Felix Houphouet-Boigny University

Department of English

Master I (LCAPA)

*Purple Hibiscus*, a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

DJIMAN Kasimi, Professor

**Outline**

**Introductory Words**

**The Sociotext and Tradition**

**Writing Education**

**The Emerging Social Commitments**

**Introductory Words**

Published in 2003 by the Nigerian female writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* is preoccupied with rectifying the negative perception associated with women in many literary texts. The point is that her artistic rendition of African womanhood is worth some notice as it extols the picture of the feminine gender. In Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, the reader is briefed about a woman of some sort of prominence through the depiction of the character of Aunty Ifeoma, a university lecturer who is far from being a nobody as she tells her minds openly within the fictitious narrative.

Theory-based, this course wants to shed light on the progressive picture of womenfolk displayed in recent literary tests, namely in what can be termed here “the 21 st century novel.” In a sociocritical orientation as laid down by Claude Duchet, this course wants to read the social in the literary text. The following points will be considered:

* The Sociotext and Tradition
* Writing Education
* The Emerging Social Commitments

**The Sociotext and Tradition**

For Duchet, the “sociotext” deals with the literary text as it appears with its settings and characters. Here the point is to see to what extent the literary text dissociates itself from African traditions.

In the fiction, women are staying away from the traditional practices

* As respect to the notion of marriage, the character of Ifeoma opines: “sometimes life begins when marriage ends” (75). Aunty Ifeoma’s outright rejection of marriage attests to her rebuttal to regulate her life according to any tradition. The “co-text”,in the words of Claude Duchet, shows that this woman flouts the existing rules ad is ready to create new ones on her own. For Duchet, the co-text
* The character of Aunty Ifeaoma is no ordinary female citizen as the reader discovers throughout the words of Kambili, the lady narrator:

When she barged into the dining room upstairs, I imagined a proud….,

walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots, nursing babies

until they walked and talked, fighting wars with matches sharpened on

sun-warmed stone. She filled a room (29)

One feels like saying Aunty Ifeoma is a true warrior as shown by the war-like references. On a metaphorical level, Adichie wants to impart the view that Aunty Ifeoma refuses to undergo the humiliation women face.

-Likewise, Aunty Ifeoma’s speech does not know submission:”Defiance is like marijuana. It is not a bad thing when it is used right” (144). Drawing on the view that in the African context, a good woman must be submissive, one can argue that Ifeoma is no traditional African woman.

-That she stays away from the *mmuo* masquerade shows her distance with tradition as an oppressive force. The very fact that she “looked amused” (86) before this masquerade is a sign that she laughs at a tradition that condemns women to a peripheral status

**Writing Education**

The field of education is another avenue one needs to take in order to understand the type of new women being described by Adichie.

-The character of Aunty Ifeoma is associated with books, metaphorical references to emphasize ideas, which in turn are instrumental in changing society

-She is also a university lecturer in the University of Nsukka. In the garden of her residence she grows purple hibiscus associated with liberation by the critic Brenda Cooper.

-She also reforms the psyche of her female counterparts. In this respect, her suggestion to Kambili, the lady narrator, to clothe in trousers, is quite important here. Women are called upon to embark on new territories synonymous with fresh possibilities

-She is keen on climbing the social hierarchy. Her admonition to her father comes from this logic: “Let your spirit ask *Chukwu* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer, that is all I ask” (83). One must therefore understand that the character of Aunty Ifeoma accords preeminence to her job over anything else

**The Emerging Social Commitments**

Here, the point is to insist on social practices associated with the feminine gender. In other words, new roles are being given to women within the narrative in order to help understand their growing influence.

-Aunty Ifeoma is a critical conscience both in her university institution and in the country

* In her university

She tells her mind: Threatened with dismissal by the university authorities, she argues:” I am not paid to be loyal. When I speak the truth, it becomes disloyalty” (222)

* In the country

She does not stay aloof as she scrutinizes her society in order to better it. Her immersion into the public sphere is only indicative of her willingness to revise the outdated principle according to which a woman’s place is in the kitchen:” When do you speak out, eh? When soldiers are appointed lecturers and students attend lectures with guns to their heads?” (223)

**Bibliography**

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, *Purple Hibiscus*, New York, Anchor Books, 2003

Brenda, Cooper, “Resurgent Spirits, Catholic Echoes of Igbo & Petals of Purple: The Syncretised World of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, *African* *Literature Today*, No 27, 2010

Djiman, Kasimi, “ In Praise of the “New Woman”: A Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus, *Safara*, No 13, January 2014, Senegal