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**HELON HABILA'S OIL ON WATER AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S  
PURPLE HIBISCUS THROUGH THE FIRST-WAVE ECOCRITICISM LENS****Iorwuese Gogo**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is an ecocritical examination of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* through the first-wave ecocriticism lens. First-wave ecocriticism is a strand of ecocriticism - the literary study of nature - that explores nature in its pristiness, human harmony with nature and nature conservation in literature. The paper is a content analysis of the novels at the levels of the ecology. In *Oil on Water*, it is realised that despite the serious theme of ecological despoliation and oil war, there exists a pleasant relationship between some major characters in the novel and the natural environment. This is in respect to the characters' attempt at nature conservation, appreciation of the beauty of nature and belief in its healing and redeeming powers. In *Purple Hibiscus*, it is revealed that the author shows her ecological sensibility by giving her text the title of an ecological element. The major characters in the novel exhibit their ecological consciousness by propagating and adoring the ecology. The paper concludes that the novels have captured reasonably the beauty of nature, attachment to place and ecological sensibility which fits into the philosophy of first-wave ecocriticism.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, First-wave Ecocriticism, Nature, Environment, Ecology.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The environmental literary movement began as a consciousness of the centrality of the natural environment to literature and humanity as well as contribution to the heightening environmental activism. The approach is availed via ecocriticism or environmental criticism which put nature/environment in literature in perspective. This paper is a criticism of Habila's *Oil on Water* (2012) and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) from the ecological vantage point of Lawrence Buell's first-wave ecocriticism. It opens with the explication of the theory of ecocriticism and first-wave ecocriticism. The two novels are then logically evaluated through the framework of the foregoing theories.

**The Ecocriticism Theory**

Ecocriticism, although can be traced from classical literature, became a remarkable literary school in the late 20th century - C. 1980s/1990s - through the efforts of nature-literature enthusiasts and scholars such as Glotfelty C, Fromm H, Branch M. P, O'Grady S, Love G, Buell L and others. The goal of these scholars was to facilitate the study of nature-literature or nature in literary works that was hitherto out of contention in literature circles. Ecocriticism is therefore the assembly and criticism of literary related works that dwell on nature and environment. Buell, Heise and Thornber (2011) projects that ecocriticism or environmental criticism is the omnibus term most commonly used to refer to environmentally oriented study of literature (p. 418). Scholarship on nature-literature was initially named ecocriticism, an adoption from William Rueckert's essay (1978) "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". However later scholarship argued that ecocriticism as a term does not reflect the

current environmental crisis but biological nature, hence the need for the more currently relevant name, environmental criticism, which fits into the environmentalist movement of the 21st century. Moreover whether considered as ecocriticism or environmental criticism both terms refer to an anthology of nature writing/environmental concepts wanted to literary research.

Glotfelty (1996: xviii) defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Her position reveals that ecocriticism is research on environment in the premise of literature. Marshall (1994: 8) announces that ecocriticism is literary criticism informed by ecological awareness. This means that ecocriticism is found on ecological values propagated by the ecological movement. Cokinos (1994: 3) explicates that "ecocriticism is the critical and pedagogical broadening of literary studies to include texts that deal with the non human world and our relationship to it". Thus ecocriticism is the expansion of the analytical tools and teaching methods of literature to accommodate the environment. For Ryden (1994: 8):

Ecocriticism and the texts upon which ecocritical scholars focus, provide perhaps the most clear and compelling means we have of literally grounding the study of literature in the vital stuff of life - the earth that surrounds and sustains us. The ecocritical stance reconnects literary study to both the processes and the problems inherent in living on this heavily burdened planet, focusing our attention anew on the ground beneath our feet, on our complex relationship to that ground, and on the implications of our behaviour toward that ground....

Ryden's opinion is that ecocriticism provides the measures for literary consideration of the environment. It creates awareness on the workings of the environment, the consequences of human actions on it and the essence of maintaining the environment.

In his article, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism", Scheese (1994: 11) postulates that:

Ecocriticism is most appropriately applied to a work in which the landscape itself is a dominant character, when a significant interaction occurs between author and place, character (s) and place. Landscape by definition includes the non-human elements of place - the rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air - as well as human perceptions and modifications. How an author sees and identifies these elements relates to geological, botanical, zoological, meteorological, ecological, as well as aesthetic, social, and psychological, considerations.

The critical outreach of ecocriticism investigates the preoccupation of a literary work with nature at various levels of earthly components and human philosophy bearing the authors' and characters' perception of nature.

### **The First-wave Ecocriticism**

First-wave ecocriticism is a categorisation of the ecocritical movement by one of the leading scholars of ecocriticism, Buell L. First-wave ecocriticism is literature that represent nature in its taintlessness. These literature put into perspective the glory of nature on earth. Humans in such literature are cast as devotees and beneficiaries of the resourcefulness of nature. Buell (2005) in his book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, advanced that ecocriticism has evolved into two forms - first-wave ecocriticism and second-wave

ecocriticism. In first-wave ecocriticism, environment effectively meant the natural environment. Ecocriticism was initially understood to be synchronous with the aims of earth care. Its goal was to contribute to the struggle to preserve the biotic community. The first-wave ecocritic appraised the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its spoilers, and reversing their harm. In the process, the ecocritic might seek to redefine the concept of culture itself in organicist terms with a view to envisioning a philosophy of organism that would break down the hierarchical separations between human beings and other elements of the natural world (p. 21-22). The critical proposition entails that first-wave ecocriticism leans toward ecological purity and humans' harmony with it. Its bearing is on the ecosystem against social and constructed environments. Its apologists aim at celebrating and representing nature in its adorable and healing state, and preserving and recovering its lost and destroyed components.

In addition, Buell (2011) in a co-authored paper with Heise and Thornber entitled "Literature and Environment" reiterated that:

First-wave scholarship of the 1990s tended to equate environment with nature; to focus on literary renditions of the natural world in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction as means of evoking and promoting contact with it; to evaluate nature preservation and human attachment to place at a local-communitarian or biological level; and to affirm an ecocritic or biocentric ethics, often intensified by some conception of an innate bond - whether biological, psychological, or spiritual - conjoining the individual human being and the natural world. (p. 419)

The surmise of first-wave ecocriticism scholarship by Buell, Heise and Thornber is a cursor to literary commitments to the human affinity with nature, nature protection and veritably suprasensible human adaptation to ecological formations and surroundings. Caminero-Santangelo and Myers (2011) corroborates that first-wave ecocritics favour literary representations that focus on knowing, appreciating, identifying with, and protecting nature in a relatively pure state and/ or on natural forms of belonging (p. 4). First-wave ecocriticism recognises ecological sensibility in literature. Whence, the relationship between an author and nature, the text and nature and the characters in a text and nature is of great interest.

In summation, literary criticism that is pegged on first-wave ecocriticism is thus characterised by the: (a) natural environment as theme (b) nature in its pristine state (c) celebration of natural phenomena (d) nature as religion and worship of ecological elements (e) the preservation and care for nature (f) the human bond with nature (g) nature as bedrock of human culture (h) nature conservation (i) nature as universal sustainer.

## **2. HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER* IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF FIRST-WAVE ECOCRITICISM**

Unless with critical lenses such as first-wave ecocriticism, not many would think the serious theme of environmental degradation and oil war that is the prime focus of Habila's *Oilon Water* (2012) would be skipped for a reading that is alluring - the admiration for nature and its worship. Hence no critic has advanced the study of the novel from the angle of first-wave ecocriticism - which is out for nature in its pleasing scenery, harmony with humans and nature protection - until this present one which has provided fresh critical perspectives on the novel. Thus, in the novel, the way leading to the village from the Shrine in Irikefe Island provides a vantage point from which nature in its pristine age untouched by man can be viewed.

The way reveals lush green and beautiful geometric patterns carefully designed by the Sun rays. This is captured by the narrator thus:

[...] I followed her through a path in the woods and after a few meters it was as if we had stepped onto a different dimension, away from the sea and the sculptures and huts and worshipers. **The tall iroko trees shaded the sun completely, and whenever a single ray found its way through the million leaves and branches and fell on our skin or the dead leaves below, it looks so pure and startling as if it had been refined through a thousand sieves.** (Emphasis added) (p. 132-33)

The tall iroko trees, the million leaves and branches and the geometric patterns designed by the sun rays through the thick woods provide a magnificent beauty of nature and the environment untouched by man.

When Zaq wakes up at Bar Beach in Lagos with the narrator - Rufus – it is revealed he "pointed eastward to the huge red sun emerging out of the blue water (and says) beautiful (the narrator too acknowledges in response) "yes, beautiful" (p. 22-23). Here, it can be seen that upon all Zaq's love for liquor (as exhibited in the novel): he still finds time to appreciate the beauty of nature, in this case, the radiance of the king of the solar system - the Sun. The narrator, Rufus, also acknowledges the enticing interaction of natural elements and man, "I walked with the frogs and crickets and crabs. Over the sound of the water the night birds took turns singing the world a lullaby" (p. 77). Here, the beautiful voices that nature produce which in turn keep it still and peaceful can be perceived.

As Rufus, the narrator, becomes bored at Irikefe Island where he and his co-journalist, Zaq, have lodged to trace the kidnappers of a British woman, he takes a short walk around the Shrine and his contact with the forces of the natural environment relieves his mind. Rufus reports: "I went out and walked up the hillock, and suddenly I was facing the water over the top of the scanty trees. The wind from the sea blew into my face fresh, moist, and I was instantly filled with an unaccountable exhilaration. I felt free. With my back against a tree, I faced the water..." (p. 118). The special encounter with the sea winds refreshes the narrator's mood and fills him with paroxysm of joy. Therefore nature can be seen as a restorer of active human emotions. More so, Rufus, after observing the procession of the earth worshippers, at the Shrine, to the sea and their ritual of immersing into the water and miming the waves, concludes: "They believed in the healing powers of the sea" (p. 119). Naman, the priest at the Shrine, in a view to distinguishing his community of earth worshipping from the rest in the world of the novel responds to an accusation from Zaq, the journalist, whether he is a collaborator of the kidnappers thus: "No. We are a holy community, a peaceful people. Our only purpose here is to bring a healing, to restore and conserve..." (p. 130). These values conform to the goals of first-wave ecocriticism.

The religious practices by dwellers of Irikefe Island also called Halfmoon Island in the novel provides readers with the experience of devoted earth worshippers. The people's religion is nature. They believed in the healing powers of nature and the protection it offers its creatures and worshippers. It is understood that they believe the sun rising brings a renewal. All of creation is born anew with the new day. Whatever goes wrong in the night has a chance for redemption after a cycle (p. 85). Also, from the view point of the priest, it is realised that the Shrine was started a long time ago after a terrible war had claimed a lot of lives and the blood from the victims and their bodies overflowed the rivers causing the fishes to die, it was a terrible time. The land was so polluted that even the water in the wells turned red. Then a group of

priests from different shrines came together to build a shrine by the river to worship mother earth and beg for her forgiveness for the evil committed against her with a promise never to do such again (p. 122). To this effect, the water regained its normalcy and the priesthood grew and some worshipers became specialists in mud and wood figures. The figures represent the ancestors watching over the people. They face the east, to acknowledge the beauty of the sun rising, for without the sun there would be no life. And some face the west, to show the dying sun the way home, and to welcome the moon (p. 121).

These people believe in nature so much that Naman, the priest of the Shrine at Irikefe Island responds to a question whether he believes in ghosts this way: “ of course we believe in spirits, good and bad. The bad ones who have sinned against mother earth and can't find rest in her womb. They roam the earth, restless, looking for redemption (p. 107). This belief by members of the Irikefe Island fits into the transcendentalists practice. Transcendentalism is a literary, political and philosophical movement developed by Ralph Waldo Emerson in the nineteenth century. It is a belief that people were naturally good and could fall away from grace only by the influence of man-made evil. It believed in individual mythical experience reached through contemplation of nature. The teaching presents a set of novel ideas which in themselves prompt their followers to search for spiritual renewal outside of institutionalised church, the woods or mere nature being a much better place for contemplation or meditation (www.plato.stanford.edu, 2018).

Therefore, based on the world in the novel, this earth worshipping religion in honour of nature is totally affective and attractive. For instance, when Zaq (who is ill), his friend, Rufus and the other reporters landed in the Shrine at Irikefe village, they quickly boarded a ferry home to Port Harcourt but Zaq instead, insisted on staying in the Shrine, according to him, he loved the place, that it is peaceful and he might even be healed there. In the same vein, the narrator's - Rufus' - sister, Boma who had joined the worshipers in search of her brother rejected the offer from him to return home to Port Harcourt. According to her "I like it here, I like the people and I can feel myself relaxing in a way I haven't in a long time. My spirit feels settled"(p. 226-27). And the narrator himself rightly observes: "Now the worshipers were in the water, swaying and humming; I strained my eyes trying to determine which of them was Boma. She'd forget John, her scars would recede to the back of her mind and one day she'd look in the mirror and see they were gone"(p. 227). Boma in view lost her beautiful face to a fire disaster in Junction - a suburb of Port Harcourt - and it became an anxiety that never evaded her mind. To add to that, she lost her husband - John - who was her little source of joy. But in the Shrine, the narrator believes she would be totally healed from all her anxieties just the way she believes too. And let it be believed she is already healed by accepting to stay back in the Shrine. Then nature and the faith in it can totally be seen as healing to human predicament.

### 3. ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS* THROUGH FIRST-WAVE ECOCRITICISM

*Purple Hibiscus* (2003) is a bildungsroman novel that is set in Enugu State of Nigeria around the 1990s. It details the ambivalent life of the Achike family and Nigeria under a military rule with socio-economic hardship and unjust killings of press persons and activists. Thence, the title of the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, informs one very early of the ecological sensibility of the author and the text. Why purple hibiscus, an ornamental plant? This will definitely not entice someone reading from an anthropogenic perspective who will invariably consider purple hibiscus (a plant) as mere and less impacting on a novel predominated with sociological materials. However, from the ecocentric angle, the title, *Purple Hibiscus*, is the special petal that will attract ecocritical pollinators to fertilize the novel to green. This is

because, the title, indicating an ecological element, shows the ecological awareness of the author and how that will go a long way in shaping the intuition of the characters and the plot of novel.

Realising from the foregoing, soon after the novel began, the ecological sensitivity of the protagonist, Kambili is noticed. This is in spite of her modern upbringing in a high-wall-fenced home in the heart of the city, Enugu, filled with modern technological appliances that she could glue to for physical and mental excitement, yet she finds time to interact with the ecological components in her home. This comes thus:

I sat at my bedroom window after I changed; the cashew tree was close I could reach out and pluck a leaf...The bell-shaped yellow fruits hung lazily, drawing buzzing bees that bumped against my window's netting...It was early rainy season, and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillea, cut smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church alter and how often visitors pluck them as they walked past to their parked cars. (p. 8-9)

Kambili's vivid description of these ecological elements shows her attention and deep sense of attachment to nature. This is a clear indication that Kambili is conscious of her environment and does celebrate the phenomena of its green aspects as they flower, send out scent, produce fruits and colourate the environment which stimulate both humans and animals. This is why Mama, Kambili's mother, usually collects flowers to beautify the church alter and members of her prayer group pluck it to decorate themselves. It also applies to the bees which gather round the flowering plants to suck nectar.

The narrator, Kambili, through her experience explains the significance of ecology to the psychological state of individuals. Her experience points out that the ecology is a major factor in shaping human emotions and replenishing same in case of a breakdown. This, the narrator puts:

Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all; Auntie Ifeoma's little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. But my memories did not start at Nsukka. They started before, when all the hibiscus in our front yard were a startling red. (p. 15-16)

In this extract, it is seen that there is a sense of place by Kambili and his brother, Jaja. This is because in Nsukka where they have visited their aunt, Ifeoma, they began having a sense of themselves and slowly developing their personalities devoid of a streamlined pattern of thought and behaviour forced on them by their father, Eugene. This is influenced by the ecology where Kambili and Jaja on their stay in Nsukka gets attracted to their aunt's garden and thus become attached to it and dedicated themselves to nursing it. This then uplifts their deranged mood which they had come with from their home in Enugu, caused by their father's strange lifestyle

and series of physical abuses on them. Their encounter with the garden free them from the social and mental bondage imposed on them by their father and it is ascribed to the new variety of a hibiscus that tends to be purple instead of the usual red. For in spite of being new and experimental, the purple hibiscus strives to survive and blossom in the face of harsh weather. This breeds freedom, which Jaja and his sister, Kambili have never had. It loosens Jaja and Kambili's yoke which allows them to think, respond, expect and project the future outside of their father's prescribed behavioural pattern. Aside the purple hibiscus, the narrator, Kambili, reveals that her memories of individuality began with the buoyant red hibiscus in her home in Enugu. By this, the keen observation of a natural phenomenon or being surrounded by it makes one sober and confident to face the challenges of society. Most especially to gain social and mental freedom unlike the political and economic freedom people solicit for during a despotic rule.

Also, the impact of nature on human psychology is felt where Kambili informs that: "Aunty Ifeoma came back in the afternoon when the buzz of a bee around the garden was almost lulling me to sleep" (p. 150). This shows how sounds produced by animals can charm humans to relaxation. For Kambili, unlike Amaka whose way of relaxation is by listening to cultural music made with the combination of powerful instruments, the voice of a bee pampers her senses to slumber and it portrays her deep sense of involvement with the ecology.

Nsukka and its environs are the factors that influence the self-realisation of Kambili and Jaja thus; Nsukka occupies a special spot in the memories and thoughts of Jaja and Kambili and this is reflected by Kambili after she and her brother and mother have become totally free at the expense of her brother and father so:

Nsukka's untarred roads coat cars with dust in the harmattan and with sticky mud in the rainy season...The air smells of hills and history and the sunlight scatters the sand and turns it into gold dust. Because Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song. As laughter. (p. 291)

The description of Nsukka here shows its rusticity which may please pastoralists. It does invoke a deep sense of place in the mind of Kambili, the protagonist, which goes a long way to easing the mental trauma suffered by her and her brother, Jaja. Therefore, Nsukka is the Biblical River Jordan to Kambili and Jaja. By this, she says of the air in Nsukka smelling of hills and history and Nsukka making one whole again after excruciating pains.

Kambili and Jaja's ecological sensibility comes much alive in Nsukka where they visit their aunt, Ifeoma, who is a lecturer in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and does live on campus. Hence, on their first appearance on the campus, Kambili describes:

A lawn the colour of spinach splashed across the side of the road. Marguerite Cartwright Avenue was bordered by tall gmelina trees. I imagined the trees bending during a rainy-season thunderstorm, reaching across to touch each other and turning the avenue into a dark tunnel...In front was a circular burst of bright colours - a garden-fenced around with barbed wire. Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a hand-painted wreath. (p. 112)

This portrays the university campus and its dwellers as being ecologically conscious and maintaining a good balance between human activities and the state of the ecology. Also, it

shows the ecological sensitivity of Kambili for the fact that she is able, in spite of all, to accommodate the environment in her thoughts and let her imagination run through it and appreciates its lushness.

In Auntie Ifeoma's flat in the university staff quarters, there is a garden cultivated at the back of the flat and the plants in it marvel most of her visitors. The garden and its unique and exceptional and experimental plants thrills Jaja so much that immediately he is introduced to it, he commits himself to appreciating and caring for it. This is presented thus:

That's a hibiscus, isn't it, Auntie?" Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fencing. "I didn't know there were purple hibiscuses." Auntie Ifeoma laughed and touched the flower, coloured a deep shade of purple that was almost blue. "Everybody has that reaction the first time. My good friend Phillipa is a lecturer in botany. She did a lot of experimental work while she was here. Look, here's white ixora, but it doesn't bloom as fully as the red." Jaja joined Auntie Ifeoma, while we stood watching them. "*O maka*, so beautiful," Jaja said. He was running a finger over a flower petal. Auntie Ifeoma's laughter lengthened to a few more syllables. (p. 128)

What is witnessed here is the candid interaction with nature by Jaja and his aunt, Ifeoma. Auntie Ifeoma presents Jaja to her collection of plants and his response is bellowing which shows his positive thoughts about natural phenomena. Auntie Ifeoma too takes great pleasure in explaining the *nature* of her plants to her visitors. That is why she laughs at length when Jaja expressed his innocence and enthusiasm about the plants. She also explains with casual pride, her friend, Phillipa's experimental activities in her garden. Kambili, the narrator, too seems to observe with excitement, the conversation between his brother and aunt and their concerned movement in the garden. Auntie Ifeoma's further explanation that: "yes it is. I had to fence my garden because the neighbourhood children came in and plucked many of the more unusual flowers. Now I only let in the alter girls from our church or the protestant church" (p. 128), proves that the inhabitants of Nsukka enjoy interacting with their environment and do include it in the running of their weekly activities which is a point to exhibit their ecological consciousness.

In Auntie Ifeoma's ride around the university campus with her children and Jaja and Kambili to show them around the campus, Kambili observes:

The houses we drove past had sunflower hedges, and the palm-size flowers brightened the foliage in big yellow polka dots. The hedges had many gaping holes, so I could see the backyard of the houses...(p. 129) Gmelina and dogonyaro trees stood firmly on either side. The sharp, astringent scent of the dogonyaro leaves filled the car, and Amaka breathed deeply and said they cured malaria. We were in a residential area, driving past bungalows in wide compounds with rose bushes and faded lawns and fruit trees. (p. 130)

This shows that the residents of the university live in tune with nature for they plant and maintain flowers, grasses and trees not just for the love of it or beauty it provides but also for security reasons. For they tend to fence their apartments with such flowers barring unnecessary intrusion into their compounds. Thus, nature serve as a securing element to them costless against concrete wall-fence or steel. The sensitivity of Auntie Ifeoma's family to the curing magic of nature is also exposed when in the presence of dogonyaro (neem) woods, Amaka breathe in deeply the caustic scent from the woods and recognised they tackle malaria. Thereto,



Aunty Ifeoma's family and the university community can be said to live in harmony with nature.

Jaja's fierce commitment to the ecology is revealed when he visits his aunt, Ifeoma, in Nsukka and gets introduced to Aunty Ifeoma's garden. However, this does not end there as he extends his ecological zeal to its propagation. This, he carefully collects the stalks of purple hibiscus in Aunty Ifeoma's garden under her tutelage and takes them to his home in Enugu to get them planted. This is exhibited thus:

We went downstairs to the kitchen. It was wrapped in black Cellophane paper, as well, and he (Jaja) had lodged it in the refrigerator, beneath bottles of Fanta. When he saw my puzzled look, he said they weren't just sticks; they were stalks of purple hibiscus. He would give them to the gardener. It was still harmattan and the earth was thirsty, but Aunty Ifeoma said the stalks might take root and grow if they were watered regularly, that hibiscuses didn't like too much water, but they didn't like to be too dry, either. Jaja's eyes shone as he talked about the hibiscus, as he held them out so I could touch the cold, moist sticks. (p. 194-95)

By implication, Jaja is wholly dedicated to the sustainability and multiplicity of plants. Therefore his attitude to the ecology can be adjudged to be healthy thereby fitting into the preservationists circle.

After Jaja and Kambili had spent time with their aunt in Nsukka, they become very conscious of nature on their return to their home in Enugu. This is reported by Kambili thus:

The scent of fruits filled my nose when Adamu opened our compound gates. It was as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados..."see, the purple hibiscus are about to bloom", Jaja said, as we got out of the car. He was pointing, although I did not need him to. I could see the sleepy, oval-shaped buds in the front yard as they swayed in the evening breeze. (p. 247-48)

It is clear here that Jaja and his sister, Kambili, are very happy about the plant, purple hibiscus, that they have persevered to propagate. Above all, they have shown their ecological sensibility by recognising and considering the ecology and its yield. This is by noticing the scent and fruits and flowers of the plants in their home and approaching and appreciating them with vigor against synthetic materials of beauty and even humans in the home.

Following from here, a double tragedy struck the Achike family. Their father and head of the family, Eugene Achike, dies suddenly and the autopsy results show he is poisoned. Therefore, Jaja, Eugene's first son claims responsibility for the death, when police initiated investigation, in order to save his mother who has perpetrated the act. Thus, he, Jaja, is arrested and remanded awaiting trial. His mother and sister, Kambili, become devastated emotionally. But when events began playing out for the release of Jaja from jail, life began returning to the family. Therefore in spite of everything, Kambili plans of a new happy beginning with the planting of trees and flowers. By this, she forecasts the coming of new rain which indicates hope and a fresh beginning against the rough experience the family have had. This is reported thus:

We will plant new orange trees in Abba when we came back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscus, too, and I'll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers. I am

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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)

Therefore, Eugene Achike's family, despite the trauma it has suffered from Eugene due to the physical abuses and suppression he meted at his wife and children, his death and the imprisonment of his son that send the family into a state of abyss, have resolved to have a new beginning surrounded by plants. This, the family places above material things. Then it can be said that the family is ecologically zealous for its interest in promoting the ecology and its upliftment of human emotions.

Another angle of the ecology that is given detail attention and heartily spoken of with its impact on humanity and the green vegetation in *Purple Hibiscus* is the weather. This is revealed in the guise of rain, air, harmattan and sunlight. Normally, weather is key to the success and failure of living things and human activities. In Nigeria for instance, during the wet season, the vegetation blossoms, wild animals thrive better and agricultural activities, which are the life wire of majority of the people, rise to their climax and bring the population and the ecology into a state of mirth. The dry season on the other hand, accompanied with the dusty-wind of the harmattan and heat, brings difficulties and makes living callous as water scarcity and shortage of fresh food loom. This makes humans and animals to suffer and plants to wither.

Therefore, weather in the manner of the foregoing is captured in the novel and passionately described. However, a twist to it is its extraordinary response to disheartened human events. This can be said to be a form of spirituality between humanity and weather. This is reported thus:

It rained heavily the day Ade Coker died, a strange, furious rain in the middle of the parched harmattan. Ade Coker was at breakfast with his family when a courier delivered a package to him. His daughter, in primary school uniform, was sitting across the table from him. The baby was nearby, in a high chair. His wife was spooning Cerelac into the baby's mouth. Ade Coker was blown up when he opened the package...When Jaja and I came home from school, we were almost drenched by the walk from the car to the front door, the rain was so heavy it had formed a small pool beside the hibiscuses. My feet itched inside my wet leather sandals. Papa was crumpled on a sofa in the living room, sobbing. (p. 202)

The rain as portrayed comes in its unusual period, the dry season during harmattan. Significantly, rains in this period, even though rare, when they drop they ease the coarse mood inflicted by the harmattan. Therefore the furious downpour on the day of the cruel death of Ade Coker, Editor of the Standard Newspaper torn apart by a letter-bomb from the Military Head of State for his articles that condemn the head of state's breach of human rights, divulges the supernatural connection between humans and weather. It seems the rain reacted as a result of Ade Coker's tragedy, which is a prominent case among many of such cases in the novel. Also, its fall cools the harsh weather condition thereby calming the high tension in the land as a consequence of the merciless persecution of journalists and activists among others.

Weather in the face of harmattan with its dryness, cold, dust-carrying, and violent wind which introduce harshness on the society is captured thus: "outside, the harmattan wind tore across the front yard, ruffling the plants in the circular garden, bending the will and branches

of trees, coating the parked cars with more dust" (p. 187). This terse comment on harmattan reveals its intrinsic features and how it comes to bear on the society. Therefore, it shows that the novel is conscious of weather in its passing seasons.

More so, the enigmatic manner of weather, with its fast-changing and mixture of atmospheric conditions side-along-side to the amazement of humans is portrayed thus:

Rain splashed across the floor of the verandah, even though the sun blazed and I had to narrow my eyes to look out of the door of Auntie Ifeoma's living room. Mama used to tell Jaja and me that God was undecided about what to send, rain or sun. We would sit in our rooms and look out at the raindrops glinting with sunlight, waiting for God to decide...I went out to the verandah and stood by the wet railings, watching the rain thin to a drizzle and then stop. God decided on sunlight. 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. "Aku na-efe! Aku is flying!" a child in the flat upstairs shouted. The air was filling with flapping, water-coloured wings. (212-13)

This proclamation of weather shows the state of its alignment and realignment that create a mix feeling and reaction and impact on society. This is where Kambili, the narrator, marvels at the sight of the drizzling rain and the radiant sunlight. For in normal circumstances, rains shade the sunlight thereby creating a blurred atmosphere. Therefore, the coming of rain after a period of drought sparked liveliness in the constituents of the ecology as the atmosphere become fresh. This is why the aroma produced by the earth entices the narrator, Kambili, to having a thought of eating it. It is also as a result of this that other creatures too, like insects come out of their hideout to display in the calm and refreshed atmosphere. Thus their display attracts the children who run after them enjoying the fresh air which shows that weather is a major determining factor in the mood of the society.

From the impact of the early rain on the ecology and humans in the foregoing, the microcosm of the effect of the full season of rain on the ecology and society through Auntie Ifeoma's yard and garden is revealed thus:

[...] It had rained all night. Jaja was kneeling in the garden, weeding. He did not have to water anymore because the sky did it. Anthills had risen in the newly softened red soil in the yard, like miniature castles. I took a deep breath and held it, to savour the smell of green leaves washed clean by rain, the way I imagined a smoker would do to savour the last of a cigarette. The allamanda bushes bordering the garden bloomed heavily with yellow, cylindrical flowers. Chima was pulling the flowers down and sticking his fingers in them, one after the other. I watched as he examined flower after flower, looking for a suitable small bloom that would fit onto his pinky. (p. 219-20)

What appears here is the flourishing shape of the ecology caused by rain fall. The rains irrigate the earth and prompt a variety of anthropogenic and arthropodic activities. This, it is seen that Jaja devotes himself to keeping the garden off unwanted plants while the ants make new holes and clear the old ones heaping sand that form pavilions on land. The plants blossom while Kambili, the narrator, enjoys their freshness inhaling the strong fragrance of the leaves enthusiastically and Chima enjoys a close watch of the blooming flowers picking the most flamboyant ones. This shows the significance of the wet weather to humans and the ecology also revealing the ecological sensitivity of the novel and its characters.

The forces of weather are again shown to have intervened in human fracas with the kind of aggression that causes more confusion and destruction. This is where it is reported that:

Everything came tumbling down after Palm Sunday. Howling winds came with an angry rain, uprooting frangipani trees in the front yard. They lay on the lawn, their pink and white flowers grazing the grass, their roots waving lumpy soil in the air. The satellite dish on top of the garage came crashing down, and lounged on the driveway like a visiting alien spaceship. The door of my wardrobe dislodged completely. Sisi broke a full set of Mama's China. Even the silence that descended on the house was sudden, as though the old silence had broken and left us with the sharp pieces. When Mama ask Sisi to wipe the floor of the living room, to make sure no dangerous pieces of figurines were left lying somewhere, she did not lower her voice to a whisper. She did not hide the tiny smile that drew lines at the edge of her mouth. She did not 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. There was something hanging over all of us. Sometimes I wanted it all to be a dream - the missal flung at the étagère, the shattered figurines, the brittle air. (p. 251-52)

The peace and mutuality of the family of Eugene Achike crashed into shambles completely as a result of Jaja's arrogant protest against his father's fanatic Catholicism and overbearing abuses on the family. Thus he, Jaja, refuses to go to communion in the church during Palm Sunday. He continues so by disregarding certain Catholic doctrines that his father, Eugene, insists must be observed properly even at home and by abstaining from dining with the family. This enrages the father and it shocks the family into silence and confusion. Therefore, the coming of the violent thunderstorm and the heavy rain that doubles the jeopardy of the family as reported by the narrator, Kambili, show the recognition of the ecological forces and their impact in human predicament. This then exhibit the ecological awareness of the novel and the narrator, Kambili.

Relatedly, the ecology also reacts to the tragedy of the family of Eugene Achike as they lost their breadwinner and head of the family unexpectedly. The narrator also turns to it as a consoling factor to her sad and confused state. Therefore she explains: "Outside the rain came down in slants, hitting the closed windows with a furious rhythm. It would hurl down cashews and mangoes from the trees and they would start to rot in humid earth, giving out that sweet-and-sour-scent" (p. 281). This shows the consciousness of the narrator, Kambili to the elements of the ecology and its centrality and interplay into human events. This is for the reason that the coming of the rain would definitely calm the bad mood within the family of Eugene Achike.

Furthermore, aside the comforting role nature plays in the lives of the major characters in the novel and its special interplay in high-emotion human events; it is also represented as corresponding to supernatural occasions which indicates the supra-connectivity of the geo system. This comes hither:

"See, there, on the tree, that's Our Lady!" Others pointed at the glowing sun. "There she is!" We stood underneath a huge flame-of-the-forest tree. It was in bloom, its flowers fanning out on wide branches and the ground underneath covered with petals the colour of fire. When the young girl was led out, the flame-of-the-forest swayed and flowers rained down. The girl was slight and solemn, dressed in white, and strong-looking men stood around her so she would not be trampled. She had hardly passed us when other trees nearby started to quiver with a frightening vigor, as if someone

were shaking them. The ribbons that cordoned off the apparition area shook, too. Yet there was no wind. The sun turned white, the colour and shape of the host. And then I saw her, the Blessed Virgin: an image in the pale sun, a red glow on the back of my hand, a smile on the face of the rosary-bedecked man whose arm rubbed mine. She was everywhere. (p. 268-69)

The foregoing portrays a scene of pilgrimage for Catholics. The scene is an apparition ground where the Virgin Mary appears. Thus, the whole affair is spiritual and religious indicating the extraordinary. Then as the young girl that is seeing the vision of the Virgin Mary is led out to the gaze of the public, the trees began releasing flowers simultaneously and gyrating uncontrollable without the presence of wind. The silk used in dressing the arena dazzles while the sun becomes pale without the barricade of hovering clouds, showing the body of Christ. This shows the sensitivity of the ecology to supernatural events.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper has unravelled fresh critical horizons on *Oil on Water* and *Purple Hibiscus* using the principles of first-wave ecocriticism. It proves that *Oil on Water* is not just about the tragedy of environmental degradation, displacement, kidnappings and oil war but the recognition of the beauty of nature, human harmony with the ecology, the healing power of nature, restoration of nature and earth worshipping. Whence characters in the novel like Rufus, Zaq, Boma, Naman and members of the earth worshipping community of Irikefe Island exhibit a good relationship with the natural environment by having faith in its healing and redeeming powers. In *Purple Hibiscus* too, the paper focuses on the ecology as theme against the much discussed issues of feminism, postcolonialism, masculinity and dictatorship. Thus the author demonstrates her keenness to the natural environment by giving her text the title of an ecological element and recognising nature in all its cycles in her text. The major characters in the novel; Kambili, the narrator, Jaja, and Auntie Ifeoma, have shown their ecological sensibility by propagating and appreciating the ecology. More so the ecological representation in the text reveals the extraordinary human connectivity to the natural environment where natural forces interfere in the human mood and events. The natural forces in the novel are presented to be responsible for the wellbeing of humans on earth. Therefore, the novels both can then be considered as fitting in the philosophy of first-wave ecocriticism.

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