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## **The Quest for Equality: The Invitational Rhetoric of Adichie's Novel Purple Hibiscus**

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### **Abstract:**

*The growth in status of women partaking in social, political and economic issues has seen the willingness of women and men to cooperate in their undertakings. This willingness to work with men has led Adichie to display the sense of the invitation of perspectives in the manner that does not degrade any participant in the conversations. In examining Adichie's novel The Purple Hibiscus, this paper examines the feminist principles of equality, immanent value and self-determination used in the quest to obliterate the system of patriarchy and how the external conditions of value, safety and freedom contribute to cooperative dialogues. It shows that some traditional beliefs continue to suppress the contributions of women, which is a challenge in recognising the value of women's contributions. Adichie has shown how Kambili suffers the lack of freedom when interacting in the presence of her father, Eugene, because of his domination and traditional beliefs. The paper sees that in adhering to these principles men and women can reach the consensus necessary to do away with patriarchal society. It further tries to show the viability of invitational rhetoric in sharing perspectives and fostering mutual understanding.*

**Keywords:** *Invitational rhetoric, feminist principles, patriarchy, domination*

### **1. Introduction**

Invitational rhetoric came into being when Foss and Griffin thought classical rhetoric is patriarchal, violent and cruel in a way. They believe that since rhetoric is the art of persuasion, people are power hungry and want to influence others to change (Foss & Griffin, 1995). This devalues the lives and beliefs of those being influenced and gives the person influencing the power. Graig and Muller (2007) are of the opinion that the Western discipline of rhetoric has been defined as the conscious intent to change others, and then every communicative attempt encounter has been considered as primarily an attempt to change or influence other. Therefore, some feminist scholars have looked at the theory that has to include all participants in the communication process. They have identified communicative modes that previously have not been recognised because they are grounded in alternative values (Craig & Muller, 2007). Invitational rhetoric was introduced as an alternative rhetorical option promoting rhetoric as an agency of voluntary transformation.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

Through literature, women have voiced against the patriarchal settings so that all social classes can have equal representation in private and public spheres. The problem is that it is not evident as to how the novel is in quest for equality for both genders. Therefore, this paper focuses on how the novel use feminist principles to instill an understanding of the importance of gender equality in order to avoid the domination, exclusion and oppression of women in patriarchal societies.

### **3. Research Objectives**

- To determine how external conditions of value, freedom and safety contribute to free perspectives offering amongst the participants.
- To evaluate how these novels promote ideas of equality, immanent value and self-determination amongst women and men.

### **4. Related Literature**

#### ***4.1. Invitational Rhetoric at Work***

In invitational rhetoric rhetors engage without intent to change or persuade others. Lozano (2013) indicates that it is a rhetoric that equalizes both the speaker and audience. The purpose of the dialogue is to offer information in order to provide further understanding of the rhetor's point of view, to invite each others into their perspectives. Each rhetor must be willing to

engage with the others' perspectives and judgement freely. This creates a safe environment for the rhetor to offer their perspectives. Lozano (2013) states that "once all parties accept the situational conditions: safety, freedom and value \_ and they embody their message with the three feminist principles". Acceptance to these conditions lead the participants believe that there are better humane and enriching ways to live. So, these efforts to dominate and gain power over others cannot be used to build relationships of equality. Therefore, it is better if feminists decide to do away with alienation, competition and dehumanization that hallmark relationships with intimacy, mutuality and camaraderie attitudes (hooks, 1984). This article aims at finding the conversation that promote economic, political and social equality among women and men; where everyone is considered as a contributor to the conversation. This is emphasized by Lloyd (2013, p. 250) who indicates that invitational rhetoric addresses the rare conditions of economic, political, and social equality among participants. Even if the rhetor's offer is rejected, the maintenance of the connection between the rhetor and audience remains the same because the audience is still valued.

Invitational rhetoric seeks to reach social cooperation amongst the interlocutors. According to Lozano (2013) in Starhawk's novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* equality is depicted when the society is cooperative and work together despite their different perspectives. They each enact their own cultures and languages, but they are all grounded in the knowledge of respect of the sacred things. Kindred (2007) emphasizes that in invitational rhetoric the aim is not to control others, but something that can be employed by all members of interaction so that everyone can learn from the interaction. This interaction creates knowledge and the decision made is shared between the initiator of rhetoric and the audience. The initiator of rhetoric acts as the facilitator for exchange of information to flow freely in the communication process for all the participants to enact self-determination. In addition, one of the focuses of invitational rhetoric is immanent value. "Immanent value professes that every human being is unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe" (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 4). According to Sharier (2015) as humans, we must first realise that we exist with the sphere of equality, that we share the same image. When we create the mentality of opposition, we oppress the object of oppression and demonising others traditional beliefs and this type of inequality is a problem as it views others as less than humans.

#### 4.2. *Offering Perspectives*

In invitational rhetoric, the rhetor just offers a point of view to the audience instead of imposing ideas on them; convincing the audience to follow one's viewpoint. Makinen (2016) points out that when a rhetor offers perspectives in her/his speech, the audience is given a view through the rhetor's eyes to the surrounding world or on a specific issue. The aim of invitational rhetoric is to provide the audience and in a dialogic-oriented situation, the rhetor included, with new perspectives instead of trying to inflict changes on the audience. Bone, Griffin and Scholz (2008) indicate that:

In offering perspectives rhetors do not seek to impose their position on audience members, rather, they articulate their perspectives as fully and carefully as possible: offering is the process of giving voice to a perspective rather than imposing a position or view on another rhetor. When rhetors offer perspectives, they articulate a point of view not gain adherence to that view, but, rather to enhance understanding of it. (p. 436)

The above account articulates what happens in the works of fiction. Fictional writers do not convince their readers to change towards their views, rather they offer perspectives on certain issues and the readers will see it to themselves whether they want to change or not. In offering perspectives, one can use personal narratives as confirmed by Langellier (1989) that personal narratives "whether performed or written become mutually constructed by the participants according to shared knowledge and interaction rules". However they are usually told by the first person speaker even though the actual story may be experienced by someone else. In addition, personal narratives are constructed on realities that are cultural and personal relevant, but they are also meant to challenge cultural beliefs and innovation (Langellier, 1989 & McAdams, 2008).

#### 4.3. *External Conditions*

The environment in which the interaction is taking place is of the utmost importance. According to Craig and Muller (2008), if invitational rhetoric is to result in mutual understanding of perspectives, there must be a creation of atmosphere in which audience members' perspectives can also be offered. To have a positive environment three external conditions in the interaction between rhetors and audience members: safety, value and freedom have to be created. Craig and Muller (2008) explain that the condition of safety involves the creation of a feeling of security from danger for the audience. The audience members feel safe when their ideas and feelings are received with respect and care. Mihalcea (2014) adds that value is present when the rhetor recognizes the views of other people, although different from his/hers and that he/she takes a stand to understand other people's perspectives. Value is created through the principles of moral respect. According to Mihalcea (2014) when freedom is present, rhetors do not place restrictions on an interaction; they do not choose for the participants how to think. All opinions and views can be expressed as long as there is no violation of external conditions.

## 5. Discussion of the Findings

### 5.1. *Creating Good External Conditions*

Adichie has used the technique of dialogues as a method to apply invitational rhetoric. In invitational rhetoric, the environment where communication is taking place must be safe and free for the interlocutors to partake in the conversation

freely. Makinen (2016, p. 8) has urged that “the participants should be able to communicate without any fear of mental or physical abuse and maintain their integrity”. During the Christmas lunch at Abba, one can see that there is a difference in behaviours between Auntie Ifeoma and Eugene’s children. Amaka is free and breaks the silence by asking Kambili “do you always eat rice with a fork and knife and napkins?” (p. 97). Kambili is not used to this kind of conversations at the table, so she wishes Amaka to keep her voice low. Amaka shows external conditions of freedom to express her opinion and gets information of what she wants. According to Foss and Griffin (1995) the objective of invitational rhetoric is the mutual understanding between the participants, and it can be reached when all of them know that there are no restrictions to communication as long as they are going to do it without violating anyone’s value, freedom and safety. Amaka has the freedom of bringing any subject on the table because she cannot see any restriction that can avoid her freedom to speak out. She comments on the juice that Eugene’s factory makes. “It’s a little too sweet. It would be nicer if you reduced the sugar in it. Amaka’s tone was as polite and normal as everyday conversation with an older person” (p. 98). Amaka’s comments are according to how she feels about the juice, but not to please people around her. Amaka also demonstrates the sense of safety around her because the tone of her voice does not show any kind of intimidation or fear. The environment she is in is safe for her to be polite and to have a normal expression. In addition, Auntie Ifeoma offers a suggestion that Kambili and Jaja visit Nsukka. Auntie Ifeoma accords them safety of expression by inviting Kambili and Jaja into their home space. “I’m sure they will like to see Nsukka. Jaja and Kambili, won’t you?” (p. 97). Auntie Ifeoma wants to ensure that she does not impose her decisions on them, but have their opinions and freedom of choice.

The external conditions of value are demonstrated when Amaka poses the question to Eugene. “Did you hear about Aokpe, Uncle Eugene? It is a tiny village in Benue. The Blessed Virgin is appearing there” (p. 99). Amaka speaks to Eugene without fear not minding that he is the most feared person in his family. She displays her immanent value that she can have her contribution heard and minimizes the distance between her and Eugene. Eugene is respectful to Amaka’s contribution by affirming, “Yes, I heard about it” (p. 99). By affirming Eugene shows that he values Amaka’s question. Bone et al. (2008) agree that value is manifested by appreciating the audience by listening to them and ensure them that their opinions and ideas are valued. When you value the participants in the conversation it invites more perspectives to be offered because people are at ease. Auntie Ifeoma suggests that Kambili and Jaja join them on the pilgrimage to Aokpe where she is supposed to take her children.

Well, the church has not verified the authenticity of the apparitions, Papa said.

You know we will all be dead before the church officially speaks about Aokpe, Auntie Ifeoma said.

Even if the church says it is not authentic, what matters is why we go, and it is from faith.

When do you plan to go?

Sometimes in January, before the children resume school.

Okay, I will call you when we get back to Enugu to arrange for Jaja and Kambili to go for a day or two. (p. 99)

This illustrates that Papa and Auntie Ifeoma share the same value in understanding the authenticity of the appearance of the Blessed Virgin. They all know that the church does not verify the authenticity of the appearance. Despite Eugene’s negative view of that, Auntie Ifeoma emphasizes the issue of which Papa is pleased with. Papa has shown the same value with Auntie Ifeoma by affirming with her on the issue of faith. Safety, value and freedom can enable other interlocutors to say something further for better understanding. They are engaging in invitational rhetoric because Eugene appears to understand the ideology as Amaka and Auntie Ifeoma, and in this way domination is avoided. Adichie is using Amaka and Auntie Ifeoma to discourage patriarchal conversations that Eugene is used to when conversing with his family members. It is however important in invitational rhetoric to understand the perspectives of other interlocutors even if they are different from yours. Everybody in the conversation needs to be valued by being appreciating and acknowledging their views. In the presence of Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka there is no intimidation or forceful acceptance because they choose to do away with the credence that men in their society have the authority to decide, rather they do what is comfortable for them as women. Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka show that there are women who do not get intimidated by the presence of men who are deemed powerful in society; wherever they are, they are ready to resist male dominance.

## 5.2. Feminist Principles

In invitational rhetoric, conversers offer their views when they are at ease, in other words when their external conditions of freedom, value and safety are created. If the audience is at ease, they are at liberty to be involved in the conversation and to offer their own perspectives. It is important to note that the rhetor is not intending to change the audience but to offer or give his/her standpoint. The audience will change willingly and if they do not choose to adopt the rhetor’s standpoint, it is up to them as supported by Lozano’s (2013) argument that the suggested goal of invitational rhetoric is not to persuade, that change can only occur to the individual involved in the dialogue. Therefore, it is creditable that invitational rhetoric embraces the feminist principles of equality, immanent value and self-determination. Adichie has used the character of Father Amadi to express to the readers that not all rhetors ignore others’ perspectives because they are deemed inferior. When Kambili and Jaja are meeting Father Amadi for the first time, Kambili’s cousins are free at responding to what Father Amadi asks them. Father Amadi has tried to include them in the conversation by asking them questions. The questions are directed to both Kambili and Jaja because they are in plural ‘you’ ‘unu’ rather than singular ‘gi’. “He asked where we went to school, what subjects we liked, if we played any sports” (p. 136). Father Amadi is putting Kambili and Jaja at ease so that they

are in the safe and free environment to be able to participate in the conversation and also recognising their immanent value that they are important part of the conversation. Father Amadi believes in equality for all, he refuses to be dominant in the dialogue because everybody around him has something valuable to contribute. Lozano (2013) remarks:

The function of alternative rhetoric was to open conversation by equalizing the value of those participating in the dialogue, which in turn alleviated any bias towards a dominant viewpoint. Domination was only successful when there was submissive counterpart; therefore, equalizing the situation compromised this power-over approach. (p. 34)

The above quotation concurs with Father Amadi's approach of engaging everyone around him in the interaction. "When he asked which church, we went to in Enugu, Jaja told him" (p. 136). This question propels Kambili to offer a perspective through a personal narrative where she describes what she remembers and what Papa said about Father Amadi during his visit in Enugu.

I remembered then, the young visiting priest who had broken into the song in the middle of his sermon, whom Papa had said we had to pray for because people like him were trouble for the church. There had been many other visiting priests through the months, I just knew. And I remembered the song he had sung. (p. 136)

The presentation of Kambili has offered an outside perspective to the readers to know that it is not the first time she is seeing him. The readers are also learning more about Father Amadi and how Papa feels about his way of preaching. Kambili is here showing her father's hateful thinking of referring to Father Amadi as some trouble to the church, indicating that Eugene thinks that he is better than other Christians.

Furthermore, as indicated earlier that if the external conditions of value, safety and freedom are created, it is more like a motivation for more perspectives to be offered from the participants. The mention of the name of the church by Jaja brings in Auntie Ifeoma into the conversation to tell the audience that her brother, Eugene, finances the church almost alone. "My brother, Eugene, almost single-handedly finances that church" (p. 136). She is at the same time giving hegemonic power to her brother; that he is almost the only one who finances the church and at the same time, letting the audience know who her brother is. Father Amadi continues the conversation; "I was reading somewhere that Amnesty World is giving your brother an award" (p. 137). Father Amadi shares what he knows about Eugene; extending their knowledge because they (Amaka and Auntie Ifeoma) confess that they do not know about the award. Amaka shows an expression of surprise, "An award?" (p. 137). This interaction discounts Condit's (1997) criticism of invitational rhetoric that it is causing gender division (dichotomy feminism). In the above account, both genders are involved in the communication and interacted without any sign of provocation. The environment is made conducive for everyone to participate in the conversation and each perspective is acknowledged for everybody to feel valued.

In addition, Father Amadi's conversations display the presence of feminist perspectives. Father Amadi passes by Auntie Ifeoma's house after playing football at the stadium and Obiora asks him, "Why didn't you tell me you would be playing today?" (p. 148). Obiora shows self-determination because he can choose to play; it is his own decision to be part of the team. "I am sorry I forgot to, but I will pick you up and Jaja next weekend so we can play. Perhaps Kambili will play with us also" (p. 148). Father Amadi does not discriminate boys and girls according to the sport codes; he invited Kambili for the football game too. He trusts everybody can play soccer, which is the sign of equality. Father Amadi chooses not to impose his decision on Kambili thus he uses the word 'perhaps' to display lack of uncertainty. Kambili can make her own decision whether she wants to join them or not. Father Amadi includes Amaka in football playing too, "Amaka used to play with us when I first came here, but now she spends her time listening to African music and dreaming unrealistic dreams" (p. 148). Father Amadi respects what Amaka has chosen to do with her life. Amaka demonstrates self-determination as she has selected how she wants to spend her time. From this observation, Adichie glorifies Father Amadi by appreciating the people who are marginalised like Kambili and Jaja. Kambili and Jaja are not used to this kind of conversations, but in this case Father Amadi puts them into the context they are able to share their views. Therefore, the conversation shows the importance of valuing others self-determination, immanent value and equality.

The sharing of responsibilities in Auntie Ifeoma's house also demonstrates the feminist principles. They share the house chores amongst themselves equally.

The flat always sparkled \_ Amaka scrubbed the floors with a stiff brush, Obiora did the sweeping, Chima plumped up the cushions on the chairs. Everybody took turns washing the plates. Auntie Ifeoma included Jaja and me in the plate-washing schedule, and after I washed the garri-encrusted lunch plates, Amaka picked them off the tray where I had placed them to dry and soak them in water. (p. 140)

This shows the family that is cooperative to attain some goals. They each perform their functions in the family; they are grounded in the principles of equality and immanent value. Despite their genders, they take part in the same household chores, for example, they take turns in washing the plates. Work is not assigned according to their gender per se; they contribute equally. This in fact shows that everyone's contribution is valued and respected in the family. Auntie Ifeoma is bringing up children who are gender-sensitive by seeing no boundaries of doing house chores. Chesaina (2015) advises African mothers to strive to bring up children who are gender-sensitive, we want the society where our boys or young men appreciate the opposite sex and do not repeat the mistakes of their fathers. Chesaina continues to say we want a culture whereby our girls grow up knowing who they are, knowing their potential, refusing the negative images about themselves and to grow up as confident women with clear and positive identity.

## 6. Conclusion

The conversations discussed above portray the presence of invitational rhetoric. Amaka shows external condition of freedom when she engages people at the table by asking them question to get an understanding of Eugene's family issues. Amaka's feeling of safety is shown in her voice as it sounds normal without any portrayal of fear. Aunty Ifeoma gives freedom of choice to Jaja and Kambili to choose whether they want to spend some time with her family. Aunty Ifeoma does not want to impose her decision on them, but they are free to choose what they want. Interlocutors show that they value each others by answering questions and acknowledging each others comments. The conversations make use of equal involvement of to discourage patriarchal (dominant) conversations that give men the privilege to dominate women. Father Amadi promotes invitational rhetoric by respecting each person's perspective which in return recognizes the feminist principles of equality, immanent value and self-determination. The same thing happens in Aunty Ifeoma's house where everyone equally partakes in household chores.

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