et de Jaja qui ont fait l'expérience de trois villes et village, Enugu, Abba et Nsukka. Enugu, la ville où ils résident est pour eux une source d'oppression tant dis que Abba et Nsukka, leur village d'origine et la ville où réside leur tante Aunty Ifeoma, se trouvent favorable à leur épanouissement. Ce qui importe le plus, c'est la manière dont la transformation de Kambili s'est opérée après qu'elle eut fait l'expérience de Abba et de Nsukka. Son contact avec ces deux milieux lui a permis de se comparer à Amaka, et de comparer sa mère à Aunty Ifeoma. Elle s'est aperçue que l'éducation qu'elle a reçue n'est pas appropriée et qu'elle doit se remettre en cause. Alors, elle est devenue plus ouverte, s'exprime librement et prend des responsabilités. Ce changement de Kambili est conforme au Stiwanism de Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, théorie féministe qui voit la famille comme le premier milieu favorable aux changements en ce qui concerne les questions basées sur le genre.

Mots-clés : Enfance, déresponsabilisation, autonomisation, environnement, féminisme, Stiwanism

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, launches her triumphant entry on the national, regional and international literary scene in 2003. Born in the seventies to Igbo parents, Adichie is reported to have grown up in Nsukka, in the house formerly occupied by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. The environment in which she lived has favoured her artistic talent even though her contact with African acclaimed writers only comes later (Ojinmah: 2012).

In fact, like the majority of women's fiction, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has often been analysed in a feminist perspective whereby men are portrayed as perpetrators of violence against women, and women as victims, and strong women generally, as prostitutes. For example, Kivai (2010) in his analysis of the root cause of female marginalization and subjugation in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, identifies domestic violence, religion, traditions, family life, desire for sons and colonialism as being responsible for unequal gender relations, which serves as the basis of women's exploitation.

Of course, Adichie is engaged to work with women, and through her writings, she gives them the means to empower themselves and the opportunity to achieve their highest potential. She intends to remove the stereotypical portraiture of women and move towards stronger representation of women characters not only taking active and shared roles with men, but also taking responsibility for their own destinies. To achieve her vision, she is convinced that, for lasting change to occur, it has to start from the family, a place where men usually assert their power over the women and get them fall submissive. In *Purple Hibiscus*, she exposes how Kambili's father's injustices towards her wife Beatrice have negatively affected Kambili and her brother Jaja while their cousins, Amaka and her brothers, all brought up by their mother Ifeoma, a widow, grow up with a completely different outcome.

Adichie is in fact pointing out that the relationship between husband and wife affects the children and their lives seriously and therefore advocates for both men's and women's positive change of mindset for the progress of society. This view developed by Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* complies with Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism (1994: 230) which stands for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. This theory advocates for a new reordering of society, particularly at the level of family as it indicates the family as a site for social transformations (p. 210).

This study is mainly interested in Kambili's progress as a girl. In this perspective, we first present Enugu as a place favouring her disempowerment, in the second position, Abba as the place of the beginning of her self-discovery and we finally

emphasize Nsukka as the place of her empowerment. Then, I conclude with the lessons to draw from her experiences.

1. Defining Key Concepts

It would be a useful beginning to clarify the topic by explaining its main constituent terms and some others likely to contribute to understanding it. Among them are childhood, empowerment, disempowerment and environment.

Childhood is defined as the time a boy or a girl spends from birth until he/she becomes an adult. For Evans (2012), childhood is considered to be a period of innocence, vulnerability and development; during this time, children are in need of adult protection and care due to their physical and emotional immaturity. So, some qualities that are often associated with childhood are physical and emotional immaturity and vulnerability in comparison to adults, causing lack of autonomy and social dependence. Therefore, a child needs to be brought up by his/her parents to be empowered. To empower, according to *The Oxford Advanced Learner's*

Dictionary (1948), is to give (someone) the authority or power to do something. For Kabeeb (1999) defines empowerment as "the ability or self-confidence for making choices or changes in one's life" (p. 435). In a word, to empower a child is to render him/her powerful and confident. If, on the opposite, parents breed their children in a mood in which they lack self-confidence and feel weak, ineffectual, fearful and unimportant, they have then disempowered them. Most of African women have indeed been victims of disempowerment.

As far as the word environment is concerned, it can be defined as the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal or a plant lives and which influence their lives. (*Longman Active Study Dictionary*: 2000). Environment contributes to shaping people's character and influences children the most. Environment is the same as setting. It is the physical location that provides the background in which the events of the narrative take place in literature. It has to do with the time and the place of the action. (Ross & Geoffrey Winterrowd: 1992).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, it showcases contrasting women's ways of thinking and perception and their empowerment. The story takes place in two towns Enugu and Nsukka and the protagonists' hometown, Abba, where they usually celebrate Christmas. This movement to a variety of places leads Kambili and Jaja to new experiences and discoveries opens their minds to comparison. Their ensuring growth and maturity enable the narrator to create an atmosphere of freedom which helps to dismantle the oppressive powers.

In other words, while a given environment around young female characters serves to disempower them, others serve as a factor which empowers them.

2. Enugu, a place of disempowerment.

Enugu, the town where the narrator-protagonist and her parents live, and where the story opens, is introduced to the reader as a place which symbolizes women's oppression. Indeed, in Achike's family, Eugene is a stark reminder of the patriarchy and male chauvinism. His attitude and behaviour prevent his wife and children from being happy. He is violent and usually beats both wife and children. He reacts uncontrollably when he is angry and often creates physical damages and destroys household properties beyond repair. In this way, through the beating, he has hurt his wife's body to the extent where he has killed the child in the wife's womb. Beatrice, Eugene's wife undergoes two miscarriages as a result of being beaten. (Adichie: 41-43, 253)¹. Jaja's finger is disfigured for failing two catechist questions, Kambili is scolded before her classmates because she comes second instead of first in her class; her feet are soaked because she shares the same room with her grandfather who is considered by her father as a pagan (*PH*: 55, 201).

The objects and images that the narrator has associated with Achike's house emphasize Eugene's oppressive attitude towards his family at home. For example, the red colour of the hibiscuses growing in Kambili's house stands for blood and violence in this context. As Kambili is often punished in her father's bedroom, she relates the room to a never-ending place with nowhere to run to when penance waits (*PH*: 49). This climate of violence is evidence that Kambili's family lives at their father's unpredictable mercy, which prevents them from expressing their feelings freely.

Silence is therefore another medium of disempowerment. In Eugene's house, of course, laughs, speaks or smiles. The mouth is bound to be closed or to praise Eugene as the best husband, the best father, or praise the products of his factories as the best ones. For instance, the afternoon when Jaja has not gone to communion and Eugene is very angry, though Beatrice does not like the taste of the cashew juice brought from Eugene's factories, she says it tastes good (*PH*: 20). Still to please Eugene, Kambili supports her mother's view, saying: "It's very good" (*PH*:21). All that is done in the home is performed silently. They, for instance, communicate with their spirits and eyes, their eyes interconnect without an exchange of words (*PH*: 113). They walk silently at home, make silence when Eugene is resting; they think silently and go to church without talking to each other. Even their family time is quiet (*PH*: 20, 39- 40). So, although Kambili's house is the most prestigious of the city, it is uncomfortable as whenever its inhabitants happen to talk, it is not to express their true mind, but to make Eugene proud and happy.

¹- *PH* followed by the page number will be used in reference to *Purple Hibiscus* further in the work.

Beatrice, like her children, lives under the influence of her husband in such a way that she cannot react at all to his abuse. Eugene controls her and everything related to her life, her movements inside and outside home, her friends, what meal should be cooked, etc. In a word, the home which is supposed to be under the wife's care, is under the husband's instead. Beatrice's situation is just shocking and annoying. She is more or less in a prison, clearly in a psychological and emotional trap. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 211), concerning about women's dependency behaviour, finds that: "African women need to educate themselves about the rights and responsibilities of liberal democracy in a modern nation-state for the woman as an independent individual and not as a dependent". In other words, it is only by sharing responsibilities with the father within their home that mothers can positively affect the education of their children and contribute to their well-being.

Kambili's mother's silence in the face of her husband's abuse in the presence of their children, which occurs repeatedly, does not help Kambili at all. It does not help to boost her self-confidence or make her courageous; it rather makes her weak, fearful and sad. A mother who is unable to communicate, advise and share experiences with her daughter and strengthen her is rather a social danger, and a girl always living under stress with no one with whom to share her pains and fears, is at a loss how to behave and lacks the ability to understand the world around her. Having grown up in such an environment, Kambili lacks the ability to hold a serious conversation or give her opinion. When she goes to the hairdresser's and some girls are gossiping about her hair, she is unable to voice her mind as she confesses in the following words:

I wanted to tell the girl that it was all my hair, that there were no attachments, but the words would not come out. I knew they were still talking about 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 (PH: 141).

Likewise, when at school Kambili is asked by Mother Lucy to start the pledge to Nigeria to be faithful, she has tried to speak but has failed both the first and the second time. In her effort, she has opened her mouth but the words have not come out. Before she finally succeeds in starting the pledge, she has gone through unimaginable states of unease. Though she knows the words to use, they have not come out. She even sweats all over (PH: 56). In a word, Kambili repeatedly finds herself in situations where she remains silent or utters words she does not intend to, often out of fear of displeasing her interlocutors or because she is unable to articulate her response. Adichie, by highlighting the mood characterized by the family's speechlessness, emphasizes the importance of communication between husbands and wives and parents and children because she is aware of its importance to their development.

Apart from being silenced, neither Kambili or Jaja nor their mother can take a decision for themselves. Only their father decides everything, the clothes the children must wear, the book they must read, how to answer questions, the time to go to bed, how to pray etc., just an absolute dictator. The resultant atmosphere in their home clearly does not favour the family's progress. It does not help mother and children to live freely and enjoy life. It rather prevents them from building up their personality.

As an homodiegetic narrator, Kambili is conscious of both her physical handicap and its causes; she knows her stressful life at home makes her a victim of such mental problems as anxiety and depression; this turns her dumb, unable to express and defend her view among other children though there are a lot of things in her head, unable to create and develop her skills. The challenges she is daily confronted with in her home such as violence, silence, fear of speaking or asking questions, are destroying her, making her less than a human being. This kind of life makes her waste her potential depriving her of her talents. Of course, in order to please her father, she is successful at school, but her authentic character takes a back seat.

For Kambili, a fifteen years old girl, it is such a harsh treatment to live in a luxurious home which at the same time is unfavorable to her empowerment. This environment is incompatible with Kambili's age as the family's chief executive and self-appointed god, Eugene, carries out his duties and regularly tortures his family to become the humble servants of God. For Adichie, the fact that parents constantly beat children for any mistake leaves a negative psychological effect on the victims when they survive this traumatic experience, mainly if they are girls.

We do agree with her because, as the saying goes, "as is the mother, so is the daughter". Thus, there is likelihood that Kambili will, like Beatrice, grow into a mother who is dependent and unable to resist oppression from her husband; she will obey the rules made by him even if it means death. Aware of those long term negative consequences on girls, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 163) theorizes that for a positive transformation in African societies, women should change their mindset and face oppressive practices: "Our dependency complex, built into us from early childhood socialization, is certainly one of the weaknesses to be combatted".

Moving further, what emphasizes Enugu as a place of disempowerment is Christianity. Adichie demonstrates that Christianity is used as a force which prepares women to accept violence and oppression from men, and discourages potentially positive social change. This is noticed through the way the mass is celebrated. At the Roman Catholic Church, silence is for the mode of conduct. Eugene's house and the church are remarkably alike; silence is required not to disturb the presence of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, just as the religious rituals are

performed in Latin not in Igbo because the aim is not have the church members understand what is said, in a like manner, Eugene does not mind his wife and children's opinion about anything concerning his household, which concords with the Christian commandment of the wife's submissiveness to her husband.

In short, the narrator is pointing out that Enugu and particularly Eugene's house subjugates women and therefore, girls have no chance to be brought up in this place with self-confidence skills. Adichie knows that not all places are like Enugu. So, a stay in another town or in a village is necessary to arouse the characters' awareness. In this perspective, the narrator uses the celebration of Christmas to relocate the protagonist in her hometown, Abba.

3. Abba, the beginning of self-discovery

In literature, a village is often set as an idyllic place where people enjoy a peaceful life. *Purple Hibiscus* is no exception. A week stay in a village is enough for urban people to realize that there are other ways of life to possibly make a new and better start. Among Christians, Christmas reminds the birth of Jesus-Christ and therefore marks the beginning of a new era. Abba is thus going to bring about changes in Achike's family's lifestyle.

What first makes their stay in Abba interesting is that, there, Kambili and her brother have no schedules imposed on and nothing to fear like them their father's tough reactions. They eat together and have more time to discuss and more time to laugh. The narrator also brings to the fore the close relationship among women. The wives of Eugene's family members come over to do the cooking and Beatrice has the opportunity to chat with them and other women. Her duty is to stay around and provides more salt, more utensils, etc... Contrary to Enugu middle class women, poor Abba women are not submitted to strict religious rules. They move freely from one compound to another. As a result, in Abba, Beatrice and her children untie their lips and have a happy moment (*PH: 67*).

Indeed, in Abba, Kambili and Jaja have space to enjoy childhood. Eugene, here, is busy entertaining the endless stream of visitors and attending church council meetings. So, he has little time for his family. Clearly, the atmosphere in Abba is very relax. Kambili's happiness makes her confess Abba's difference as follows:

In Abba Jaja and I had no schedules. We talked more and sat alone in our rooms less, because Papa was too busy entertaining the endless stream of visitors and attending church council meetings at five in the morning and town council meetings until midnight. Or maybe it was because Abba was different, because people stroll into our compound at will, because the very air we breathed moved more slowly (*PH: 67*).

Another opportunity which makes Kambili and Jaja's stay in Abba interestingly different from lifestyle in Enugu is their visit to their paternal grandfather who lives close by their home. Their contact with their grandfather Papa Nnukwu has

made them realize that their father has unjustly decreed him heathen. The fact is that in the old man's house they discover a Papa Nnukwu different from what their father used to tell them; the old man invites them to eat, discusses with them concerning his health, teases them, laughs with them and even prays for them. (PH: 71-74). In addition, staying in Papa Nnukwu's company helps them to really come into contact with their Igbo tradition and custom and to know more about it.

Actually, Papa Nnukwu is a good person, happy in his poor living condition and who defends his belief no matter how crazy it may sound to his son Eugene. He is not going to live under Eugene's control though poor. Papa Nnukwu is very amazed at Kambili and Jaja spending good times with him; Kambili also feels so comfortable in his company that she has no desire to go back home as her words express: "Jaja nudged me. But I did not want to leave; I wanted to stay so that if the fufu clung to Papa Nnukwu's throat and choked him, I could run and get him water. I did not know where the water was, though. Jaja nudged me again and I still could not get up". (PH: 74). Kambili's unwillingness to leave has made them stay with Papa Nnukwu longer than planned. Another indication that she enjoys her grandfather's company is that even on her way going back home, she has waved to him and kept her eyes on him while he shuffles back into his compound (PH: 75). She has discovered Papa Nnukwu is somebody greater than her father says he is. She admires his strength, his calm and happy look even in his sick state.

Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene's sister is another important character. Achike's family members come into contact with in Abba. A resilient, educated, intelligent and liberal mother, she is a single parent of three children who she upbrings in a way that contrasts with that of her brother. She trains them to be outgoing and outspoken, rather than be confined to religious solitude in a bid to appear moral. Her parenting system is clearly contrary to that in Beatrice's home, where the children including their mother, are ridiculously conditioned to act like robots. Kambili easily perceives the difference between her mother and Aunty Ifeoma who is a strong, fearless and influential woman who openly defies Eugene, her brother. For instance, when Aunty Ifeoma is asking Eugene for permission to bring Kambili and Jaja outside and Eugene ignores her, she gets angry and raises her voice as follows: "It is not Christmas that we are celebrating, eh? The children have never really spent time with one another" (PH: 85). Every time Aunty Ifeoma disagrees with Eugene, she raises her voice in such a way that Kambili's heart stops, then starts again in hurry.

The portrayal of Ifeoma's children is also very significant. Through their behaviour they show great contrasts with that of Jaja and Kambili; as it appears from these words:

Amaka was a thinner, teenage copy of her mother. She walked and talked even faster with more purpose...her eyes..., quizzical eyes, eyes that asked many questions and

did not accept many answers. Obiora was a year younger, very light-skinned, with honey-colored eyes behind thick glasses and his mouth turned up at the sides in a perpetual smile. Chima had skin as dark as the bottom of a burnt pot of rice, and was tall for a boy of seven. They all laughed alike: throaty, cackling sounds pushed out with enthusiasm (PH: 86).

The use of some words like 'smile', 'laugh', 'purpose', 'quizzical eyes' and their association with Amaka demonstrates that she is following in her mother's footsteps, full of joy and very sure of what she is going to do. It is clear that a girl with such features could be nothing than an open-minded and a courageous girl. Even Amaka's brothers, Obiora and Chima, are happy, open-minded and most of the time liberal so that Kambili enjoys their company: "I heard her loud laughter, and it echoed and went on for a while. I did not realize it was my cousins' laughter, the sound reflecting their mother's, until I went out to the living room" (PH: 100). Clearly, no wonder, Auntie Ifeoma's children are all raised with the same values. They are connected and easily communicate with each other. This demonstrates that any individual is a product or the reproduction of the space where they grow, the product of how they are brought up.

Kambili has found her cousins very different from herself and this has made her compare herself mainly to Amaka. She is very surprised about how Amaka does things because she does not know that a girl, younger, with a less educational level than herself can behave this way, doing more than she can do and than she can imagine. She finds her, strong and too mature for her age and all this, has of course, made her ask herself if she is not really abnormal as Amaka has remarked (PH: 87). No doubt, this is the beginning of a change process.

A new indication of Kambili's self-realisation process is the discovery of lipstick in Abba. Amaka used to wear lipstick, and during Christmas service, she wears the same bright red lipstick as her mother and this has made her teeth seem whiter when she smiles. This again surprises Kambili to the point where it diverts her from concentrating on Mass as she confesses: "Although I tried to concentrate on Mass, I kept thinking of Amaka's lipstick, wondering what it felt like to run colour over your lips" (PH: 99). Kambili cannot stop from thinking because she discovers that all those things forbidden to her because qualified as ungodly or sinful, indeed contribute to Amaka's blooming. Each moment she spends in contact with Amaka makes her discover another positive aspect of her personality. Kambili, clearly, finds Amaka radiant and much at one with herself and admires her as an example to follow. Amaka is indeed portrayed as a confident and skilled girl to inspire Kambili so that she can free her hidden talents.

In a word, in Abba, Kambili has experienced new events which please her a lot and make her question her father's rigid principles. She wishes her relation with her family could be better, that her life could be like Amaka's. She soon realizes

that Auntie Ifeoma plays her role as a mother wonderfully. But in Nsukka, Kambili learns even more from Auntie Ifeoma and her children's lifestyle.

4. Nsukka, the place of empowerment

Nsukka is another space which has really marked a great step towards Jaja and Kambili's self-discovery, the real place of transformation for Kambili and his brother. In fact, Auntie Ifeoma's home is located in Nsukka which is a university center where knowledge is acquired to enhance sustainable development. The narrator pointing to the presence of the university in Nsukka lets the reader know it is a place where live people who are educated, and hence, forward-thinking, open-minded and progressive. Auntie Ifeoma, one of them, is a lecturer with a more balanced vision of life. As a worker, she is an economically independent woman; she lives with her children in a plainly furnished but aired house, and though they go to school, she involves them in household chores and activities outside home. She encourages them to voice their opinion on issues, has fun with them, rarely punishes them, encourages them to have walk and to take care of themselves. Auntie Ifeoma is one of the types of new African woman Ogun-dipe-Leslie is referring to for the change in women's status and the development of Africa:

Women must begin to be self-reliant mentally, socially and economically in the context of our problems as underdeveloped nations. We can say to ourselves: Don't look for a man's money to spend. You are adult. Support yourself or think thusly. Raise your daughters to be the same way. Then men can respect you and relate to you as equals and responsible persons; not exploiters and dependent. (p. 163).

Auntie Ifeoma has all the qualities cited here above; she is a conscious and serious mother who shows her kids what decency and devotion look like. As a widow she does not wait for any man, not even her brother to provide for her needs and keep her kids safe. She does her best to protect, guide and empower her children. She fights for her full social and economic rights in her family, her workplace and in society in general. She is the embodiment of the proven strength and her daughter Amaka's role model.

Kambili's stay in Nsukka allows her to understand why Amaka is so different from her in so many ways. In Ifeoma's house, Kambili and Jaja have experienced a way of life different from the quiet childhood they have in Enugu. For instance, they pray breaking into Igbo songs at the end of each decade of the novena (*PH*: 133), have a more funny schedule, have rules different from that of their father, and join in works (*PH*: 134). Kambili for instance has learnt how to peel yams, how to help in the kitchen, to fetch water and set the table for foods, she has even found herself wearing lipsticks and shorts which have been qualified ungodly by her father (*PH*: 181). Also, she participates in sports and church activities. As to Jaja, he has started playing football, (*PH*: 141), washing car and plates, also helping

in the kitchen. They watch TV, listen to music and have walks. Kambili and Jaja have found themselves doing things they are not used to and have never done before. Clearly, in Ifeoma's house in Nsukka, kitchen operates as a place of empowerment because all children, Amaka, Obiora, Chima, Kambili and Jaja are taught the art of cooking.

Of course, Kambili has to willingly struggle against herself to be able to overcome her limitations, her silence, her shyness and her inaction which are all part of the lifestyle in her father's home in Enugu. Her behaviour sometimes irritates Amaka, who has become critical of her shyness and even impatient with her. Kambili has no choice than to cooperate and voice her opinion. Aunty Ifeoma has also encouraged her to always defend her view (*PH*: 177).

A factor which also positively affects Kambili in Nsukka is her encounter with Father Amadi, a young priest and friend of Ifeoma's family. Father Amadi has encouraged her and got her to participate in sport and church activities and feel free to ask questions about issues she does not understand. The effect is that in his company Kambili has gone to the stadium many times to enjoy herself, watching the boys playing football and practice running. She is even made aware that she has good legs to be a good runner. Kambili has really enjoyed this moment she has spent Father Amadi with. In his company, she easily laughs at his jokes: "I laughed. It sounded strange, as if I were listening to the record laughter of a stranger being played back. I was not sure I had ever heard myself laugh" (*PH*: 183-186). Thus, for the first time in her entire life Kambili discovers that she can laugh aloud, that apart from being excellent at school, she has the ability to achieve great things, she can for instance be very good at running, an amazing gift revealed to her!

Quite interestingly, this relationship with Father Amadi has indeed strengthened and freed Kambili from all discomfort and embarrassment to the extent that once back home in Enugu, on the second day of school, she has freely and happily joined the group of girls on the volleyball field. She is no longer that so called "backyard snob" (*PH*: 211). She has another view of her life as a girl.

There have been a lot of changes when Kambili has started taking things personally. Of course, her progress has been slow as she has started by muttering a word (*PH*: 147), then words, and begins to speak more confidently, laugh and even sing. To let the reader know she has made a lot of progress in her cousins' company, she says: "I laughed. It seemed so easy now, laughter. So many things seemed easy now. Jaja was laughing, too, as was Amaka, and we were all sitting on the grass, waiting for Obiora to come up to the top" (*PH*: 288).

In short, in Nsukka, Kambili, just like her brother Jaja, has experienced a different version of family life and faith: Ifeoma and her children are open-minded and

defenders of their view and their Catholicism is liberal and loving. She also experiences love for the first time as she develops strong feelings to father Amadi. In the novel, Adichie attracts the reader's attention to Kambili and Jaja's desire to go back to Nsukka to signal that they have had unforgettable positive experiences which make them meaningful and fulfilled. An indication of their happiness in staying in Ifeoma's house is Kambili informing the reader about Jaja's reaction when their father has allowed them to stay in Nsukka a few days longer: "... and Jaja smiled so widely I saw dimples I did not even know he had" (PH: 155). Of course, there, they feel they are full human beings with the rights to speak, act, and live with joy and responsibility.

Ifeoma and her children's impact on Kambili as a girl is quite significant and impressive. In their home, she feels that her life has meaning and purpose, has learnt that she is full of potential and that she matters; she has then started to uncover her dreams and passions. She starts to feel happy and hopeful. No doubt, no matter the concerns, for positive changes to take place, new solutions are needed for old versions of thinking. Einstein is right when he says: "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it". (Anonymous: 2015).

Conclusion

This paper has set out to emphasize the influence of environment on shaping human character; that is, showing that the environment where one lives or grows up affects one either positively or negatively. To this end, I have explored *Purple Hibiscus*, a novel in which Kambili and her brother Jaja have experienced the lifestyle of three different towns and village; Enugu, Abba and Nsukka. In Enugu, where their own home is a hostile place to them because of their religious father's violent character and intolerance, which has made them grow silent and inhibited and turned their mother fearful, submissive and disempowered, in Abba and Nsukka, on the contrary, they have encountered different life images. Abba is a loving place with such kind, wise and truthful people as Papa Nnukwu and the women of Eugene's family who are always ready to help and advise. In their contact, Kambili and Jaja have experienced love, attention and joy and have noticed that Auntie Ifeoma, though a woman, answers back to their powerful father, and even rejects some of his ideas.

Nsukka, more interestingly is a university center, a place where live progressive, understanding and open-minded people. Kambili and Jaja's stay in this town in Auntie Ifeoma's house in contact with their cousins has allowed them to actively participate in activities and even take on responsibilities, and express themselves freely, which they have never experienced before. Moreover, through their contact

with Father Amadi, they have discovered that Kambili, though not a boy but a girl, can be a successful sports woman. This has made them change their life's philosophy and become self-confident. They are even rebellious against their father's ways of life.

What the paper is mostly interested in is the development and transformation which occur in Kambili's life after she has experienced a happy family life with Auntie Ifeoma as her protector, defender and adviser. The idea is that parents, especially mothers, should be positive role models to their daughters as they have profound impact on them; it is important they teach them to be brave and open-minded. From home, mothers should socialize them to be comfortable and brave.

Auntie Ifeoma is an example of a good mother. Her strength and capability to successfully bring up her children, which is noticed through her daughter Amaka's maturity and her ease to voice her mind, not only complies with the sustainable development goal number five, but also, is one of the practical aspects of Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism which wants women to re-engage themselves for their rights, and provide them paths to achieve it.

Adichie is clearly pointing to the fact that what impacts most on children is the environment where they grow up and insists that it is parents' role to provide them one conducive to their sound development. In this perspective she strongly believes that contrary to Beatrice who thinks that it is the duty of her husband all alone to provide for the family, the African mother has to be financially independent like Auntie Ifeoma, and actually share household responsibilities.

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