“A Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men”

A feminist reading of Adichie’s fiction

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1

2. Nigerian literature in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries .................................................. 3
   2.1. The generational approach .................................................................................................................. 3
   2.2. First generation Nigerian literature ................................................................................................. 4
   2.3. Second generation Nigerian literature ............................................................................................. 5
   2.4. Third generation Nigerian literature ................................................................................................. 6

3. Towards “a world of happier men and happier women”: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s feminism ................................................. 10

4. Dismantling the patriarch: Adichie’s \textit{Purple Hibiscus} ............................................................................ 21
   4.1. The Catholic patriarch of \textit{Purple Hibiscus} .................................................................................. 23
   4.2. Feminist criticism from within ......................................................................................................... 28
   4.3. Gender roles and relations in Igbo culture ......................................................................................... 29
   4.4. Kambili’s incomplete hermeneutic process ...................................................................................... 35
   4.5. Positive representation of a feminist ............................................................................................... 47
   4.6. Cultural hermeneutics as a feminist tool ......................................................................................... 50

5. Female resistance against sexism and oppressive marriages: Selected short stories by Adichie ........................................................................................................................................................................... 52
   5.1. “Jumping Monkey Hill” .................................................................................................................... 53
   5.2. “Imitation” ........................................................................................................................................ 57
   5.3. “The Arrangers of Marriage” ........................................................................................................... 60

6. Becoming ‘a Happy African Feminist’: Adichie’s \textit{Americanah} .......................................................................... 67
   6.1. Gender roles ...................................................................................................................................... 68
   6.2. Power dynamics in heterosexual relationships ............................................................................... 71
   6.3. Attitudes towards marriage .............................................................................................................. 74
   6.4. Views on women’s bodies and sexuality .......................................................................................... 76
   6.5. Sexual harassment ............................................................................................................................ 79
   6.6. Black women’s hair ........................................................................................................................... 79
6.7. Preference of light skin ................................................................. 83
6.8. Representation of black beauty ...................................................... 84
6.9. Representation of feminist characters .............................................. 85

7. Conclusion ....................................................................................... 87
8. List of abbreviations ................................................................. 88
9. Bibliography .................................................................................. 89
1. INTRODUCTION

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity” (TED 2009).

Literature has the fascinating power of opening our minds to the unknown and provoking us to reimagine the familiar. Literature can inspire us to feel respect, admiration and empathy, but also disdain and aversion, for the characters represented in stories. In my thesis, I argue that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie uses literature as a means of feminist empowerment by making experiences of black Nigerian women accessible to an international audience.

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s feminism, as outlined in her non-fiction, is expressed in her novels and short stories. In this thesis, I will explore the ways in which Adichie uses her fiction to raise awareness of feminist issues, express feminist critique and demonstrate female emancipation. The texts selected for this purpose are the novels Purple Hibiscus (2003) and Americanah (2013), and the short stories “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2009), “Imitation” (2009) and “The Arrangers of Marriage” (2009).

In order to provide a larger context for Adichie’s fiction, the first chapter outlines 20th and 21st century Nigerian literature. Born and raised in Nigeria, Adichie’s fiction meets Griswold’s criteria for being considered part of Nigerian literature (cf. Griswold 2000: 22). The first chapter introduces ‘Nigeria’ as an analytic category, and the generational approach as a way of describing Nigerian literary history from the 20th century onwards. Subsequently, the three generations of Nigerian literature and its characteristics will be discussed, with a special focus on the third generation, which Adichie is considered part of (cf. e.g. Nwakanma 2008: 4, Adesanmi and Dunton 2005). Recent research has paid particular attention to Nigerian women writers (cf. Hewett 2005, Bryce 2008), of whom Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most renowned representatives.

Adichie’s approach to feminism and feminist critique constitute the focus of the second chapter of the present thesis, since these aspects serve as the framework which the analysis of Adichie’s fiction is based on. Adichie might be one of the most widely-known advocates of feminism due to her famous speech “We Should All Be Feminists” (2012), which was published as an essay in 2014, and her second feminist non-fiction Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions (2017). Adichie fully embraces the term ‘feminist’ (cf. WSABF). Her approach to feminism is characterized by its use of everyday occurrences instead of feminist jargon (cf. DJ 27, 28). Adichie’s feminist critique includes
negative stereotypes about feminist, gender roles and expectations, sexism manifested in language, and attitudes towards marriage, motherhood, women’s bodies and sexuality that foster gender inequality.

The analytical part of this thesis opens with a chapter on Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*. My discussion of Adichie’s debut novel will illustrate how the author uses her fictional characters to express feminist critique, focusing on the incomplete transformation of the first-person narrator Kambili. This chapter also investigates how *Purple Hibiscus* is reflective of Adichie’s feminism, and, building on Wallace’s (2012) analysis of the novel, how Adichie employs cultural hermeneutics as a feminist tool.

The next analytical chapter examines how selected short stories by Adichie engage with sexual harassment and power imbalance within marriages. My analysis of “Jumping Monkey Hill” will show in which ways Adichie narrativizes the intricacies of sexual harassment and the protagonist’s path to making her voice audible. The discussions of “Imitation” and “The Arrangers of Marriage” will illustrate how the stories are reflective of Adichie’s feminist critique of marriage. This chapter tries to show that the three selected stories most distinctly portray female resilience and resistance.

In the final analytical chapter, which focuses on Adichie’s *Americanah*, I will investigate the ways in which Adichie presents feminist critique. This chapter tries to demonstrate that feminist critique is expressed rather explicitly through the focalizers, Ifemelu and Obinze. My analysis will also illustrate that Adichie contrasts oppressive attitudes towards female bodies and sexuality with positive ones, which also includes the celebration of black female beauty as a contrast to the marginalisation of black women that is informed by racism and sexism. This chapter as a whole tries to show in how far Ifemelu and Obinze could be regarded as feminists.
2. NIGERIAN LITERATURE IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

The works of fiction by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are inseparably linked to Nigeria. Adichie’s novels and short stories mostly feature Nigerians as protagonists and many of her works are set in Nigeria. Adichie was born in Nigeria in 1970, grew up there, and now lives in the United States and Nigeria (cf. WSABF). Therefore, Adichie’s fiction can be described as being part of Nigerian literature. This chapter provides an overview of Nigerian literature in the 20th and 21st centuries with a particular focus on the novel, thus serving as a broad context for the analysis of Adichie’s fiction in the analytical part of this thesis.

‘Nigeria’ and ‘Nigerian’ are terms which are less straightforward than they seem to be at first. Taking into account the history of the territory which is present-day Nigeria and the fact that more than 250 ethnic groups (400 according to some accounts) with distinct languages live in Nigeria, the meaning of being Nigerian has always been unclear (cf. Griswold 2000: 6-10). Despite this conceptual ambiguity, Wendy Griswold argues for using the nation as essential analytic category in her discussion of the Nigerian novel (cf. Griswold 2000: 12). The novel in Nigeria is less than a decade older than the nation Nigeria, which gained independence in 1960, and is therefore linked to the development of the nation (cf. Griswold 2000: 12). Secondly, the processes of publishing and distributing novels in Africa are in general confined within an individual country without considerable exchanges between nations (cf. Griswold 2000: 12). Finally, Griswold states that Nigerian writers, publishers, editors and readers “think in terms of the ‘Nigerian novel’” (Griswold 2000: 12). Griswold’s criterion for what constitutes a ‘Nigerian’ novel is the writer’s place of birth or permanent residency in Nigeria (cf. Griswold 2000: 22), which is a criterion that applies to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The vast majority of Nigerian novels and books in general are written in English, which makes them accessible to Nigerians of different ethnicities (cf. Griswold 2000: 31-32). Griswold concludes that “only novels written in English can truly be called Nigerian novels” (Griswold 2000: 32; original emphasis).

2.1. The generational approach

Nigerian literature from the beginning of the 20th century onwards is usually described in terms of three generations (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005, Adesanmi and Dunton 2008, Griswold 2000, Griswold 2006, Hewett 2005). Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton outline the central characteristics of the generational approach in the following way:
The writers / artists and intellectuals who are categorized as belonging to a particular generation either fall within a loosely determined age bracket, or are published within a loosely defined timeframe on the one hand, and their themes / tropes are shaped by identifiable events or experiences commonly shared. (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 13)

In the case of Africa, colonialism is regarded as the main point of reference (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 14). African authors who are considered as being part of the first or second generation were mainly born during colonialism in the first half of the 19th century (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 14). While second generation writers were also born during colonial times, they were influenced by “independence and its aftermath of disillusionment and stasis” (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 14). According to a similar approach focusing on the date of publication of the writers’ works, first generation literature appeared prior to and shortly after independence, whereas second generation literature was available after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) (cf. Hewett 2005: 76). Third generation writers were in general born after 1960, when Nigeria (amongst other African nations) became politically independent from colonial powers, and published their works from the mid-eighties onwards (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 14). Although Adesanmi and Dunton acknowledge “thematic fluidity” and “temporal overlaps” as weaknesses of the generational model, they still consider it to be a suitable approach to comprehending literary development from a synchronic and diachronic perspective (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 13). It should be noted that the generational approach considers Nigerian literature from the beginning of the 20th century onwards. As a number of critics emphasize, writing was not brought to the African continent or Nigeria in particular by European missionaries, but existed well before colonialism (cf. for example Hale 2006, Griswold 2000: 30-31).

2.2. First generation Nigerian literature

Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, T. M. Aluko, Elechi Amadi and Flora Nwapa are referred to as first generation writers (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 14, 15, Griswold 2000). Griswold refers to this generation as “pioneers” (Griswold 2000: 47). The writers of the first generation were born during colonialism in the 1930s or earlier; thus they fulfil the criterion of a certain temporal frame for constituting a generation (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 13). In the focus of first generation writing were for example tradition, rural places and rituals (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 15). Amos Tutuola’s The Palm-Wine Drinkard (1952) is widely considered to
be the first Nigerian novel (cf. Griswold 2000: 30). The “by far best-known, most widely read, and the most frequently cited Nigerian novel” (Griswold 2000: 129-130) is Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which can thus be considered as one of the most representative examples of first generation Nigerian fiction. *Things Fall Apart* recounts the life, rituals and traditions in an Igbo village and its encounter with colonizers and their oppressive practices by focusing on Okonkwo, the most prestigious villager. *Things Fall Apart* can be regarded as a “village novel” (Griswold 2000: 124) and indeed depicts traditions in a rural setting, as is described as characteristic of first generation fiction (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 15). Cyprian Ekwensi’s *People of the City* (1954), on the other hand, with its depiction of life in a contemporary city, established the genre of the “city novel” (Griswold 2000: 35).

2.3. Second generation Nigerian literature

The end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 marked the emergence of second generation writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Festus Iyayi, Abubakar Gimba, Zaynab Alkali, Odia Ofeimun, Tunde Fatunde, Bode Sowande, Wale Okediran and Tanure Ojaide (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 7, 14, Hewett 2005: 76). The ensuing oil-boom era saw a significant rise in publication numbers, with 50 novels appearing in 1982 (cf. Griswold 2000: 36). Griswold refers to this generation of writers as “optimistic oil boom generation,” who shared the positive outlook of the 1970s and regarded themselves as “‘New Nigerians,’ modern men and women who had moved beyond the restrictions of tribe, the educational disadvantages, and the enforced poverty of the colonial era” (Griswold 2006: 526). In his article “The Alternative Tradition: a Survey of Nigerian Literature in English since the Civil War” written in 1980, writer Femi Osofisan gives similar reasons for the rise in literary production. Osofisan attributes this increase to the growth of the education system, “the inspiring success of our pioneer writers of the first generation,” expectations of financial gain, increasing wealth and more free time (Osofisan 1986: 162). Osofisan criticizes the literature of the 1970s for “its almost unrelieved lack of distinction,” and blames the influence of popular (American) literature for a perceived decrease in quality (Osofisan 1986: 163). Osofisan describes a noticeable break from the first generation, as writers of the new generation distance themselves from the attitudes of the preceding generation and aim at a broad public audience (cf. Osofisan 1986: 164). The focus of second generation writers lies on “experiences taken directly from mundane, quotidian life and from the stress of living in a

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1 Both the classification of *The Palm-Wine Drinker* as a novel and its being the first Nigerian novel is debated (cf. Griswold 2000: 30).
2 This fear of displaying stereotypically ‘female’ weakness is carried to the extreme in the character of
difficult neo-capitalist economy” (Osofisan 1986: 165). Osofisan identifies Civil War literature, popular literature intended to entertain, and the ‘alternative tradition’ as the three main areas of literature in the 1970s (cf. Osofisan 1986: 166-172). Osofisan used the term ‘alternative tradition’ to describe literature which aspires “to bring about a revolutionary change into the established social system”, discarding the term ‘socialist literature’ in order to avoid misunderstandings (Osofisan 1986: 170-171). The alternative tradition includes the writers Kole Omotoso, Buchi Emecheta, Odia Ofeimun and Femi Osofisan (cf. Osofisan 1986: 170-172). The end of the oil boom and the recession in the 1980s lead to a decrease in publishing numbers and caused foreign publishers to leave Nigeria (cf. Griswold 2000: 37).

2.4. Third generation Nigerian literature

Writers of the third generation made their literary debut in the mid-eighties or later (cf. Griswold 2000: 47-48, Dunton and Adesanmi 2005: 14). It includes writers such as Ben Okri, Okey Ndibe, Akachi Ezeigbo, Biyi Bandele, Sefi Atta, Helon Habila, Chika Unigwe, Akin Adesokan, Ike Oguine, Nduka Otiono, Chris Abani, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Helen Oyeyemi (cf. Nwakanma 2008: 4). Griswold calls the writers of the third generation “strugglers” (Griswold 2000: 48) and contrasts the hopes of the second generation with the “disillusion” of the next (Griswold 2006: 527). While poetry was prevailing from 1985 to 1995, the novel has since then become the predominant genre (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 8). In the 1990s Biyi Bandele’s early novels were the first ones by a member of the third generation to enter the academic canon in several countries (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 10). The works of fiction of Ike Oguine, Okey Ndibe and Maik Nwosu also drew attention to the novel (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 10). Still one of the most widely-known Nigerian writers is Ben Okri with his use of magical realism. Okri was awarded the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1991 for his novel The Famished Road (1991). A “revival of the Nigerian novel” was brought about by the instant success of the novelists Helon Habila, Chris Abani and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 10-11).

Features of third generation literature which have been characterized by scholars include transnationality, transculturality and the narrativization of the Nigerian diaspora (cf. Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 16, Eze 2005, Feldner 2019), the re-narrativization of the Nigerian Civil War (cf. Hawley 2008), the child or youth figure (cf. Hron 2008) and the rise of women writers (cf. Hewett 2005, Bryce 2008). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie employs all of these elements in her fiction, interweaving them to multidimensional narratives.

In an effort to characterize third generation writing, Adesanmi and Dunton identify the predominance of urban settings and the “transnational idiom,” which is the result of “the
tropes of nomadism, exile, displacement, and deracination which have become the emblematic features of global postmodernity and postcoloniality, the condition of an increasing number of Nigeria’s third generation writers” (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005: 16). The most publicly present and acclaimed writers of the third generation live in Euro-America and have contributed to “a borderless, global, textual topography” (Adesanmi and Dunton 2008: ix). Chielozona Eze describes the “condition of transculturality” as a feature of the third generation (Eze 2008: 100). Transculturality entails “the existence of interstices, or the state of endless crossing of boundaries” (Eze 2008: 100). Using the example of Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel*, Eze contrasts Habila’s refusal of nostalgia and “monolithic, immutable tropes of identity” with the attitudes of writers of the previous generation (Eze 2008: 101). The boundaries which are crossed in both *Waiting for an Angel* and Chris Abani’s *Graceland* are determined by ethnicity (cf. Eze 2008: 101-108). Eze notes “a shift from the postcolonial concern of blame to the inner, transcultural one within the African socio-political setup”, referring to writers such as Habila, Abani and Adichie (Eze 2008: 109). Instead of “writ[ing] back” to the Empire in the classic fashion of postcolonial textualities” Habila and Abani “focus on Nigeria as a cultural, transnational and hybridized space with the goal of enhancing human flourishing there” (Eze 2008: 110).

A more global perspective is adopted by Maximilian Feldner in his survey of ‘Nigerian diaspora literature,’ a term “which combines the aspect of this literature’s Nigerianness and the tendency towards migratory, diasporic, or cosmopolitan transnationalism” (Feldner 2019: 4). Nigerian diaspora literature is in a constant process of negotiation and positioning along the spectrum between “transnational / transcultural hybridity and national identity” and primarily depicts transmigratory movement (Feldner 2019: 2). Among the texts of Nigerian diaspora literature are Helen Oyeyemi’s *The Icarus Girl*, Sefi Atta’s *A Bit of Difference* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (cf. Feldner 2019).

Some third generation novels are based on a re-narrativisation of the Nigerian Civil War. Preceded by coups, counter-coups and mob violence between different ethnic groups, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as Biafran War, was fought between the state of Biafra, which seceded from Nigeria, and federal forces (cf. Griswold 2000: xviii-xix, Hawley 2008: 16). While members of earlier generations who witnessed the war wrote about it “scathingly and with immediacy, naming names and particular places as if the writers were reporters seeking to draw the world’s attention to an ongoing injustice” (Hawley 2008: 17), writers of the third generation produced novels in which the Biafran war with its suffering is
used for the exploration of various other themes (cf. Hawley 2008). John C. Hawley argues that in Dulue Mbachu’s *War Games* (2005), narrated from a child’s point of view, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) the focus is on the principal characters in the novels, “rather than on the politics and strategies that shaped the war” (Hawley 2008: 20). Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), on the other hand, follows the brutal story of its focalizer, a child soldier. Hawley observes that *Beasts of No Nation* is a “war novel that transcends the Biafran War” as it more generally refers to conflicts in countries in which “children are, or recently have been, used as soldiers” (Hawley 2008: 22). Hawley’s comparison of the Nigerian Civil War’s role in the three novels shows a versatile image of the re-narrativizations. According to Hawley, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a national novel which grasps “the spirit of the Nigerian people” and recreates it in the fates of the novel’s characters, “but at the same time refus[es] to be overtaken by the events of the war to the degree that some earlier novels may have been” (Hawley 2008: 23). Hawley considers *War Games* with its “committed anger” to be closer to the works of the earlier generation (cf. Hawley 2008: 23), while *Beasts of No Nation* has nearly left behind the Biafran war (cf. Hawley 2008: 24).

Nigerian third generation literature frequently revolves around a child or youth character, for example in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, Oyeyemi’s *The Icarus Girl* and Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (cf. Hron 2008: 27). While the figure of the child also features in traditional culture and literature, Madelaine Hron argues that a young protagonist is “a particularly apt vehicle for the third-generation of Nigerian authors [...] to convey their perspective on Nigerian culture, in the context of multiculturalism, globalization, and even international human rights, to Western readers” (Hron 2008: 28). The development of the child’s sociocultural identity is interlaced with consequences of postcolonialism and globalization which are concretized as “repression, violence or exploitation” (Hron 2008: 29). Since the intended audience of third generation novels includes to a significant proportion Western readers, Hron observes that a child focalizer might facilitate Western readers the access to the complex culture and politics in Nigeria (cf. Hron 2008: 29). Hron characterizes childhood as “a space of hybridity, possibility and, most importantly, resistance” (Hron 2008: 29). The child figure can be regarded as a metaphor for third generation writers, as well as for Nigeria itself: “It is in this resistant space of childhood that this new generation of Nigerian writers explores its own hybrid position in contemporary postcolonial society” (Hron 2008: 30). Similar to the child figure finding his / her sociocultural identity in a postcolonial, Western-dominated and globalized environment, “Nigeria finds itself having to define itself
anew in the global world order” (Hron 2008: 30). The focus of third generation novels featuring a child as protagonist might be on Nigeria (*Purple Hibiscus*), immigration (*The Icarus Girl*) or on a more global issue (*Beasts of No Nation*); however, all of these novels navigate the hybridity of childhood, questions of language, different societies, and the potential for change and resistance to established social systems (cf. Hron 2008: 43).

Although the visibility of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta among other Nigerian women writers might suggest otherwise, women novelists have been underrepresented throughout the 20th century, with only one in seven novelists in Nigeria being women (cf. Griswold 2000: 41). Feminist critics have drawn attention to the omission of women writers from the canon of Nigerian literature (cf. Hewett 2005: 77). Heather Hewett (2005) and Jane Bryce (2008) are among the critics who have paid critical attention to Nigerian women’s writing. While acknowledging the importance of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as the Nigerian ur-text, Hewett emphasizes that it is “challenge[d]” and re-imagined by Adichie (Hewett 2005: 77-79). Similarly, Bryce states that women writers’ homage to *Things Fall Apart* “may [...] be partly ironic since it points to so many absences” (Bryce 2008: 56).

Hewett applies the phrase ‘aesthetics of pain’ to the writings of many women of the third generation, “who have explored women’s physical experiences in their poetry and fiction” (Hewett 2005: 81). Amongst these women writers is Adichie, who, in her fiction explores “the embodied experiences of female characters in Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora,” female sexuality in heterosexual relationships and women’s situation in marriages (Hewett 2005: 81). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie also broaches the issue of physical abuse within the family (cf. Hewett 2005: 81). Bryce draws the following conclusion from her survey of fiction written by Nigerian women in the 21st century:

We learn from them that identity is far from being a given, that older identities are more of a hindrance than a help in negotiating a postcolonial reality. That women’s determination to negotiate this reality through fiction is unstoppable, and that they do so in full recognition of the fictions which have preceded them and have, so far, defined the terrain on which articulation can take place. (Bryce 2008: 64)
3. TOWARDS “A WORLD OF HAPPIER MEN AND HAPPIER WOMEN”: CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S FEMINISM

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie can be considered one of the most widely-known contemporary feminists, having reached several million people with her TED talk “We Should All Be Feminists” from December 2012. Adichie’s speech gained an even larger audience when singer Beyoncé included parts of it in her song “Flawless”. Adichie’s feminist speech was turned into an essay, which was published in 2014. In 2017, Adichie published another feminist non-fiction work in epistolary form, Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions, in which she resumes her arguments from We Should All Be Feminists and turns them into fifteen suggestions on how to raise a daughter in a feminist way.

In the preface to her pamphlet We Should All Be Feminists, Adichie remarks on the limiting force of stereotypes evoked by the term ‘feminist’ and the concept of feminism, and her determination to speak about feminism because of her passion for it, despite her expectation that it might be unpopular (cf. WSABF: 3-4). Adichie addresses the negative stereotypes and connotations attached to the word ‘feminist’ by relating instances in which it was applied by way of an insult or when she was advised to not refer to herself as a feminist (cf. WSABF: 8-11). The very first time Adichie encountered the term ‘feminist’ was as a teenager in a heated argument when it was used against her in a pejorative way, implying radicalism (cf. WSABF: 8). The numerous negative stereotypes about feminists which Adichie was confronted with later in her life confirm that ‘feminist’ still carries negative connotations and is regarded as a defamatory term by many people. Feminists were described to Adichie as ‘unhappy’ because of their inability to find husbands (cf. WSABF: 8), feminism was termed “un-African” and a result of reading Western literature (WSABF: 10), and feminists were suspected of hating men (cf. WSABF: 10). In response to these stereotypes, Adichie resolved to (ironically) call herself “a Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men” (WSABF: 10). Adichie lists and refutes the following assumptions about a ‘feminist’: “you hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, you think women should always be in charge, you don’t wear make-up, you don’t shave, you’re always angry, you don’t have a sense of humour, you don’t use deodorant” (WSABF: 11).

For Adichie, “feminism is always contextual” (DI: 6). In Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions, Adichie introduces “two ‘Feminist Tools’” (DI: 6), the first of which is the premise “I matter. I matter equally” (DI: 6). The second tool is the question “Can I reverse X and get the same results?” (DI: 6), which can be applied to behaviour or character traits expected of women as compared to men.
The avoidance of feminist jargon and the use of personal everyday examples render Adichie’s approach to feminism easily accessible and her arguments comprehensible even to people unfamiliar with or critical of feminism. Adichie acknowledges that “[w]e feminists can sometimes be too jargony, and jargon can sometimes feel too abstract” (Di: 27). Although Adichie recommends avoiding terms such as ‘misogyny’ and ‘patriarchy’ specifically in conversations with children (cf. Di: 27), this is in general also true for Adichie’s non-fictional works about feminism. In debates between feminists and critics of feminism, these feminist buzzwords, instead of proving a (feminist) argument, lead to a deadlock, since the reality of misogyny and patriarchal societies is a fact for feminists, but a fiction to many critics of feminism. Adichie provides a simple tool for the identification of misogyny without using the term: “[I]f you criticize X in women but do not criticize X in men, then you do not have a problem with X, you have a problem with women” (Di: 27). Instead of generalising or universalising women’s experiences, Adichie personalises and exemplifies, stating that “[i]t is helpful [...] to use everyday examples” (Di: 28). She mentions a TV commercial of a woman clapping for her husband for cooking, which she saw in Lagos (cf. Di: 28). Adichie identifies the sexist nature of the commercial by criticizing that the woman’s praise is directed at the man’s act of cooking instead of the food, which is based on the assumption that “cooking is an inherently female act” (Di: 28). With regard to the example of a mechanic who was referred to as ‘lady mechanic’ in a newspaper in Lagos, Adichie rejects this description, stating clearly that the woman should be called a mechanic (cf. Di: 28). Adichie provides the example of men who try to empathise with female victims of rape by imagining them as relatives, saying for example “if it were my daughter or wife or sister” (Di: 29), while the same thought process is not necessary for empathy with male crime victims (cf. Di: 29). Another everyday example observed by Adichie is a U.S. politician insisting on ‘revering’ and ‘championing’ women (cf. Di: 29). Adichie criticizes the “patronizing undertone” of this demand (Di: 29), which is reminiscent of chivalry based on the assumption of women’s weakness (cf. Di: 30).

Adichie’s avoidance of generalising statements about women’s experiences and her use of personal experiences as illustrative examples, while placing them in the context of a specific location (e.g. Lagos, U.S.) and social class, render her writings a counter-discourse to feminist writing about the ‘Third World Woman’ as criticized by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (cf. Mohanty 2003: 49-70). Mohanty’s critique focuses on (primarily Western) feminist texts which consider women as a homogenous group, disregarding effects of class, ethnicity or race (cf. Mohanty 2003: 52). Mohanty also criticizes “the uncritical way [in which] ‘proof’ of
universality and cross-cultural validity are provided,” resulting in the construction of an “‘average third-world woman’” (Mohanty 2003: 53). Instead of claiming to speak, for instance, for a working-class Nigerian woman, Adichie’s feminism is clearly based on her own experience as a famous Nigerian diasporic writer and academic.

Feminist theory is not explicitly part of Adichie’s feminism. In an interview, Adichie observed that she feels detached from and cannot identify with the various waves of feminism (cf. CNN 2018). It was not feminist reading that made her become a feminist, but personal experience in the context of the society in which she grew up:

> I became a feminist because I grew up in Nigeria and observed the world. And just saw what felt to me like an injustice that made no sense. Why were women judged more harshly? Why were all the positions of real power occupied by men? Why were the cultural practices that had prestige somehow only for men? (CNN 2018)

In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie criticizes the current functioning of gender as “a grave injustice” (*WSABF*: 21) and notes that gender is prescriptive rather than “recognizing how we are” (*WSABF*: 34). Although the latter statement might imply Adichie’s preference of a descriptive approach to gender, it seems that she refuses gender roles in general: “Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true selves, if we didn’t have the weight of gender expectations” (*WSABF*: 34). In *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie explicitly discards the concept of gender roles as “absolute nonsense” (*DI*: 14). She mentions the “pink-blue binary” of children’s clothes and the toy section with primarily active toys for boys and passive ones for girls (*DI*: 16) as examples of enforcing gender roles in early stages of infancy. For Adichie, one of the main characteristics of gender roles is restriction: “If we don’t place the straitjacket of gender roles on young children, we give them space to reach their full potential” (*DI*: 17-18). Adichie suggests regarding girls as individuals instead of comparing them to an ideal image of a girl (cf. *DI*: 18). However, Adichie also acknowledges the internalisation of gender roles that might lead people to conform to them “even when they chafe against our true desires, our needs, our happiness” and that “[t]hey are very difficult to unlearn [...]” (*DI*: 19).

By using an example from her childhood, Adichie emphasizes the power of repetition with regard to assumptions about gender. She recounts a situation in primary school, when instead of her, who fulfilled the requirements and was eager to earn the special position, a male classmate became the class monitor (cf. *WSABF*: 11-12). To the teacher it was evident that being male was necessary for the position (cf. *WSABF*: 12). According to Adichie, it is the repetition of behaviour which results in the appearance that something is ‘normal’ or ‘natural’, be it that only boys are class monitors or that only men occupy leading positions in
companies (cf. *WSABF*: 13). Adichie regards gender roles and inequality as originating in society, i.e. as human constructs. This notion underlies Adichie’s observation in response to Nigerian waiters welcoming the man she has entered the restaurant with and disregarding her: “The waiters are products of a society that has taught them that men are more important than women [...]” (*WSABF*: 20). Adichie discards the idea that women could just refuse to conform to restricting gender roles as an oversimplification of the problem, as “[w]e internalize ideas from our socialization” (*WSABF*: 30). Adichie describes socialisation as an exaggeration of biological differences and a “self-fulfilling process,” providing the example of cooking (*WSABF*: 35). She poses the rhetorical question whether the reason for the fact that women nowadays tend to do the cooking is that “women are born with a cooking gene” or that “over the years they have been socialized to see cooking as their role” (*WSABF*: 35). Since Adichie considers humans as the creators of social norms, she has the hopeful view that “there is no social norm that cannot be changed” (*DI*: 51).

The prevalence of patriarchal structures is illustrated by the fact that men hold the majority of powerful or prestigious positions (cf. *WSABF*: 17). Adichie regards the gender disparity in terms of power from an evolutionary perspective. She argues that in earlier times physical strength was the crucial determinant for leadership, which put men, who are in general physically stronger than women, at an advantage (cf. *WSABF*: 18). In today’s world, the conditions have changed, as intelligence, knowledge, creativity and innovation have become crucial aspects of leadership (cf. *WSABF*: 18). Adichie notes, “We have evolved. But our ideas of gender have not evolved very much” (*WSABF*: 18).

Addressing one of the most stereotypically traditional roles of women, Adichie tells the implied reader of *Dear Ijeawele* to not “define [herself] solely by motherhood” (*DI*: 7-8), but to “[b]e a full person” (*DI*: 8). Adichie refuses to accept tradition as a justification for prescribing women how to raise their children (cf. *DI*: 8). She disproves that ‘traditional’ motherhood means staying at home by explaining that in Igbo culture (i.e. the culture which Adichie grew up with) women farmed and traded prior to British colonial rule (cf. *DI*: 8-9). Adichie criticizes praising women for their ability to “do it all”, which she considers as based on the assumption “that caregiving and domestic work are singularly female domains” (*DI*: 10); instead, they “should be gender-neutral” (*DI*: 11).

Adichie addresses the lack of awareness of sexism displayed by many men and women who have asked her to provide proof for its existence (cf. *DI*: 23). She refers to an assumption made by various critics of feminism by quoting one of her acquaintances’ opinion that “it is in fact women who are privileged” and in control “behind the scenes” (*DI*: 23, 24).
Adichie responds by asking for the reason why if a woman has power her power has to be veiled (cf. DI: 24). She identifies a double standard with regard to the perception of powerful men as opposed to powerful women. “Our world is full of men and women who do not like powerful women. We have been so conditioned to think of power as male that a powerful woman is an aberration” (DI: 24). Women in power are supposed to be humble, smiling, thankful and domestic, while men do not encounter similar expectations, which in turn “shows that our discomfort is not with power itself, but with women” (DI: 24). Adichie mentions the notion that ambition and success are positive traits of a woman only as long as they do not pose a ‘threat’ to the man, lest the woman’s financial success “emasculate[s]” her male partner (DI: 27-28).

Adichie rejects “the idea of marriage as a prize to women” that has to be earned with good cooking skills, for example, (DI: 15) and “marriage as an achievement” (DI: 30). As society raises only girls, and not boys, to aim for marriage, this difference translates to adult relationships which are characterized by imbalance, since marriage is not equally important to both partners (cf. DI: 30-31). Symbols of the significance of marriage for women are the title ‘Mrs’ and the wedding ring. In the context of Nigeria, Adichie criticizes the degree of society’s esteem for the title ‘Mrs’ as “disturbing”, mentioning the underlying implication that unmarried women have been unsuccessful (DI: 35). Similarly, a wedding ring seems to carry prestige for a woman and “make her seem worthy of respect” in the context of a Nigerian workplace, as is implied in Adichie’s example of an unmarried woman who wears a wedding ring on conferences (DI: 29-30).

According to Adichie, language reflects the gender roles within marriages: “The language of marriage is often a language of ownership, not a language of partnership” (WSABF: 30). Inequality within marriages is manifested when ‘respect’ describes the way a woman relates to a man, but not the other way around, when women are expected to compromise rather than men (cf. WSABF: 31), and when women’s sacrifices are greater than men’s (cf. WSABF: 31, DI: 31). Adichie identifies the mindset of what she calls “Feminism Lite” (DI: 20), which particularly applies to relationships between men and women and is presented as feminist, while reinforcing a power hierarchy in favour of men. Adichie strongly opposes Feminism Lite, which is “the idea of conditional female equality” (DI: 20) exemplified in comparisons of the man to the head whereas the woman is the neck, or the image of the man as driver while the woman is a passenger in the front (cf. DI: 20-21). According to Adichie, the underlying assumption of Feminism Lite is the inherent superiority of men, who “should be expected to ‘treat women well’” (DI: 21). Adichie also draws
attention to the problematic nature of the term ‘allow’ in heterosexual relationships, citing a British newspaper which observed that the husband of British Prime Minister Theresa May “[...] allowed his wife, Theresa, to shine” (*DI*: 21). For Adichie, the notion of ‘allowing’ is concerned with power imbalance and “should never be the language of an equal marriage” (*DI*: 22).

Adichie emphasizes the significance of language as “the repository of our prejudices, our beliefs, our assumptions” (*DI*: 26) also with regard to raising children. She suggests reflecting the use of language with children, giving the example of a woman who rejects the nickname ‘princess’ for her daughter, as the word denotes “a girl’s delicacy” and a prince who will come to her rescue (*DI*: 26).

Another troubling aspect with regard to gender is, according to Adichie, the idea of likeability (cf. *DI*: 36). A girl’s task “is not to make herself likeable, her job is to be her full self, a self that is honest and aware of the equal humanity of other people” (*DI*: 36). A disastrous result of the pressure put on girls and women to be likeable is that abusers take advantage of this attitude (cf. *DI*: 37). Anger, as opposed to likeability, is considered to be especially unsuitable for women, as it seems threatening (cf. *WSABF*: 21-22). Adichie supports this argument by using work place experiences of female American friends who were criticized for a leadership style that a male predecessor had received praise for, and who remained silent in response to unfair treatment (cf. *WSABF*: 22-23). Adichie relates these instances to the expectation of likeability as an integral part of a woman’s character (cf. *WSABF*: 23-24).

Adichie points out that “[i]n every culture in the world, female sexuality is about shame” (*DI*: 53), and the paradox that “[e]ven cultures that expect women to be sexy – like many in the West – still do not expect them to be sexual” (*DI*: 53). The shame attached to women’s sexuality is concerned with the control of women’s bodies by many cultures and religions (cf. *DI*: 54). This control is enforced in order to protect men, which Adichie regards as “deeply dehumanizing because it reduces women to mere props used to manage the appetites of men” (*DI*: 54). Adichie notes a gender disparity in terms of sexuality: “We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way boys are” (*WSABF*: 32). This observation is exemplified by the tendency to regard girls’ boyfriends with suspicion or disapproval, and to emphasize the significance of girls’ virginity (cf. *WSABF*: 32). Adichie regards shame as the salient feature of female sexuality, which is manifested in dress codes and rules of behaviour (cf. *WSABF*: 33). Due to these restrictions, it is implied to girls that “by being born female, they are already guilty of something” (*WSABF*: 33). As a consequence, these girls become
women who cannot express their desires and “silence themselves” (WSABF: 33). Adichie draws attention to the connection of girls’ and women’s clothing to morality, which she firmly rejects (cf. DI: 44). This association of short or revealing clothing with immorality implies an inherent guilt of the female body, thereby promoting shame, and can be considered a tool to exercise control over women’s bodies. Another way in which control is exerted particularly over black girls’ and women’s bodies is the definition of ‘neat’ hairstyles, which are, according to Adichie, “Too Tight and Scalp-Destroying and Headache-Infusing” (DI: 45).

Alluding to a misconception about feminists and their demands, Adichie states that “[f]eminism and femininity are not mutually exclusive” (DI: 43). She argues that women have begun to consider it necessary to provide excuses for conventionally ‘female’ interests such as fashion and makeup, while the same is not true for men and conventionally ‘male’ interests (cf. DI: 43). This double standard translates to a carefully planned physical appearance, which for a man, as opposed to a woman, is not associated with presumptions about “his intelligence, his ability, or his seriousness” (DI: 43-44). Adichie recalls her fear “that if [she] looked too feminine, [she] would not be taken seriously” as a teacher in graduate school (WSABF: 38). This association of femininity with the expectation of not being taken seriously is based on the idea of “men as the standard, as the norm” in terms of physical appearance (WSABF: 39). Adichie rejects this norm, stating that she decided to “no longer be apologetic for [her] femininity” and “want[s] to be respected in all [her] femaleness” (WSABF: 39).

In terms of romantic relationships, Adichie exclusively considers heterosexual relationships, acknowledging that she is best prepared to discuss heterosexual romance (cf. DI: 55). Girls and boys are conditioned to think differently about love: While girls are taught “that a large component of their ability to love is their ability to sacrifice their selves,” boys do not learn the same (DI: 56). As an alternative, Adichie suggests teaching girls to “also expect to be given” (DI: 56). Adichie regards her observation that women seem to value love more than men do as being caused by the conditioning of girls to aspire to marriage, which she considers as highly problematic (cf. DI: 57). Adichie moreover rejects the gender roles of the man as the only acceptable proposer of marriage and the provider in a relationship (cf. DI: 58-59).

Culture is an invalid justification for gender inequality for Adichie (cf. WSABF: 45). She emphasizes the changing and constructed nature of culture: “Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture” (WSABF: 46). Adichie stresses the role of culture in the identity formation of children, but at the same time advocates a selective and feminist
approach to culture. She advises her friend Ijeawele, the implied reader who is directly addressed in the text, to “teach her [daughter] to embrace the parts of Igbo culture that are beautiful and teach her to reject the parts that are not” (DI: 39). For example, Adichie refers to the appreciation of “community and consensus, and hard work” (DI: 39-40) and the beauty of the Igbo language and its proverbs as positive aspects of Igbo culture (cf. DI: 40), while she renounces sexist tendencies: “But Igbo culture also teaches that a woman cannot do certain things just because she’s a woman, and that is wrong” (DI: 40). Another aspect of identity formation Adichie considers as important for Ijeawele’s daughter is the visibility of “the enduring beauty and resilience of Africans and of black people” in a world with white role models in popular culture and the media, and negative conceptions about being black and African (DI: 40).

Adichie’s view on culture is reminiscent of the concept of cultural hermeneutics outlined by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in her book Introducing African Women's Theology (2001). Oduyoye describes biblical and cultural hermeneutics as tools used by African feminist theologians to analyse the Bible and culture in search of liberating aspects (cf. Oduyoye 2001: 11). The aim of one aspect of cultural hermeneutics, the ‘hermeneutics of liberation,’ is “to identify the positive aspects of culture and to promote them” (Oduyoye 2001: 12). Central characteristics of these “cultural elements that are life-affirming for women in Africa” are “women’s full humanity and participation in religion and society” (Oduyoye 2001: 13). Cultural hermeneutics moreover includes the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ concerned with critical analysis of culture (cf. Oduyoye 2001: 13-14), together with the ‘hermeneutics of commitment,’ which is concerned with African women’s resolution to foster “wholeness and enhancement of life in the community” (Oduyoye 2001: 14). Oduyoye remarks that cultural hermeneutics is not only employed by women theologians, but also by African women writers who foreground cultural aspects in need of reimagination (cf. Oduyoye 2001: 14), which seems to be true for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (cf. Wallace 2012).

Adichie’s feminism also includes awareness of diversity in terms of sexual orientation and religion (cf. DI: 62). For Adichie, being conscious of difference is a necessary prerequisite to “survive in a diverse world” (DI: 61). Similar to her own approach to feminism, Adichie demands that children should learn “never to universalize [their] own standards or experiences” (DI: 62). Adichie’s stance on difference bears similarities to feminist theorist Audre Lorde’s appreciation of difference. Lorde advocated the inclusion of the voices of lesbian and third world women in feminist discourse (cf. Lorde 2003: 26). Lorde
emphasized the significance and power of difference between women, which goes beyond mere tolerance towards interdependence of different women as a source of creativity (cf. Lorde 2003: 26).

The focus of Adichie’s feminism is not exclusively on girls and women, but extends to boys and men as well. Adichie states that the way in which boys are raised is harmful: “We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way. Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage” (WSABF: 26). According to Adichie, boys are conditioned “to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability” (WSABF: 26). This hardness expected of boys results in men with “fragile egos,” which girls are taught to gratify (WSABF: 27). Another aspect of masculinity criticized by Adichie is its association with money, made explicit in the assumption that boys and men are always supposed to pay as a “proof” of their masculinity (cf. WSABF: 26-27).

Adichie acknowledges that the conversation about gender is difficult and that people react with discomfort, resistance, irritation or contempt (cf. WSABF: 40). Instead of terms such as “believer in human rights” (WSABF: 41), Adichie insists on the use of ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ since “to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender” (WSABF: 41; original emphasis). The use of ‘human rights’ “would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded” and a denial of the fact that “the problem of gender targets women” (WSABF: 41). Addressing in particular men’s responses to feminism, Adichie suspects that some men’s perception of feminism as a threat is due to “the insecurity triggered by how boys are brought up, how their sense of self-worth is diminished if they are not ‘naturally’ in charge as men” (WSABF: 42; original emphasis). Another problem, according to Adichie, is “[t]hat many men do not actively think about gender or notice gender” (WSABF: 42; original emphasis). Another male reaction to feminism is that some men believe that gender inequality was a problem of the past (cf. WSABF: 42). Adichie demands of men to challenge misogynist behaviour when they witness it (cf. WSABF: 42-43). Another response to conversations about gender points to the hardships faced by men living in poverty, which Adichie acknowledges (cf. WSABF: 43). However, Adichie considers this response irrelevant to a conversation about gender, since gender and class are distinct categories (cf. WSABF: 43). Adichie remarks that systems of oppression “can be blind to one another” (WSABF: 43-44), providing the example of a man who described “his experience as a black man” but would not understand why Adichie talked about her experience as a woman instead of a human being (WSABF: 44). Adichie’s example

2 This fear of displaying stereotypically ‘female’ weakness is carried to the extreme in the character of Okonkwo, the protagonist of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart.
shows that the experience of the discriminatory power of class or race does not necessarily create more awareness of other forms of discrimination such as sexism; rather, discrimination seems to become most distinctly visible through personal experience.

Adichie notes that recognizing the existence of female misogyny and addressing instances of women rejecting the term ‘feminist’ should not be left for anti-feminists to use as arguments against feminism (cf. DI: 60). Instead, Adichie insists that women’s rejection of feminism “makes us see the extent of the problem, the successful reach of patriarchy” (DI: 60-61) and “that not all women are feminists and not all men are misogynists” (DI: 61).

In both of her feminist non-fiction publications, Adichie advocates a change in how girls and boys are raised as the starting point for approaching the problem of gender inequality (cf. WSABF: 25, DI: 4). Emenyonu terms Adichie’s focus on the upbringing of children as “a pedagogical approach for the realization of [...] gender harmony” (Emenyonu 2017: 2). Adichie believes that a different upbringing and education can result in “[a] world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves” (WSABF: 25).

Adichie concludes We Should All Be Feminists with her own definition of a feminist: “My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes there’s a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better’” (WSABF: 48). This definition of the term ‘feminist’ is significantly different from the more common definition cited by Adichie that a feminist is “a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes” (WSABF: 47). Adichie’s definition explicitly includes men instead of the more neutral term ‘person’ and thus emphasizes that feminism can be a movement of and for both men and women instead of a fight of one against the other. Adichie foregrounds the current problematic state with regard to gender rather than invoking the aim of feminism (i.e. social, political and economic equality of the sexes). The ‘problem’ of gender is not specified in Adichie’s definition, rendering it vague and difficult to understand without the context of the preceding observations and examples in the essay, which illustrate the ‘problem’ Adichie refers to in her definition. Perhaps most significantly, Adichie’s definition of a feminist expresses the resolution to actively change today’s functioning of gender. As opposed to the conventional definition, which is based on the belief in gender equality, Adichie defines a feminist as a person who actively brings about change.

Literature is a tool, successfully employed by Adichie, which raises awareness of feminist concerns by immersing the readers in the experiences of a fictional character. Personal experience is deeply significant to Adichie’s feminism. However, we cannot experience everything personally, and some experiences are inaccessible to us due to our
gender, sex, age, race, class, or location. Literature is a discursive tool which makes experiences – no matter how alien – more tangible by enabling us to regard situations through the eyes of a fictional character and feel what this person feels. With regard to feminist issues this can be demonstrated on the example of Adichie’s fiction as I will show in the following chapters.
4. DISMANTLING THE PATRIARCHY: ADICHIE’S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Adichie’s debut novel *Purple Hibiscus*, first published in 2003, is set in south-eastern Nigeria in the 1990s and revolves around 15-year-old Kambili. Kambili is the first-person narrator, who tells the story from a temporal distance of about three years to the main events narrated in the novel. The narrative is organised non-chronologically, beginning with the events in Kambili’s family on Palm Sunday, which mark the family’s disintegration. After Kambili’s older brother Jaja refuses to go to communion at church, their father Eugene shatters his wife Beatrice’s ceramic figurines. The next section of the novel illuminates the events leading up to Palm Sunday, providing insights into the oppressive atmosphere of Eugene’s patriarchal rule and domestic violence, which effectively silences his family. Eugene’s sister Ifeoma, an outspoken and fearless academic, invites Kambili and Jaja to stay with her and her children in Nsukka. There, Kambili is confronted with her grandfather Papa-Nnukwu, a traditionalist who is shunned by his son Eugene, and gradually gains her voice in the open and joyful environment of Ifeoma’s family and the young priest Father Amadi. After Papa-Nnukwu’s death, Eugene takes his children home and almost fatally punishes Kambili because of a painting of Papa-Nnukwu she holds dear. Kambili and Jaja return to Nsukka where Kambili for the first time acknowledges the abuse she suffers from her father. Together with Beatrice, who had a miscarriage induced by Eugene’s violence, Kambili and Jaja return to Enugu for Palm Sunday. After Palm Sunday Kambili and Jaja once again spend time in Nsukka until they learn of Eugene’s death. At the end of this section of the novel, Jaja is taken to prison for confessing to his father’s murder, which Beatrice committed, Father Amadi has left Nigeria for a missionary project, and Ifeoma and her family are about to emigrate to the United States.

In the final section of *Purple Hibiscus*, which is set in the present, that is three years after Eugene’s death, Jaja is soon to be released from prison and Kambili forges plans for the future.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s first novel *Purple Hibiscus* intricately interweaves the themes of gender relations, religion, tradition and nation in a coming-of-age story of a Nigerian girl. Cheryl Stobie credits Adichie with the creation of “a hybrid, creative and freshly dialogic view of religion, the body, and Nigerian society within a global framework (Stobie 2010: 433). Referring to the intertextual relationship to Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Heather Hewett describes *Purple Hibiscus* as “the story that Okonkwo’s wife cannot tell” (Hewett 2005: 79). While Hewett emphasizes the significance of the female (and perhaps feminist) perspective of the novel, her comparison also seems to allude to Adichie’s

The remarkable relevance of gender when reading and interpreting *Purple Hibiscus* also informs my analysis of the novel. In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which Adichie expresses feminist critique and proposes a feminist tool for the analysis of culture and religion in *Purple Hibiscus*. The significance of personal experiences in the development of Adichie’s feminism (cf. CNN 2018) and her use of everyday examples to illustrate feminist concerns (cf. DI: 28) are reflected in the novel *Purple Hibiscus*. By constructing the first-person narrator and focalizer Kambili as an astute observer, Adichie gives the reader profound insights into the 15-year-old girl’s experiences and her reaction to them. Tracing the voice of the narrating and the experiencing I, I will show the extent to which Kambili transforms from an observer to an analyser and critic. Building on Wallace’s reading of *Purple Hibiscus* as an illustration of cultural hermeneutics and an exemplification of “the critical, or sceptical, dimension of cultural hermeneutics in its vivid critique of colonial Christianity as well as Igbo patriarchy, and also in its representation of the two as intertwined” (Wallace 2012: 469), I will show that Adichie employs cultural hermeneutics as a feminist tool in *Purple Hibiscus*. Adichie’s characters not only see or experience practices that require feminist critique and revision, but more particularly, Adichie demonstrates through them and to them as well as to the reader how to criticize and revise misogyny in culture and religion. In *Purple Hibiscus* Adichie addresses the “problem with gender as it is today” (*WSABF*: 48), as the novel is infused with Adichie’s approach to feminism, reflecting issues such as stereotypes about women and men, gender relations within marriages, and the use of religion and culture as misogynist tools, which she discusses in detail in her non-fiction publications *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele* (2017).
Prior to the discussion of *Purple Hibiscus*, I will provide a brief introduction to cultural hermeneutics. Cultural hermeneutics is an analytic tool devised by female African theologians which can be applied to “their culture, religion, and the Christian heritage” (Kwok 2004: 15). The view on culture underlying cultural hermeneutics is that cultural practices and conventions are not to be seen as rigid dogmas but as changeable and dynamic (cf. Oduoye 2001: 12). Cultural hermeneutics is a process within a culture “seek[ing] a critique from within” (Oduoye 2001: 12). Cultural hermeneutics as described by Mercy Amba Oduoye combines three parallel hermeneutic processes (cf. Oduoye 2001: 12-14). A hermeneutics of liberation aims at the identification and promotion of positive cultural elements (cf. Oduoye 2001: 12, 13), with the guiding principle of “women’s full humanity and participation in religion and society” (Oduoye 2001: 13). Simultaneously, a hermeneutics of suspicion requires a critique of oppressing cultural elements (cf. Oduoye 13-14, Kwok 2004: 15-16). At the same time, a hermeneutics of commitment involves the dedication to furthering “wholeness and enhancement of life in the community” (Oduoye 2001: 14) and the transformation of discriminating practices (cf. Kwok 2004: 16). The two main fields of application of hermeneutic principles as suggested by Oduoye are “African religio-culture” and the Bible (Oduoye 2001: 18). Oduoye does not limit the application of cultural hermeneutics to African women theologians, but acknowledges the role of African women’s literature: “Through their poems, novels and drama they have offered analyses and critiques of African cultural practices” (Oduoye 2001: 14). With the display of positive elements as well as the exposure and transformation of oppressive elements in Christianity and Igbo culture in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie claims her place among the female African writers who employ cultural hermeneutics.

4.1. The Catholic patriarch of *Purple Hibiscus*

Through the eyes of the first-person narrator and protagonist Kambili, Adichie shows the sexism that informs the patriarchal system of oppression Eugene has built based on his Christian fanaticism. Particularly in the section of the novel covering events before Palm Sunday, Kambili describes Eugene’s oppressive and misogynist dogmas and actions in a disconcertingly naive manner, which does not (yet) indicate an analysis, evaluation, and eventual denunciation of sexism. In terms of cultural hermeneutics, Kambili does not or is not able to employ a hermeneutics of suspicion. In Nsukka and after Palm Sunday, subtle commentary of the narrating voice suggests a heightened awareness and the beginnings of an analysis, which denotes the dawn of Kambili’s use of a hermeneutics of suspicion. The representation of Ifeoma provides a more direct counter-discourse to Eugene’s patriarchal
rule. By contrasting the households of Ifeoma and Eugene, Adichie underscores the positive, “life-affirming” (Oduyoye 2001: 13) aspects of the former and the oppressive ones of the latter, encouraging a hermeneutics of liberation and a hermeneutics of suspicion on the part of Kambili and the reader.

Eugene structures and controls Kambili’s life as well as the lives of her brother and mother. Eugene devises exact schedules for his children, which allocate periods of time to activities such as lunch, studying and resting over the course of a day (cf. *PH*: 22-23). Kambili initially mentions the schedules as the reason why she cannot have lunch with her brother (cf. *PH*: 22-23). While she wishes to eat with Jaja (cf. *PH*: 22), she neither expresses her dislike of the schedules nor provides any evaluation or condemnation of them. Ifeoma is the first one to draw attention to the peculiarity of Eugene’s schedules by laughing upon discovering them (cf. *PH*: 124). Ifeoma’s laughter and her disruption of the schedules effectively undermine Eugene’s control. Kambili represents it as an obvious fact that her father will decide on her future education: “When the time came, Papa would decide” (*PH*: 130). The inescapability of Eugene’s control over her life is emphasized by her remark that she had not even thought about higher education or a subject she would be interested in (cf. *PH*: 130). Significantly, it is Ifeoma who instigates this reflection, which could be regarded as evidence for Kambili’s beginning awareness of Eugene’s power, by suggesting that Kambili might attend university with her cousin Amaka. Eugene’s control is also evident in the fact that his family in general has to ask for his permission to go somewhere (cf. *PH*: 43). The necessity of permission accentuates the rigid power hierarchy within the family, which particularly shows the power inequality in the relationship between Beatrice and Eugene, since Beatrice has as little power as her children. Adichie seems to illustrate her repudiation of the notion of ‘allowing’ in the vocabulary of an even marriage (cf. *DI*: 22).

A seemingly insignificant instance of Eugene’s misogyny is his disregard of the family’s female servant, Sisi. However, through the repetition of the scene, it gains significance and seems to denote Kambili’s awareness of the sexism inherent in Eugene’s behaviour. Eugene does not directly address the family’s female servant; instead he refers to her as “that girl” and tells Beatrice to convey his orders (*PH*: 12, 98, 258). While in the first two instances before and on Palm Sunday this action is shown by way of direct speech (cf. *PH*: 12, 98), in the third instance, after Palm Sunday, it is narrated by Kambili (cf. *PH*: 258). The telling as opposed to the showing of this action and the use of quotation marks for ‘that girl’ after Palm Sunday indicate Kambili’s awareness of Eugene’s choice of words and the
delegation of Eugene’s orders to Beatrice. Whether or how Eugene’s action is evaluated by Kambili, either as experiencing or narrating I, is not evident.

The dress code Kambili is subjected to illustrates Adichie’s critique of the control religions and cultures exert over women’s bodies, exposing the association of female sexuality with shame (cf. WSABF: 33, DI: 54) and dismissing of the connection between female clothing and morality (cf. DI: 44). Kambili describes her school uniform as “a gray skirt with a darker-toned waistband, long enough to show no calf when I wore it” (PH: 19-20). It is implied that the girl’s calves are sinful, or too sexual, and should therefore be covered. In her comment, Kambili shows awareness of the skirt’s length but does not question it. Outside of the convent school, which Eugene chose for his daughter, Kambili has to conform to a dress code established by Eugene. In response to Ifeoma’s suggestion that it might be better to wear trousers instead of a skirt for a short trip, Kambili tells Ifeoma that she is fine, adding, “I wondered why I did not tell her that all my skirts stopped well past my knees, that I did not own any trousers because it was sinful for a woman to wear trousers” (PH: 80). While Kambili repeats Eugene’s opinion about the sinfulness of wearing trousers, which links women’s legs with shame, she seems to be aware that this sexist dogma is perhaps not valid outside of her immediate family, since she is hesitant to reveal her real reason for not wearing trousers. Later when Kambili admits that she does not own shorts and her aunt does not inquire about the reasons, Kambili suspects that “perhaps she already knew” (PH: 174). Although neither the narrating nor the experiencing I specify what exactly Ifeoma might already know, the reader can infer that Kambili refers to Eugene’s fundamentalist religious beliefs. The silence in the text mirrors Kambili’s muteness and emphasizes the force of Eugene’s power over Kambili. Another dress code which is justified with religion is covering women’s hair, since Eugene and the priest consider the exposure of women’s hair in church as “ungodly” (PH: 100).

While Eugene cruellypunishes all the members of his immediate family for a variety of reasons he justifies with Christian faith, some of his acts of violence exhibit a gendered nature (cf. Stobie 2010: 427). Eugene displays ignorance of the female body and its needs when he punishes his family because Kambili has broken the Eucharist fast in order to take an analgesic for menstrual cramps, and when he violently beats his wife, causing at least two miscarriages (cf. Stobie 2010: 427). Eugene ignores Beatrice’s justification that Kambili experiences period cramps (cf. PH: 101-102), showing utter disregard for Kambili’s body. Instead, he punishes the whole family, invoking the devil’s presence (cf. PH: 102). Eugene regards Beatrice’s request to be excused from a visit to their priest due to nausea as her refusal
to visit God’s servant and causes a miscarriage by beating her (cf. *PH*: 29-33). In both instances, Eugene links women’s bodies with sinfulness and justifies violent punishment with his fundamentalist religious beliefs. Wallace traces the roots of Eugene’s violence to the link between Christian fundamentalism and “a fear of the body and sexuality related to the colonial association of Africanness with the bodily and the sexual” (Wallace 2012: 471). Iniobong I. Uko regards “Papa’s continued cruelty towards his wife and children [...] [as] symptomatic of maternal envy” (Uko 2017: 63-64). Thus, Uko links Eugene’s violent behaviour to “fear of what Mama can do that he cannot, fear that he is not an effective head of family” (Uko 2017: 63). The fact that Eugene causes Beatrice to miscarry at least twice is perhaps the most apparent indication of Eugene’s buried fear of his wife’s power to bear children. Some critics name colonial mimicry as a possible reason for Eugene’s brutality (cf. Hron 2008: 31, Nabutanyi 2017: 76). Eugene’s use of Igbo language instead of English during acts of violence or as a sign preceding physical punishment (cf. *PH*: 69, 102, 209) supports the idea that Eugene’s behaviour mimics the coloniser. The novel directly addresses the influence of colonialism on Eugene when Kambili remembers Ifeoma’s comment “that Papa was too much of a colonial product” (*PH*: 13). It becomes clear that Eugene at least once imitated a punishment he received from a priest and performed it on his children (cf. *PH*: 194-196). Thereby, colonialism is explicitly linked to violence and Eugene’s mimicry is made apparent. Edgar Fred Nabutanyi regards fanatic sexism as another way of interpreting the brutal punishment administered by Eugene, as his violence could be seen as his reaction to “manifestations of femininity,” such as Kambili’s period and Beatrice’s pregnancy nausea, posing a threat to Eugene’s “patriarchal pride” (Nabutanyi 2017: 78). Eugene’s violence could also be indicative of “his primitively misogynist hatred for femininity” (Nabutanyi 2017: 78). While some of the punishments Eugene inflicts on his family are related to gender, others are not. Eugene’s brutality is connected to colonialism and motivated by religious fanaticism. Thus, Eugene’s conduct is driven by various oppressive patterns, which can be read as an illustration that sexism is not an isolated issue, but can intersect with or be integrated into other discriminatory systems.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie illustrates possible manifestations of patriarchal power hierarchy by portraying his family’s and particularly Kambili’s desire for Eugene’s approval and affection. For example, his family praises a sample of biscuits (cf. *PH*: 40), and Kambili and Beatrice praise the juice produced in Eugene’s factory. Kambili observes that “I wanted to seem eager; maybe if I talked about how good it tasted, Papa might forget that he had not yet punished Jaja” (*PH*: 12). Beatrice echoes Kambili’s flattery by comparing the juice, which
Kambili considers “watery” (*PH*: 12), to cashew and white wine (cf. *PH*: 13). These efforts to gratify Eugene can be seen as an example of accommodating to men’s “fragile egos” which result from the association of masculinity with hardness, as criticized by Adichie (*WSABF*: 27). Kambili’s use of flattery to appease Eugene illustrates her limited means of influence on Eugene due to the extreme power hierarchy privileging Eugene. In contrast to Kambili, Beatrice and Jaja, Ifeoma and Amaka challenge Eugene. Ifeoma reprimands him for not calling her and Amaka criticizes one of Eugene’s products as “too sweet” (*PH*: 98), which causes a “knot” to form in Kambili’s throat (*PH*: 98) and results in spilling her drink (cf. *PH*: 98-99). These physical reactions to actions questioning Eugene’s authority render her uneasiness explicit, revealing that Eugene’s authority is unquestionable for Kambili. Using religious references, Kambili models her language to earn Eugene’s approval (cf. *PH*: 26), sometimes wishes she had said something which is met with Eugene’s appreciation (cf. *PH*: 42-43, 97), and imagines Eugene’s pride as a reaction to her words even in his absence (cf. *PH*: 81). Eugene has the power of sanctioning his family’s words. For instance, Beatrice answers with what she believes to be Eugene’s opinion to a suggestion by Ifeoma (cf. *PH*: 73). Kambili and Jaja seek their father’s sanction before responding to a question by a journalist and family friend: “We looked at Papa at the same time; he was on the sofa, reading a Christmas card and smiling. ‘Yes,’ we said” (*PH*: 57). The first-person narration of *Purple Hibiscus* enables an inside view on a father-daughter relationship and a marriage characterized by patriarchy and dependency.

As several critics (cf. Wallace 2012: 471, Stobie 2010: 425) have noted, Eugene is not demonized, but portrayed as a complex character whose patriarchal violence has its origins in his colonial missionary education and who is a benefactor of the church and his extended family. With his newspaper Eugene is an advocate of democracy, he is respected in his church community and in his hometown. Other people’s esteem for Eugene seems to be strongly connected to his wealth, since he presents members of his hometown with money (cf. *PH*: 55, 60) and donates to the church (cf. *PH*: 90). As a consequence, the members of Eugene’s umunna (i.e. extended family) take the side of Eugene in a dispute with his poor father (cf. *PH*: 61). As Stobie observes, Catholicism and “the Western model of the self-made man and the specifically Nigerian embodiment of the Big Man” are the underlying patriarchal systems of Eugene’s “quasi-divine status” (Stobie 2010: 424). Janet Ndula considers “the entrenched traditional constructs of his home culture of Enugu” as another ideological foundation of Eugene’s character (cf. Ndula 2017: 33). Patriarchal rule does not exist isolated in the realm of Kambili’s family, with the character of Eugene as the only example. “References to the Big
Man in politics – here known as the Big Oga – and in universities make it clear that Adichie is using Eugene as a symptomatic case of the unchecked use of patriarchal power” (Stobie 2010: 426). Instead of regarding Eugene as a “paradox” because of the positive and negative aspects of his character (Hron 2008: 31), I consider his round character as a means of enhancing the believability of the narrative, which is told by his daughter, whose relationship to him is characterized by love and admiration but also fear. Moreover, Beatrice’s and Amaka’s attempts to excuse Eugene’s brutality with stress and the great responsibilities he shoulders (cf. *PH*: 250, 251) draw attention to the difficulties of comprehending and condemning domestic violence. By representing Eugene as a complex character rather than an archetypal sexist villain, even though primarily focusing on the destructive effects of his behaviour on his family and particularly the female first-person narrator Kambili, Adichie emphasizes that sexism and religious fanaticism can coexist with other, commendable qualities, but are nonetheless to be challenged.

4.2. Feminist criticism from within

It is significant that Eugene and his beliefs are not criticized from the outside but rather from within his family and the realm he considers himself most firmly rooted in, namely Christianity. This practice is consistent with the “critique from within” of cultural hermeneutics (Odujaye 2001: 12). Both his sister Ifeoma and the priest Father Amadi are Christians who openly oppose Eugene. Madelaine Hron observes that “Catholicism, condemned in the figure of Eugene, is renegotiated in the person of Father Amadi” (Hron 2008: 32). For example, Father Amadi challenges Kambili to question the idea that living in the same house as her non-Christian grandfather is sinful. When asked why it is sinful, Kambili responds that she does not know (cf. *PH*: 175). Father Amadi correctly names Eugene as the source of Kambili’s harsh judgement of Papa-Nnukwu (cf. *PH*: 175). This scene underscores Father Amadi’s role of a facilitator of Kambili’s hermeneutic process. Adichie uses oppositions as a means of subversion in *Purple Hibiscus*, as Hron (2008: 32) and Ndula (2017) have observed. The oppression in the Achike household (i.e. Kambili’s home) is foregrounded through the contrast to the atmosphere in Ifeoma’s home: “I had felt as if I were not there, that I was just observing a table where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished” (*PH*: 120). Kambili’s detachment denotes the unfamiliarity of this domestic scene; the emphasis is on the perceived freedom of speech, which indicates that the oppression in the Achike household particularly manifests itself and results in the suppression of spoken language. Jane Bryce considers the contrast between the purple hibiscus in Ifeoma’s garden and the red one in front of the
Achike’s house as “metonymic of a series of oppositions on which the novel is structured: silence and speech, repression and spontaneity, state violence (for example, public executions) and family abuse, censorship and press freedom, harsh and gentle versions of masculinity” (Bryce 2008: 59). Hron emphasizes the complexity and multivocality of the oppositions in the novel, stating that “Adichie’s text resists any simple oppositional binaries but rather is constantly revaluing and renegotiating them, by repeatedly drawing attention to disparate points of view” (Hron 2008: 32). The technique of providing contrasting representations of Eugene on the one hand, and Ifeoma and Father Amadi on the other hand facilitates comparative analysis, the recognition of positive elements, and the challenge and repudiation of negative elements for Kambili as well as the reader. Thus, by providing the first-person narrator with access to contrasting voices, Adichie promotes hermeneutic processes of suspicion and liberation.

4.3. Gender roles and relations in Igbo culture

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie reveals not only problematic elements of fundamentalist Catholicism through the representation of Eugene, but also sexist elements of Igbo culture, the majority of which concern relationships between men and women. At the same time, the representation of Ifeoma and Father Amadi emphasizes the positive aspects of both Christianity and Igbo culture which they combine in their faith. As Wallace points out, parallel to Christian religion, Adichie provides critique of Igbo culture, “contrasting characters whose own beliefs manifest the proliferated possibilities of a secular age: no repudiation of Igbo culture or of Christianity, but a dynamic process of critique and embrace” (Wallace 2012: 467).

A conversation between Beatrice and Kambili exposes Beatrice’s gratitude towards Eugene for staying in a monogamous relationship with her, and the community’s expectation of many, preferably male, children:

‘[...] You know after you [Kambili] came and I [Beatrice] had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our umunna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu’s second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us.’ (*PH*: 20)

The Igbo community Beatrice has to face seems to consider fertility as a requirement for marriage and as a woman’s only means of securing her status as a wife, while the incapability of giving birth to male children might result in the loss of a woman’s home and social status. Beatrice’s situation is consistent with Uko’s description of motherhood in the context of
Africa as determined by childbearing with the expectation of male offspring, care giving for the family and the necessary position within a patriarchal family context (cf. Uko 2017: 57-58). Beatrice seems to accept the expectations of the Igbo community, which delegate the full responsibility of bearing more sons to the wife, instead of both husband and wife. Uko observes that while many cultures value motherhood for its “life-giving essence”, Adichie turns this notion on its head as Beatrice, Kambili’s mother, murders her husband Eugene (Uko 2017: 57). Kambili has internalised the notions of her community: “Papa deserved praise for not choosing to have more sons with another woman, of course, for not choosing to take a second wife” (PH: 20). This passage is an example of Kambili’s unreflected opinions prior to her stay with Ifeoma in Nsukka and underscores the formative power of socialisation, which Adichie considers as the source of gender roles (cf. WSABF: 30, 35).

The view on marriage represented by Beatrice is deeply influenced by patriarchal mindsets, as she is convinced of women’s dependence on men within relationships, which can be seen when she asks Ifeoma what a woman is with children but without a husband (cf. PH: 75). Beatrice not only questions a woman’s independent agency but her entire definition and identity by asking ‘what’ such a woman is. Her point of reference for a woman’s definition is the husband. According to Beatrice, “[...] a husband crowns a woman’s life [...]” (PH: 75), which indicates the notion of marriage as “a prize to women” (DI: 15) and “as an achievement” (DI: 30), views which are rejected by Adichie (cf. DI: 15, 30). Ndula points out the ambiguity of Beatrice adding, “[...] It is what they want” (PH: 75) (cf. Ndula 2017: 39). This statement indicates that Beatrice “knows more than she is presenting” and reveals the notion of men crowning women’s lives “as a construct suggesting that it is what men want, probably, for their convenience, as opposed to what is realistic” (Ndula 2017: 39). While ‘they’ could refer to men (as suggested by Ndula), Ifeoma’s reaction supports the interpretation of ‘they’ referring to women: “[... It is what they think they want [...]” (PH: 75). Ifeoma’s reformulation of Beatrice’s statement seems to allude to social conditioning processes which result in women’s belief that marriage ought to be their main goal in life. The idea of marriage as a prize, which Adichie challenges (cf. DI: 15), is also represented by one of Ifeoma’s students (cf. PH: 233-234). When announcing her upcoming wedding, she talks about her fiancé “with the proud tone of someone who had won a prize” (PH: 234; my emphasis). This description denotes Kambili’s awareness but does not include an explicit evaluation of the student’s attitude towards marriage. The young woman tells Ifeoma that she might not return to university in order to have children because she does not want her husband “[...] to think that he married me to have an empty home” (PH: 234). The student disregards
her own ambitions in order to conform to her fiancé’s expectations, which centre on bearing children. The only direct counter-voice to this discourse of marriage is Ifeoma, who expresses her disapproval by observing, “‘She was never particularly bright, so I shouldn’t be sad’” (PH: 234). The prevalence of the ideas of marriage as a prize and motherhood as a married woman’s main role in life is emphasized by their appearance across generations and social groups in the novel, i.e. the lower-class rural women of the umunna, upper-class Beatrice and a university student.

Adichie shows the difficulties of leaving an abusive, unequal marriage through Beatrice. After Kambili almost dies as a result of Eugene’s violence, Ifeoma advises her sister-in-law to leave Eugene, using a metaphor: “‘When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head’” (PH: 213). For Beatrice this seems beyond her imagination, as can be seen in the stoic answer she gives twice: “‘It has never happened like this before’” (PH: 214). Having come to Ifeoma’s home in Nsukka after a miscarriage caused by Eugene’s violence, Beatrice decides to return to Eugene with her children (cf. PH: 249). She responds to Ifeoma’s objections by stressing Eugene’s being unwell due to pressure (cf. PH: 250). This can be read as an indirect justification of Eugene’s violence or as the prioritisation of Eugene’s wellbeing and needs over hers and the children’s. Beatrice addresses her financial dependence that makes a separation from Eugene appear impossible and expresses gratitude for being Eugene’s wife by asking Ifeoma, “‘Where would I go if I leave Eugene’s house? Tell me, where would I go? […] Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them, even, and not to bother paying a bride price?’” (PH: 250). Due to Beatrice’s conviction that she cannot leave Eugene, murder seems to be the only possible way of escaping from the trap of her marriage.

Supposedly ‘traditional’ views on gender with regard to marriage are revealed when women of Kambili’s umunna comment on Jaja and Kambili, relating both of the teenagers to marriage. Jaja is predicted to “‘[…] inherit his father’s riches’” (PH: 91) and another woman tells him she would “‘sell’” her daughter to him if they were not relatives (PH: 91). 15-year-old Kambili is referred to by one of the umunna wives as “‘ripe’” (PH: 91), which raises the expectation that “‘[…] very soon a strong young man will bring us palm wine’” (PH: 91-92). There is a significant difference in how the women of the umunna relate wealth and marriage to the siblings which seems to be connected to gender. While Jaja is regarded as the heir of money, property and power, Kambili is not perceived in this way, which implies that wealth is associated rather with men than with women. In terms of marriage, Jaja is presented as the potential purchaser of a wife, which means that money and the power to propose are located
with him. In Kambili’s case, on the other hand, the future suitor is designated the active role, which includes offering gifts to the bride’s family, which reduces Kambili to passivity, while her ‘ripe’ body is the implied cause or reason for the appearance of a male suitor.

Power inequality is also manifested in the different significance of male and female spirits in the Aro festival, a traditional Igbo celebration. Papa-Nnukwu explains that “[…] the women mmuo are harmless […]” (PH: 85; original emphasis) and warns his family that female spectators cannot look at the most powerful mmuo (cf. PH: 86). The tradition of the spirit world explicitly favours men over women, since only boys are allowed to participate in the initiation to the spirit world, whereas “women were not supposed to know anything at all, since it was the first step toward the initiation to manhood” (PH: 87). Similar to Ifeoma’s student idea of marriage, Kambili displays awareness of gender inequality and discrimination with respect to spiritual traditions, but does not provide an evaluation.

Papa-Nnukwu as a representative of ‘traditional’ Igbo culture unconsciously discloses his culture’s misogynist elements (cf. Stobie 2010: 423, Wallace 2012: 472). Papa-Nnukwu regards Kambili with regard to marriage, saying “Kambili, you are so grown up now, a ripe agbogho. Soon the suitors will start to come” (PH: 64; original emphasis). This comment includes the association of the 15-year-old girl’s physical development with the prospect of marriage, and also the notion of the man as initiator or proposer. Papa-Nnukwu expresses the stereotypical traditional view of the man as the provider, when he tells Ifeoma that he prays “[…] that Chukwu will send a good man to take care of you and the children” (PH: 83; original emphasis). Gender inequality is also inscribed in the folk tale narrated by Papa-Nnukwu (cf. PH: 158-159): Only male animals form the council that discusses a famine, which is an issue that concerns both males and females (cf. PH: 158). The council’s decision to kill the mothers (cf. PH: 158) indicates discrimination based on gender and age. The insignificance of the mothers’ lives as compared to the ones of their (male) children is considered as normal in the embedded narrative, as can be seen in the fact that “[t]he mothers did not mind being sacrificed” (PH: 158). Uko notes that the association of “self-sacrifice and giving” with motherhood elevates motherhood to a “revered spiritual status in Africa” (Uko 2017: 58). This notion is illustrated in Papa-Nnukwu’s folk tale when the mothers express readiness to be sacrificed in order to feed their children during a famine (cf. PH: 158).

Oduyoye analysed African oral traditions using cultural hermeneutics, with the focus on the question of “how the corpus of folktale reflects or is used to actually shape women’s lives” (Kwok 2004: 16). Oduyoye investigated “for whose benefit these myths, folktales, and proverbs are told from generation to generation” (Kwok 2004: 16-17) and finally encourages
the rejection of “harmful” and obsolete folktales and the creation of “a new tapestry of meanings for women” (Kwok 2004: 17). Oduyoye’s analysis shows “that in general the folktalk [i.e. oral traditions] reinforces the subordinate position of women and perpetuates their stereotypical roles as mothers, wives, caretakers, and self-sacrificial persons who put others’ needs first” (Kwok 2004: 16). Oduyoye’s findings are consistent with Papa-Nnukwu’s folktale in Purple Hibiscus, since female characters appear in the tale only as mothers who are excluded from decision-making and who readily give their lives to care for their children.

Ifeoma provides an alternative, critical approach to marriage. She indicates the possibility of a full life without a husband to Beatrice, remarking that “[...] sometimes life begins when marriage ends” (PH: 75). Adichie’s critique of the notion of marriage as a form of ownership (cf. WSABF: 30) is expressed through Ifeoma’s worries about her female students, many of whom are married and dependent on their husbands, which causes Ifeoma to predict that “[...] when they graduate, the husbands own them and their degrees [...]” (PH: 75). With her comments Ifeoma denotes a hermeneutics of suspicion applied to marriage, which focuses on the critique of power imbalance and, as a result, relationships characterized by women’s dependence on men.

In addition to the marginalisation of women in the roles of wives and mothers, Purple Hibiscus displays problematic concepts of masculinity. Wallace considers the intertextual reference to Achebe’s Things Fall Apart with its brutal main character Okonkwo as a way in which Adichie draws attention to misogynist elements in Igbo culture (cf. Wallace 2012: 472). The first sentence in the novel refers to Things Fall Apart: “Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère” (PH: 3). Hewett observes that in Purple Hibiscus Adichie took up Achebe’s theme of the disintegration of family and community amidst the forces of colonialism and religion and set it in postcolonial Nigeria (cf. Hewett 2005: 79). While the figure of the violent patriarch, represented by Achebe’s protagonist Okonkwo, is also central to Purple Hibiscus in the character of Eugene, Hewett points out that “Adichie tells the story that Okonkwo’s wife cannot tell” (Hewett 2005: 79). The character of Eugene resembles Okonkwo in his prestige, success and the construction of “his self-identity around his rejection of his own father and all that he stands for” (Hewett 2005: 80). Both Eugene and Okonkwo maintain their patriarchal power through domestic violence. They seem to have been raised in the harmful way Adichie describes in We Should All Be Feminists as “stif[ing] the humanity of boys” with an idea of masculinity that resembles “a hard, small cage” (WSABF: 26). Okonkwo’s patriarchal behaviour is modelled
solely on Igbo culture in pre-colonial times, whereas Eugene’s patriarchalism has its foundations in colonial Catholic missionary education, but might also be influenced by ‘traditional’ ideas of masculinity of his (Igbo) community. Since Adichie gives Kambili, the female victim of patriarchal violence, a voice by narrating the story from her point of view instead of focusing on the patriarch as Achebe did in *Things Fall Apart*, *Purple Hibiscus* can be read as a critique of both ‘old’ and ‘new’ toxic masculinity and patriarchy. Referring to Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* as texts challenging Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Hewett regards *Purple Hibiscus* as part of “an intergenerational, intertextual revisioning of Achebe’s novel” (Hewett 2005: 80). Adichie’s critique of patriarchy extends from the private realm to the Nigerian public (cf. Hewett 2005, Stobie 2010: 426). For instance, Kambili witnesses the assault of market women committed by soldiers (cf. *PH*: 44), and in her dreams Kambili draws parallels between the situation at the University of Nsukka, where the sole administrator limits the freedom of speech, and the family violence she experienced (cf. *PH*: 229).

While Eugene’s struggle with masculinity is not rendered explicit in *Purple Hibiscus*, the force of stereotypes about masculinity is visible with regard to the adolescent male characters Jaja and Obiora. Both of them display attempts of taking on the role of the head of family, acting as the protectors of their mothers and denying their emotions. Ifeoma’s 14-year-old son Obiora suppresses his crying after the death of Papa-Nnukwu “because he was the nwoke in the house, the man Aunty Ifeoma had by her side” (*PH*: 184). Obiora is one year younger than his sister Amaka and not portrayed as considerably more responsible than her. Therefore, the reason why he assigns the role of the head of the family to himself and is expected to conform to this role by others is his gender. Jaja struggles with his role as a son, reproaching himself for not having acted as the protector of his mother as his cousin seems to do: “I should have taken care of Mama. Look how Obiora balances Aunty Ifeoma’s family on his head, and I am older than he is [...]” (*PH*: 289). Jaja actively takes on the role of his mother’s protector when he confesses to having poisoned Eugene and is arrested instead of Beatrice (cf. *PH*: 291). The interpretation of Jaja’s confession of the crime his mother committed varies among critics; it can be interpreted as a Christ-like self-sacrifice (cf. Wallace 2012: 478, Uko 2017: 68-69), as Jaja’s assumption of “the role of an Igbo son, responsible for the care for his widowed mother’s well-being” (Wallace 2012: 478), or as Beatrice “sacrific[ing]” Jaja (Andrade 2011: 98). The religious doubts Jaja expresses do not support the interpretation of his confession as a Christ-like sacrifice. In response to Kambili’s convictions that “God knows best” and “God works in mysterious ways” (*PH*: 289), Jaja
reveals “a classical struggle with the problem of evil” (Wallace 2012: 477) by stating “[…] Look what He did to his faithful servant Job, even to his own son. But have you ever wondered why? Why did He have to murder his own son so we would be saved? Why didn’t He just go ahead and save us?” (PH: 289). Similarly, it seems implausible that Jaja is sacrificed by Beatrice, since she tries to convince the public that she is the murderer, but is dismissed as a grieving widow and mother in denial (cf. PH: 296). Instead, Jaja seems to assume the role of the male head of the family, which he admires about his cousin (cf. PH: 289), and is arrested instead of his mother. Jaja’s religious scepticism, which stands in contrast to Kambili’s transformed faith, bears the possibility of an imitation of Eugene’s and Okonkwo’s rejection of their fathers and the continuation of patriarchal structures, albeit in a different way.

4.4. Kambili’s incomplete hermeneutic process

Critics disagree on the ending of Purple Hibiscus and the development of its protagonist Kambili; some regard it as tentatively hopeful (cf. Wallace 2012: 465), whereas others stress its openness and ambivalence (cf. Andrade 2011: 98, Nabutanyi 2017: 84). As Susan Z. Andrade observes, “[e]ndings are where the ideological commitments of novels become most visible” (Andrade 2011: 98). In accordance with Andrade, I will trace the narrating voice of Kambili with a focus on the ending of the novel and the characters’ connection to silence to show that Purple Hibiscus depicts an ongoing, incomplete cultural hermeneutic process of the first-person narrator. Adichie foregrounds the experiencing I, which as a narrative device creates more immediacy for the reader, but moreover shows that Kambili is only to a rather small degree able to reflect and provide an evaluation of her experiences.

Adichie uses the “love sip” (PH: 8), which is a sip of “Lipton tea with sugar and milk” (PH: 31) that Kambili and Jaja drink from Eugene’s cup, and Beatrice’s ceramic figurines as symbols for the oppressive nature of silence in Purple Hibiscus. Kambili describes the love sip in the following way: “The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered. But it didn’t matter, because I know that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa’s love into me” (PH: 8). The love sip symbolically connects Eugene’s love for his children with pain, which mirrors Eugene’s intention of benefitting his children through corporeal punishment. Wallace observes that Kambili’s tongue “is literally scorched and figuratively bound by the rule of her father, whose power mixes pain and love” (Wallace 2012: 470). It is significant that Kambili describes herself as “awkward and tongue-tied” (PH: 49; my emphasis). The impairment of Kambili’s tongue can be attributed to oppression at the hands of Eugene through the symbolic meaning
of the love sip. The love sip also establishes a connection between Eugene’s violence, (fanatic) Catholicism and colonialism. Nabutanyi reads the love sip as a ritual “mirror[ing] Christ’s loving and sacrificial action with his disciples during the Last Supper” (Nabutanyi 2017: 80). The pain accompanying Eugene’s ritual indicates Eugene’s perverse interpretation and transformation of Catholicism. The obvious association of tea with colonialism is addressed by Hron, who regards Eugene’s tea as “symbolic of colonial mimicry” (Hron 2008: 33) and Wallace, who calls it the “liquid symbol of British imperialism” (Wallace 2012: 470). The tongue reoccurs as a symbol of Eugene’s oppressive power when Eugene establishes a connection to religion as he reprimands his children for staying longer than he permitted at Papa-Nnukwu’s house: “‘What did you do there? Did you eat food sacrificed to idols? Did you desecrate your Christian tongue?’” (PH: 69). Kambili’s remark that she “did not know that tongues could be Christian, too” (PH: 69) reveals the artificiality of the connection of a body part essential in the production of speech to ‘sin’.

Beatrice’s “beige, finger-size ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures” (PH: 7) appear in the very first sentence of Purple Hibiscus when Eugene breaks them in anger over Jaja’s refusal to attend communion (cf. PH: 3). Kambili relates Beatrice’s habit of polishing the figurines after each of Eugene’s acts of domestic or sexual violence (cf. PH: 10-11). The “contorted postures” (PH: 7) of the dancing figures alludes to the pain that Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili suffer and their efforts to contort themselves in order to conform to Eugene’s expectations. The étagère and the figurines are used by the characters as a code for domestic violence. In the following dialogue between Kambili and Beatrice, the reader can infer that the characters use the étagère to refer to the latest assault and that Kambili is aware of the symbolic nature of the figurines and the étagère. “‘You polished the étagère.’ ‘Yes.’ ‘When?’ ‘Yesterday.’ I stared at her eye. It appeared to be opening now; it must have been swollen completely shut yesterday” (PH: 192-193). According to Nabutanyi, Beatrice’s act of polishing the figurines “indicates her failure and inability to protect her family” (Nabutanyi 2017: 81). The broken figurines “symbolize how her [Beatrice’s] children are ‘broken’ by their father without her intervention” (Nabutanyi 2017: 81). While the ‘brokenness’ of the figurines reflects the children’s brokenness, Nabutanyi’s interpretation omits Beatrice’s brokenness and the fact that she is also Eugene’s victim instead of a mere passive bystander. The fact that Beatrice rearranged her figurines two weeks before Eugene destroyed them (cf. PH: 11) can be seen as a reflection of her resolution to rearrange the power dynamics in the family by poisoning Eugene. Beatrice informing Kambili that she would not replace the figurines (cf. PH: 15) might also indicate Beatrice’s refusal to continue life as before and her
assumption that soon there might be no need for the figurines because of Eugene’s impending death.

Ndula notes the prevalence of “signs” as compared to “words” in Beatrice’s language (Ndula 2017: 34). Beatrice’s sparse use of words and passivity are perceived as the standard, as can be seen by Kambili’s comment following a longer utterance made by her mother: “She did not usually say so much at one time. She spoke the way a bird eats, in small amounts” (PH: 20). In response to a suggestion Beatrice makes of her own accord, Eugene “stared at her as if surprised that she had spoken” (PH: 107). Uko observes that Beatrice’s silence “catalogues Papa’s evil” (Uko 2017: 63). Beatrice is incapable of directly addressing Eugene’s violence, as can be seen when she very vaguely refers to Eugene’s assault which lead to a miscarriage: “‘There was an accident, the baby is gone’” (PH: 34). Ndula describes the period before Palm Sunday as a time “when Papa exclusively possessed power and speech and everyone else was condemned to passivity and silence on the power / passivity, speech / silence binary oppositions” (Ndula 2017: 37). When Eugene tells his family about a recent military coup (cf. PH: 24-25) he seems to be in the role of the only speaker, as opposed to the silence of Beatrice and the children, who are assigned the roles of listeners. The silence in Kambili’s home is gloomy and foreshadows tragic events, as indicated in Kambili’s description of the silences through the following simile: “Silence hung over the table like the blue-black clouds in the middle of rainy season” (PH: 32). Ndula states that “the silence of the characters in Hibiscus is overwhelming and so enslaving that it is [...] bad and negative. It knows no gender as everybody (men and women) are subjected to it” (Ndula 2017: 37). However, the novel shows that Kambili’s struggle with language is greater than Jaja’s, which might indicate that gender is significant in terms of silence.

The first-person narration of Purple Hibiscus enables the reader to experience Kambili’s development from her point of view, from her initial naive acceptance of the disturbing ‘normality’ of repression and domestic violence to a gradual renegotiation of her relationship to culture and religion. This development is rendered all the more believable by Kambili’s youth, since “[c]hildhood is [...] a complex phenomenon that enables literary imagination to negotiate a variety of contestations, for example, the deconstruction of masculinity or father figures” (Coker 2017: 103). Kambili’s unreflected repetitions of society’s idea of marriage and Eugene’s fundamentalist opinions show her internalisation of Eugene’s and society’s doctrines and the effectiveness of socialisation. For example, Kambili admires her father for not having children with other women or marrying another woman (cf. PH: 20) and repeats Eugene’s doctrine of the sinfulness of women wearing trousers (cf. PH:
The lack of commentary by Kambili’s voice as a narrator particularly before Jaja’s rebellion on Palm Sunday emphasizes Eugene’s influence on Kambili. Kambili expresses her pride of Eugene (cf. *PH*: 5) and her admiration of the significance of his words, since “most of what Papa said sounded important” (*PH*: 25). “I would focus on his lips, the movement, and sometimes I forgot myself, sometimes I wanted to stay like that forever, listening to his voice, to the important things he said” (*PH*: 25). This passage highlights the centrality of Eugene and his opinion, and his entitlement to speech, which reduces Kambili to a marginal role and silence. Kambili’s love for her father and her longing for his approval can be seen in the following example: “I fell asleep hugging close the image of Papa’s face lit up, the sound of Papa’s voice telling me how proud of me he was, how I had fulfilled God’s purpose for me” (*PH*: 52-53).

Kambili’s uncritical devotion to Eugene prior to her visit to Ifeoma in Nsukka is paralleled by her struggle with language. Kambili has a stutter when she speaks (cf. *PH*: 49) and frequently when she has the intention of saying something, the words do not come out of her mouth (cf. *PH*: 139, 141). When asked to begin the recital of the Nigerian national pledge, Kambili is initially unable to form the words: “I opened my mouth, but the words would not come out. [...] I cleared my throat, willed the words to come. I knew them, thought them. But they would not come. The sweat was warm and wet under my arms” (*PH*: 48). Kambili’s low voice is noticed and addressed by Amaka, who remarks, “You lower your voice when you speak. You talk in whispers” (*PH*: 117). Kambili forces herself to be silent when Ifeoma’s family and Father Amadi sing an Igbo song during the rosary in order to prevent her mouth from acting against Eugene’s doctrines (cf. *PH*: 138-139). Kambili’s silence is not simply a habit but a speech disorder likely to have been caused by her upbringing and the domestic abuse by her father. Kambili is painfully aware of her condition which impedes her attempts at interaction, as can be seen when Kambili meets Amaka’s friends: “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). Kambili is also incapable of naming Eugene as the perpetrator of violent acts, for example when she cannot express that it was Eugene who shattered Beatrice’s figurines: “I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, ‘I’m sorry your figurines broke, Mama’” (*PH*: 10). Similar to the passages cited before, Kambili is aware of her inability to utter the words she has in mind. Hewett illuminates the nuances of Kambili’s struggle with language (cf. Hewett 2005: 85-86). She observes that Eugene’s “patriarchal rule has subsumed [Kambili’s]
individual identity almost entirely” (Hewett 2005: 85), which can be seen several times in the narrative when Kambili faithfully echoes Eugene’s opinions. Fear sometimes inhibits Kambili’s ability to speak the full truth, or manifests itself physically in “mumbles, whispers, and coughs” and a feeling of constriction in her throat (Hewett 2005: 85). Kambili also struggles with being heard, since her words and her silences are frequently misunderstood by other characters, for example by her schoolmates, who call her “backyard snob” (PH: 49) (cf. Hewett 2005: 85), or her cousin Amaka, who initially mistakes Kambili’s silence for arrogance. Additionally, Kambili has troubles with communicating her true thoughts or what she intends to say (cf. Hewett 2005: 86). Hewett notes that “Kambili’s linguistic alienation underscores her personal isolation” (Hewett 2005: 85). The only character who comments on the silence surrounding Kambili and Jaja is Eugene’s friend Ade Coker, who writes bold political commentary for Eugene’s newspaper (cf. PH: 57-58) and is based on Dele Giwa, an editor who was killed by a letter bomb in 1986 (cf. Hron 2008: 34, Andrade 2011: 94). Eugene displays pride in his response, remarking that his children are different from “[...] those loud children people are raising these days, with no home training and no fear of God” (PH: 58). Silence as defined by Eugene is linked to discipline, obedience and faith, the latter of which is connected to the negative emotion of fear. Ade Coker comments on the paradox of the domestic silence in contrast to the outspokenness of Eugene’s newspaper: “Imagine what the Standard [i.e. Eugene’s pro-democracy newspaper] would be if we were all quiet” (PH: 58). Jaja’s silence is soon lifted in Nsukka, while Kambili remains almost mute. Kambili compares herself to Jaja and describes her condition: “How did Jaja do it? How could he speak so easily? Didn’t he have the same bubbles of air in his throat, keeping the words back, letting out only a stutter at best?” (PH: 145). Kambili is bewildered that Jaja told Ifeoma about the abuse they have to endure at home: “Had Jaja forgotten that we never told, that there was so much that we never told?” (PH: 154). When Kambili learns that Jaja talked with Father Amadi about Eugene she is similarly startled: “What was wrong with Jaja, anyway?” (PH: 175). Kambili’s disbelief of Jaja’s increasing openness is emphasized by the focus on the shock of the experiencing I and the absence of any reflection by the narrating I. Kambili’s silence is presented as more persistent and the normality of her silence about Eugene’s oppressiveness is challenged by Jaja’s outspokenness.

Similar to her language, Kambili’s smile is inhibited by the fear of her father, which extends to the mere sight of the house, as can be seen in this example: “I wanted to smile, but we were driving past our house just then, and the sight of the looming black gates and white walls stiffened my lips” (PH: 82-83). After spending a day with Ifeoma, Kambili has a dream
about herself laughing, “but it did not sound like my laughter, although I was not sure what
my laughter sounded like. It was cackling and throaty and enthusiastic, like Aunty Ifeoma’s”
(Ph: 88). Kambili’s dream draws attention to the absence of laughter in her life, which she
seems to notice and desire for the first time in the presence of Ifeoma. Thus, the preceding
example foreshadows the significance of Ifeoma in Kambili’s transformative process. Father
Amadi provides a characterization of Kambili when he comments on the fact that he has not
seen her laugh or smile (cf. Ph: 139) and asks her if she knows how to smile (cf. Ph: 177).
The absence of laughter and smiles is contrasted with Kambili’s description that “[l]aughter
always rang out in Aunty Ifeoma’s house” (Ph: 140). Laughter denotes the absence of fear
and the freedom to speak openly in Ifeoma’s household, which is in stark contrast to the fear
of violence and the silence in Kambili’s home.

Ifeoma not only provides the framework for Kambili to speak and laugh, but actively
encourages Kambili to speak for herself rather than remain silent or repeat her father’s
opinions. For example, after defending Kambili several times against Amaka, Ifeoma
eventually asks Kambili if she has “no mouth” and tells her to talk back to her cousin (Ph: 170). Kambili indeed manages to produce calm words (cf. Ph: 170). During an afternoon
with Father Amadi in Nsukka, Kambili smiles for the first time in the narrative (cf. Ph: 177).
When she laughs for the first time Kambili is aware of its unfamiliarity: “It sounded strange,
as if I were listening to the recorded laughter of a stranger being played back. I was not sure I
had ever heard myself laugh” (Ph: 179). Kambili’s developing ability to respond to her
cousin and to smile and laugh indicates the beginnings of her transformation. Ifeoma
encourages Kambili to apply a hermeneutics of liberation to Igbo culture, which Kambili
previously rejected by repeating Eugene’s assertion that her grandfather is a “[...] heathen”
(Ph: 175). Ifeoma gives Kambili the opportunity to observe Papa-Nnukwu’s morning ritual
(cf. Ph: 167-169). In comparing Papa-Nnukwu’s morning ritual to the rosary her family says
at home, Kambili notices a contrast in the effects of these different forms of prayer: “[Papa-
Nnukwu] was still smiling as I quietly turned and went back to the bedroom. I never smiled
after we said the rosary back home. None of us did” (Ph: 169). This passage emphasizes
Kambili’s awareness and her beginning ability to analyse traditional and Christian rituals.
However, she does not provide an explicit evaluation, although the association of the
traditional morning ritual with smiling alludes to a positive evaluation in comparison to the
rosary.

While the structure of the novel emphasizes the significance of Palm Sunday, which is
marked by Jaja’s refusal to go to communion, it is Kambili’s more subtle act of shielding the
painting of Papa-Nnukwu she received as a present from Amaka that seems to be a turning point, indicating and apparently accelerating Kambili’s transformation. Kambili’s rebellion takes place after her return home from her first visit to Nsukka before Palm Sunday. Hewett interprets Amaka’s portrait of Papa-Nnukwu as a symbol of the expansion of Kambili’s world to include her grandfather, Ifeoma, her cousins and Father Amadi – a development resulting in a more critical stance towards Eugene (cf. Hewett 2005: 83). Kambili’s attempts to protect the pieces of the painting and her refusal to stop when attacked by Eugene are acts of defiance, which distinguish this attack from previous ones, indicating Kambili’s change (cf. Hewett 2005: 83). Nabutanyi interprets the imagery of Amaka’s “culturally conscious music” and her embrace of “the pieces of the painting [of Papa-Nnukwu]” (PH: 211) in Kambili’s description of Eugene’s physical punishment after discovering the painting as “her symbolic embrace of an alternative cultural and ethical sphere to that which her father seeks to inculcate” (Nabutanyi 2017: 82). Therefore, this scene can be considered as the manifestation of Kambili’s rebellion (cf. Nabutanyi 2017: 81). Kambili’s resistance is a non-violent refusal to sever her recently made bond to Papa-Nnukwu and Igbo tradition and a manifestation of a hermeneutics of commitment. After Eugene’s potentially fatal attack in response to Kambili’s rebellion, from which Kambili wakes up in hospital, Kambili rejects Beatrice’s vague and almost euphemistic language for describing her condition: “I stared at the movement of her lips. I was not seriously ill. She knew that. Why was she saying I was seriously ill?” (PH: 212). Kambili and Jaja visit Ifeoma and her family in Nsukka for the second time after Eugene’s violent attack on Kambili (cf. PH: 216). Kambili’s ability to express herself shows further improvement: In the course of a conversation with Amaka, Kambili notes that “[i]t felt easy saying that, letting the words roll off my tongue” (PH: 220). In response to Amaka’s direct question, Kambili for the first time identifies Eugene as the person responsible for her injuries, while at the same time addressing the silence surrounding the issue of violence in her family: “Nobody had asked, not even the doctor at the hospital or Father Benedict. I did not know what Papa had told them. Or if he had even told them anything” (PH: 220). In breaking her silence, Kambili draws attention to the persons and the institutions they represent that are complicit in domestic violence. It is also in Ifeoma’s house in Nsukka where Beatrice for the first time explicitly talks about an instance of domestic violence which caused her to miscarry, and names Eugene as the perpetrator (cf. PH: 248). During her second stay at Ifeoma’s house in Nsukka Kambili relates to language differently than before, which can be seen as a sign of her transformation. Kambili displays awareness of her silence in the past and the change she has undergone: When Kambili asks Amaka a question she notes that “I knew I would not
have asked before. I would have wondered about it, but I would not have asked” (PH: 223). In Nsukka Kambili experiences a different, a “comfortable silence” with Ifeoma’s family (PH: 247), which marks a contrast to the oppressive silence based on fear and violence in her home. Kambili’s relationship to Igbo culture has changed, as she seems to dismiss her father’s contempt of Igbo culture and sings Igbo songs with Father Amadi (cf. PH: 239), which she refused to do before (cf. PH: 138-139).

While Kambili’s protection of Papa-Nnukwu’s painting can be regarded as a subtle, personal rebellion, Jaja’s refusal to go to communion on Palm Sunday more directly impacts every member of the family. Jaja’s rebellion results in Eugene destroying Beatrice’s figurines, which symbolise the silent endurance of Eugene’s violence. The significance of the destruction of these symbols of suffering manifests itself in changes in Beatrice’s behaviour, which are observed by Kambili. Beatrice no longer speaks in whispers, does not suppress a small smile and openly instead of clandestinely brings food to Jaja’s room (cf. PH: 257-258). Kambili perceives the silence after Palm Sunday differently than before: “Even the silence that descended on the house was sudden, as though the old silence had broken and left us with the sharp pieces” (PH: 257). This metaphorical connection of the silence to the broken pieces of the figurines reflects the abrupt change caused by Jaja’s rebellion, the novelty of the situation, but also the remains of the past traumatic experiences. The destruction of the figurines and the changes in Beatrice’s behaviour foreshadow the end of Eugene’s strict patriarchal rule through domestic violence.

Another event indicating Kambili’s transformation through cultural hermeneutics is the apparition of Virgin Mary, which Kambili experiences after Palm Sunday on a pilgrimage to Aokpe.

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 sun turned white, the color 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 against mine. She was everywhere. (PH: 274-275)

Wallace identifies Kambili’s vision of Virgin Mary as a crucial moment in Kambili’s process of cultural hermeneutics (cf. Wallace 2012: 474-475). Stobie remarks on the significance of the “young black female catalyst for the apparition” as opposed to the white Mary at Kambili’s church, and the natural location as a contrast to the institutional setting of a church building (cf. Stobie 2010: 429). Wallace adds that the presence of Kambili’s Christian faith on her own hand, represented by “a red glow” (PH: 274), and Father Amadi’s smile emphasize “a Christianity marked by love and joy rather than anger and fear, a presence of the divine in
African bodies and faces” (Wallace 2012: 475). Kambili’s highly personal experience with the Mother of God is evidence of a transformative process moving away from her notion of a God with “white hands” (PH: 131) and a “British-accented” voice (PH: 179) who pronounces her name in the wrong way (PH: 179-180). Kambili’s transformation is different from Jaja’s defiance on Palm Sunday, as Wallace explains: While his refusal of the host signalizes a rejection of religion, which is also apparent in his critical attitude towards God after Eugene’s death (cf. PH: 289), Kambili’s development results in an affirmation of a different version of Christianity that appreciates the body, Igbo language and culture (cf. Wallace 2012: 474).

Laughter is another indicator of Kambili’s transformation. The absence of Kambili’s laughter is followed by laughter during her stay in Nsukka after Palm Sunday: “I laughed. It seemed so easy now, laughter. So many things seemed easy now” (PH: 284).

Kambili’s process of cultural hermeneutics is a complex one, as Adichie indicates by showing Kambili’s awareness and transformation as well as her brokenness and ambivalent emotions. The way in which the narrative is shaped demonstrates a certain degree of reflection, since the titles of the sections interlace religion and tradition. As Wallace (2012: 469) notes, the structuring force of Christianity in Purple Hibiscus is apparent in the subtitles “Palm Sunday” (PH: 1), “Before Palm Sunday” (PH: 17) and “After Palm Sunday” (PH: 255). However, the corresponding titles of the sections are “Breaking Gods” (PH: 1), “Speaking with Our Spirits” (PH: 17) and “The Pieces of Gods” (PH: 255), and the title of the last section of the novel is “A Different Silence: The Present” (PH: 293). “Breaking Gods” denotes the downfall of Eugene, Kambili’s “personal household god” (Stobie 2010: 423), and the disruption of silence and violence connected to Eugene’s patriarchal regime, symbolised by the destruction of Beatrice’s ceramic figurines. “Speaking with Our Spirits” refers to “the years when Jaja and Mama and I [Kambili] spoke more with our spirits than with our lips” (PH: 16), but might also allude to the mentoring role of Ifeoma and the formation of a connection to Igbo culture. The title “The Pieces of Gods” evokes an association with the broken figurines and the new and disrupted situation after Jaja’s open challenge of Eugene, which is a vacancy yet to be filled while memories of the ‘broken’ past are still very present. Kambili displays an awareness of the change within her family and its cause: “Nsukka started it all: Aunty Ifeoma’s little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence” (PH: 15-16). In the following example the narrating I is foregrounded in comments about the prayers for Beatrice’s forgiveness after her miscarriage, which was very likely a result of Eugene’s violence: “I did not think, I did not even think to think, what Mama needed to be forgiven for” (PH: 36). The narrator’s observation highlights the unquestioning naivety
of the experiencing I, demonstrating a change in Kambili’s beliefs within the period of time between the events of the story and the narrative transmission. The narrative I seems to be present also in Kambili’s rather comical description of Eugene, who is looking around in Ifeoma’s apartment, “as if waiting for Papa-Nnukwu to appear in a puff of heathen smoke” (PH: 188). While the experiencing I shares Eugene’s dismissive opinion of her Igbo grandfather, the narrating I, having developed a more inclusive approach to Igbo culture, is able to see a ridiculousness in Eugene’s behaviour. The narrating I is also foregrounded in the following passage, when Kambili speculates if she and Jaja perhaps provoked Eugene’s anger by discarding their usual carefulness when looking at a painting of their dead grandfather (cf. PH: 209): “Perhaps it was what we wanted to happen, Jaja and I, without being aware of it. Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka – even Papa – and things were destined to not be the same, to not be in their original order” (PH: 209). Here the narrator speaks from a temporal distance, voicing a speculation on the significance of Nsukka.

However, Kambili’s development does not result in an uncomplicated liberation. Kambili’s initial reaction to Jaja’s act of rebellion is an overwhelming feeling of pressure: “[...] I felt suffocated. The off-white walls with the framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me. Even the glass dining table was moving toward me” (PH: 7). After Palm Sunday Kambili is in a liminal state, having not yet adapted to the situation brought about by Jaja’s open rebellion, which can be seen in her observation that “[i]t was too new, too foreign, and I did not know what to be or how to be” (PH: 258). This introspective comment can be attributed to Kambili as a narrator, who views her younger self from a distance that enables reflection. After Palm Sunday, Kambili’s relationship with Eugene is ambivalent, since she simultaneously longs for closeness and Eugene’s approval and distance from her father, which she reveals when asked by Father Amadi if she wanted to talk to her father on the phone:

I did want to talk to Papa, to hear his voice, to tell him what I had eaten and what I had prayed about so that he would approve, so that he would smile so much his eyes would crinkle at the edges. And yet, I did not want to talk to him; I wanted to leave with Father Amadi, or with Aunty Ifeoma, and never come back. (PH: 268)

The limited possibilities of development for Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice after their traumatic experiences are foreshadowed in a conversation between Kambili and her brother (cf. PH: 259). The child of the family acquaintance and journalist Ade Coker stopped talking after her father’s death and started to speak again after therapies which (ironically) Eugene paid for (cf. PH: 259). Jaja remarks, “‘She may have started talking now, but she will never heal’” (PH: 259). Jaja’s notion that full recovery after trauma is highly unlikely can be applied to the
conditions of Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice, too, towards the end of the novel, since all of them remain affected by their traumatic experiences. Kambili’s relationship to Eugene remains ambiguous after his death, since she still longs to hear Eugene’s footsteps, for example (cf. *PH*: 289-290). After her father’s death Kambili’s identity is in a state of disintegration: “[T]here were painfully scattered bits inside me that I could never put back because the places they fit into were gone” (*PH*: 290). This observation emphasizes the high degree to which Kambili’s identity is built on Eugene, and Kambili’s incomplete transformation, with remaining parts of the past that do not fit into her present state. The last section of the novel, which describes the narrator’s present, sheds light on the characters’ development. Beatrice’s appearance in the present is characterized by dishevelment, fidgetiness, absentness and wordlessness (cf. *PH*: 295, 298). In a turn of tragic irony, the reader learns that Beatrice reclaimed language for herself to inform people that she is guilty of Eugene’s murder but was disbelieved (cf. *PH*: 296). Ndula characterizes Beatrice’s silence in the last section of the novel as a “deliberate silence which is not painful this time because it is voluntary” (Ndula 2017: 40). I consider Beatrice’s silence as indicative of the lasting psychological impact of Eugene’s violence, her act of murder and Jaja’s stay in prison on her behalf. Beatrice’s silence does not seem entirely “voluntary” (Ndula 2017: 40), particularly since she is silenced and denied agency by the public’s disbelief when she makes an effort to tell everyone that she murdered Eugene (cf. *PH*: 296). There is still silence between Kambili and Beatrice about a range of topics including “bribes to judges and policemen and prison guards,” their wealth and Eugene’s anonymous donations (*PH*: 297). “There is still so much that we do not say with our voices that we do not turn into words” (*PH*: 297). Silence not only determines the relationship between Kambili and Beatrice but also the one between Kambili and Jaja. Whether the future of their relationship will bring improvement or stagnation is left open: “Perhaps we will talk more with time, or perhaps we never will be able to say it all, to clothe things in words, things that have long been naked” (*PH*: 306). Kambili’s feelings about Eugene remain conflicted: She perceives the silence of the past as negative and threatening, while she also wishes to see Eugene in her dreams (cf. *PH*: 305-306). The present is permeated by a silence which is not as oppressive as the one in the past. However, Kambili is still haunted by the past in her dreams.

Silence hangs over us, but it is a different kind of silence, one that lets me breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive. In my nightmares, it mixes with shame and grief and so many other things that I cannot name, and forms blue tongues of fire that rest above my head, like Pentecost, until I wake up screaming and sweating. (*PH*: 305)
Wallace emphasizes the unsettling image of the burning tongues of Kambili’s nightmares in the context of “Kambili’s literally and figuratively burned tongue” (Wallace 2012: 476). The originally positive image of Pentecost as the descent of the Holy Spirit receives a negative connotation (cf. Wallace 2012: 476). Wallace argues that the tongues of fire in Kambili’s nightmares “emphasize the overdetermined symbols at work in Kambili’s faith and psyche and leave the readers at the novel’s end with a sense that her work negotiating that faith is far from finished” (Wallace 2012: 476). Wallace considers Kambili’s narrative of her past, told from the present of the novel’s last section, as evidence of Kambili’s “healing” although she still has not fully gained language (Wallace 2012: 478). Wallace interprets the ending of *Purple Hibiscus* as tentatively hopeful, yet ambivalent (cf. Wallace 2012: 478). One event towards the end of the novel, which on the one hand indicates a positive reading of the novel’s ending, is arguably the most ambiguous one from a feminist point of view. When Kambili asks Beatrice to tighten her scarf Beatrice dismisses her daughter’s request (cf. *PH*: 296). Jaja recognises and addresses the same issue, which causes Beatrice to quickly readjust the garment (cf. *PH*: 306). Kambili’s surprise at Jaja’s taking notice of the loose scarf and Beatrice’s reaction (cf. *PH*: 306) hints at a positive interpretation of the interaction, which indicates that the characters’ presence of mind is unusual and hopeful with regard to the future. However, the fact that Jaja’s comment is immediately followed by Beatrice’s action, while she ignored Kambili’s direct request, evokes the idea that Jaja seems to have assumed the role of the male head of the family who is obeyed by his mother, while Kambili’s voice has less or no authority. The ambiguity of this passage emphasizes the potential danger of Beatrice’s (and perhaps also Kambili’s) return to similar patriarchal structures which Beatrice broke open by murdering Eugene. The ambiguity of this scene and the silence of the present are in contrast to the more positive images of Kambili’s laughter and plans for the future. In the present, Kambili is still capable of laughter, which can be seen in a short flashback to a recent visit to Nsukka (cf. *PH*: 299). The significance of this place is emphasized as one of the reasons for Kambili’s laughter: “Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song. As laughter” (*PH*: 299). The description of laughter as a ‘freedom song’ highlights its subversive power in oppressive systems. Kambili maintains a positive outlook on the future, making plans to go to Nsukka, visit Ifeoma in the U.S. and plant purple hibiscus (cf. *PH*: 306-307), which is a symbol of freedom throughout the novel. Upon leaving the prison after having told Jaja of his impending release, Kambili laughs and Beatrice smiles (cf. *PH*: 307).
In accordance with Wallace (2012: 478) and Nabutanyi (2017: 84) I also consider the ending of *Purple Hibiscus* as ambivalent. The novel shows its protagonist’s application of “a practice of cultural hermeneutics that combines critique and embrace” (Wallace 2012: 474). Mentored primarily by Ifeoma, Kambili transforms her approach to religion and Igbo culture through cultural hermeneutics, but Eugene’s death does not result in a perfect liberation, and the impact of her past is not erased. Andrade remarks that the narration indicates “that the lives of Kambili and those she holds dear are far from being settled, all of which makes the resolution less credible” (Andrade 2011: 98). Nabutanyi emphasizes the “lingering effects of abuse” apparent in the contrast between Eugene haunting Kambili’s dreams and the plans of growing purple hibiscus, whose colour is reminiscent of Beatrice’s black eye (Nabutanyi 2017: 83). According to Nabutanyi “[t]he similarity between the bruises and the purple flowers as symbols of freedom shows the struggle both to achieve healing from abuse and to cope with the indelible memories of cruel and horrible experiences” (Nabutanyi 2017: 83). Duran regards Kambili as “a natural critic of the Igbo society that she sees manifested in the behaviour of her abusive father, Eugene, and her compliant mother” (Duran 2017: 47). Instead of basing Eugene’s abusive behaviour and Beatrice’s passivity mainly on the fact that the characters are part of Igbo society, as is suggested by Duran, I rather argue that they are informed by patriarchal mindsets inscribed in both Christianity and Igbo culture, and in particular Eugene’s religious fanaticism as a consequence of colonial missionary education. Moreover, I would rather refer to Kambili as an observer and analyser who has yet to find her voice to express critique more directly, since Kambili displays awareness but never overtly evaluates the actions of Eugene and Beatrice. The narrative itself is the written testimony of Kambili’s ongoing transformation, as Kambili’s reclamation of speech can be considered “a metaphor of post-traumatic recovery and survival” (Nabutanyi 2017: 84). Hewett reads Kambili as “a figure for the silenced woman writer,” who in the fight for freedom from her father’s rule “finally comes to bear witness, through language, to her experience of the world” (Hewett 2005: 88). The narration of Kambili’s life is integral to the healing of “the traumatic dismemberment between her voice and her consciousness” and enables an existence “as a whole person with a future as well as a past” (Hewett 2005: 88).

4.5. Positive representation of a feminist

In *Purple Hibiscus* Adichie depicts “a Happy African Feminist” (*WSABF*: 10) through the character of Ifeoma, whose femininity, positive attitude towards the female body, and criticism of problematic elements of marriage are reminiscent of feminism as defined by Adichie in *We Should All Be Feminists* and *Dear Ijeawele*. Ifeoma is also the crucial mentor
figure in enabling Kambili’s practice of cultural hermeneutics by providing a contrast to Eugene and by applying cultural hermeneutics herself, voicing bold critique of troublesome aspects of Christianity and Igbo culture, while at the same time combining the positive aspects of both.

Kambili characterizes Ifeoma as a happy and vocal person, who is unafraid to give her opinion. The first indication of Ifeoma’s presence is her loud laughter (cf. PH: 71). “She laughed so easily, so often” (PH: 85). Ifeoma’s laughter and Kambili’s description of her aunt as a determined and confident woman are in striking contrast to the passivity, silence and endurance of violence which mark the characters of Kambili and Beatrice. Kambili associates Ifeoma’s confidence with her fast and eloquent language: “She walked fast, like one who knew just where she was going and what she was going to do there. And she spoke the way she walked, as if to get as many words out of her mouth as she could in the shortest time” (PH: 71). Not only Kambili perceives Ifeoma as a confident person, also her hairdresser Mama Joe characterizes her as “[…] [a] strong woman” (PH: 237). Ifeoma's laughter and general contentedness contradict the stereotype of a woman who is unhappy because she is unmarried (cf. WSABF: 9), and renders her an excellent example of “a Happy African Feminist” (WSABF: 10). The first-person narrator significantly uses the word ‘fearless’ often to describe Ifeoma (cf. PH: 76, 89, 95). Kambili is fascinated by Ifeoma: “I watched every movement she made; I could not tear my ears away. It was the fearlessness about her, about the way she gestured as she spoke, the way she smiled to show that wide gap” (PH: 76). Ifeoma’s apparent lack of fear is in stark contrast to Kambili’s fear-infused life. Ifeoma’s fearlessness seems to relate specifically to the way in which she interacts with her dominant brother on eye level. In these instances, Kambili perceives Ifeoma’s behaviour as threatening to her idolised image of Eugene and is shocked: “Every time Aunty Ifeoma spoke to Papa, my heart stopped, then started again in a hurry. It was the flippant tone; she did not seem to recognize that it was Papa, that he was different, special” (PH: 77). Ndula notes that Ifeoma’s fearlessness, laughter and loudness “speak to the way she parts with the social constructs of her society for her gender” (Ndula 2017: 38). Ifeoma disregards any hierarchy between her and Eugene that might be constructed based on gender or economic power when she persuades Eugene to allow her to take Kambili and Jaja to a traditional Igbo festival (cf. PH: 77), obtains his permission to let his children visit her (cf. PH: 78), and reprimands him for his reaction to their father’s death (cf. PH: 188). Ifeoma reflects Adichie’s resolution to be unapologetic for her femininity (cf. WSABF: 39): She wears a dress (cf. PH: 71), lipstick (cf. PH: 74) and high heels (cf. PH: 89), thus having a ‘feminine’ physical appearance. This
aspect of the character of Ifeoma is an exemplification of Adiche’s belief that “[f]eminism and femininity are not mutually exclusive” (DI: 43). Ifeoma also displays a positive attitude towards women’s bodies and sexuality, when she openly addresses Kambili’s developing body (cf. PH: 72), wears shorts (cf. PH: 112) and does a spontaneous dance of joy about gas cylinders, “moving her arms in rowing motions, throwing each leg in front of her and stamping down hard” (PH: 113). Duran observes that the complex nature of the female characters in Purple Hibiscus “helps us to understand gender relations in at least certain parts of West Africa today” (Duran 2017: 45), and that Adiche’s description of women on the marketplace, for example when Kambili gets her hair done (cf. PH: 236-239), sheds light on possible realities of the lives of urban lower class women, which is a contrast to the upper-middle class life of the Achikes and Ifeoma’s academic household (cf. Duran 2017: 53). Both Ifeoma and Kambili’s hairdresser from the market can be regarded as “unconventional women and sources of fortitude” who present an alternative to passive and complicit Beatrice (Duran 2017: 48).

Ifeoma’s style of motherhood reminds Kambili of “a football coach who had done a good job with her team and was satisfied to stand next to the eighteen-yard box and watch” (PH: 120-121). The open way in which Ifeoma raises her children, letting them express their opinions, is in stark contrast to Eugene’s oppressive behaviour demanding obedience to his rules which are informed by his religious fanaticism. The result of these radically different upbringings is the silence / speech dichotomy represented by Eugene’s children in contrast to Ifeoma’s children, which is perhaps most visible when comparing Kambili to Amaka. During her second time in Nsukka Kambili draws a direct comparison between the ways in which Ifeoma and Eugene raise their children, showing awareness of the difference and providing a negative evaluation of Eugene’s way of bringing up his children. Ifeoma sets the bar higher and higher in terms of her conversations with and expectations of her children, lead by the belief in their ability to go over the bar while “[w]e [i.e. Kambili and Jaja] did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn’t” (PH: 226). In Ifeoma’s household gender roles are not perpetuated. The chores in Ifeoma’s household are divided among her children, seemingly regardless of their gender (cf. PH: 140). The results of Ifeoma’s way of raising her children are perhaps most visible in her daughter Amaka. Being the same age as Kambili, Amaka functions as a contrastive figure highlighting Kambili’s silence. Amaka differs from Ifeoma insofar as she is characterized as even more confident and more idealistic:
Amaka was a thinner, teenage copy of her mother. She walked and talked even faster and with more purpose than Aunty Ifeoma did. Only her eyes were different; they did not have the unconditional warmth of Aunty Ifeoma’s. They were quizzical eyes, eyes that asked many questions and did not accept many answers. (PH: 78)

The contrast between Amaka’s fluency and Kambili’s silence and impaired speech cause Amaka to become an object of Kambili’s fascination: “I wondered how Amaka did it, how she opened her mouth and had words flow easily out” (PH: 99). The characterization of Amaka indicates that Amaka will grow up to be as outspoken, bold and joyful as her mother.

4.6. Cultural hermeneutics as a feminist tool

Ifeoma applies cultural hermeneutics to Christianity and Igbo culture, since she adopts and affirms positive aspects and criticizes negative elements. This approach is consistent with Adichie’s advice to “embrace” positive cultural elements and “reject” negative ones (DI: 39). Kambili establishes a positive association between Ifeoma and Igbo culture by means of a comparison to a powerful female ancestor: “I imagined a proud ancient forebear, walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots, nursing babies until they walked and talked, fighting wars with machetes sharpened on sun-warmed stone” (PH: 80). Ifeoma’s use of Igbo (cf. PH: 77) stands in stark contrast to Eugene’s refusal to speak Igbo in public and his conviction that English is “civilized” (PH: 13). Ifeoma not only embraces the language, she also accepts Papa-Nnukwu’s faith and refers to him as a “traditionalist” (PH: 81, 166) as opposed to “heathen” (PH: 166), which is the term Kambili initially uses, mirroring Eugene’s rejection of traditional faith. Ifeoma provides insights into Igbo culture which foster understanding by taking the children to a traditional festival (cf. PH: 84), and waking up Kambili to observe Papa-Nnukwu’s morning ritual (cf. PH: 167). However, Ifeoma also challenges misogynist tendencies in Igbo culture by reacting to Papa-Nnukwu’s sexist comment “‘But you are a woman. You do not count’” (PH: 83) with “‘Eh? So I don’t count? Has Eugene ever asked you about your aching leg? If I do not count, then I will stop asking if you rose well in the morning’” (PH: 83). Ifeoma reacts to Papa-Nnukwu’s notion that she is in need of a husband by explaining she would rather need a promotion (cf. PH: 83), thereby rejecting the stereotypical notions that women should exclusively aspire to marriage and are in need of a man as a provider, which Adichie criticizes (cf. DI: 57-59).

Most of Ifeoma’s direct critique focuses on society’s idea of marriage, as has been mentioned previously. Ifeoma challenges Beatrice’s gratefulness to Eugene for not leaving her and highlights problematic aspects about young women’s marriages. Ifeoma suggests that the failure of a marriage can also have particularly negative effects on the husband, not solely the wife, and thus points out the sexist notion identified by Adichie that only women are
affected negatively by the end of a marriage (cf. WSABF: 25): “Stop it, stop being grateful. If Eugene had done that [i.e. taken another wife], he would have been the loser, not you” (PH: 75). In her profession as a lecturer at university she notices that her students “[…] marry earlier and earlier these days […]” (PH: 75). Ifeoma remarks on the implications of young women’s economic dependence in marriages, which results in a state she compares to ownership (cf. PH: 75). In terms of Beatrice’s marriage to Eugene, Ifeoma condemns Eugene’s violence and attempts to persuade Beatrice to keep a distance from him (cf. PH: 213, 249-250). In doing so, Ifeoma challenges “the seemingly fixed stereotype about married people [that] leaves matrimonial victims with no other choice but to remain in an abusive and enslaving relationship” (Ndula 2017: 38).

Ifeoma’s Christian faith differs considerably from Eugene’s fundamentalism. She prays for example for the university, the lecturers, the administration, Nigeria (cf. PH: 126) and “peace and laughter” (PH: 127). Ifeoma seems to be able to see the divine in nature, when she describes colourful leaves “[…] [I]ike God playing with paint brushes” (PH: 142). In Ifeoma’s household the discussions between the older two of her children and the local priest Father Amadi about missionary projects and colonisation (cf. PH: 267, 271-272) foster a hermeneutics of suspicion. Perhaps most significantly, Ifeoma includes Igbo songs in the rosary (cf. PH: 125, 126) and thus applies a hermeneutics of liberation and commitment to integrate elements of Igbo culture in Christianity, creating a transformed faith. Wallace considers Ifeoma (as well as Father Amadi) as representatives of “an alternative mode of Christianity” who blend elements of Igbo tradition into their Christian faith (Wallace 2012: 473). In Purple Hibiscus Christianity and Igbo culture are not only represented in a negative light with a focus on oppressive elements, they are also presented as “sources of healing and hope” (Wallace 2012: 473). It is significant that Ifeoma employs cultural hermeneutics to criticize cultural elements that disadvantage women, which renders cultural hermeneutics a feminist tool. Adichie uses the character of Ifeoma as a positive representative of a feminist who applies cultural hermeneutics as a feminist tool, which serves as a model for Kambili’s own process of transformation.
5. FEMALE RESISTANCE AGAINST SEXISM AND OPPRESSIVE MARRIAGES: SELECTED SHORT STORIES BY ADICHIE

Adichie’s short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*, written between 2002 and 2009 (cf. Carotenuto 2017: 176) and first published in 2009, includes a variety of stories set in the U.S. or Nigeria which revolve around university life, riots and the Biafran War, marriage and experiences of transmigration. Adichie’s short stories have so far received only little attention from scholars. In her deconstructive reading of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Silvana Carotenuto focuses on metafictional elements in the stories and points out the theme of gender and immigration (cf. Carotenuto 2017: 175, 176). Referring to Adichie’s TED talk “The Danger of A Single Story” (TED 2009), which is a critique of one-dimensional, stereotypical images of Africa as Africans, Carotenuto regards “[t]he expression of the danger of the single story, the public discussion on the condition of women” as “Adichie’s intellectual mission” (Carotenuto 2017: 172). Maitrayee Misra and Manish Shrivastava identify the themes of dislocation and the formation of transcultural identities as central in *The Thing Around Your Neck* (cf. Misra and Shrivastava 2017: 186) and observe that the majority of “the well-depicted dislocated fictional characters are women” (Misra and Shrivastava 2017: 187). Except for one story, all of the short stories focus on women’s experiences, since Adichie almost exclusively uses female focalizers. The women of Adichie’s stories differ in terms of their backgrounds, locations, circumstances and experiences, rendering *The Thing Around Your Neck* a collection of women’s voices that is above generalizing female experiences.

In the stories “Jumping Monkey Hill,” “Imitation” and “The Arrangers of Marriage,” which I selected for my analysis, gender is a central issue and essential to the development of the stories. In the following subchapters, the three stories are discussed individually and a brief summary precedes each analysis. In my analysis of “Jumping Monkey Hill” I will discuss the way in which Adichie shows the complexities of sexual harassment and a woman’s struggle to make her voice heard, and eventually emphasizes the importance of drawing attention to everyday examples of sexism (cf. DI: 28). In this chapter I will also show how “Imitation” and “The Arrangers of Marriage” reflect aspects of Adichie’s feminist critique of marriage by analysing the characters’ attitudes towards marriage and the stories’ representation of power imbalance and female resistance. Transmigration, which has been part of the focus of critical work on *The Thing Around Your Neck* (cf. Carotenuto 2017, Misra and Shrivastava 2017), is considered as a context relevant to “Imitation” and “The Arrangers of Marriage” rather than a separate criterion of analysis. This chapter as a whole tries to demonstrate that Adichie’s stories are not only concerned with criticism of expectations and
mindsets which enable and perpetuate gender inequality, but, even more importantly, show female resilience and resistance in the face of patriarchal oppression.

5.1. “Jumping Monkey Hill”

In “Jumping Monkey Hill” Adichie tells the story of a young Nigerian writer, Ujunwa, who participates in the African Writers Workshop. The third-person narration follows Ujunwa’s interactions with other workshop participants, the British workshop organizer, Sir Edward, and his wife. The short story which Ujunwa produces in the course of the workshop is embedded in the narrative and turns out to be autobiographical. In the course of the story Ujunwa is confronted with sexism, sexual harassment and the difficulty of how to react.

One of the story’s most prominent themes is the complex nature of sexual harassment and women’s struggles with whether or not to share their story and how to react to sexism. The story traces Ujunwa’s experience with sexual harassment from the very subtle beginnings to uncomfortable looks and openly sexist comments. Upon their first encounter Ujunwa, the focalizer of the story, perceives Sir Edward, who is an “Oxford-trained Africanist” (JMH: 108) and the organizer of the workshop, as “an old man in a summer hat who smiled to show two front teeth the color of mildew” (JMH: 95-96). The recount of their conversation includes brief descriptions of Sir Edward’s actions during the interaction, which appear suspiciously familiar and intrusive on Ujunwa’s personal space. For example, he greets her by kissing her “on both cheeks” (JMH: 96), “moved a little and sat closer to her” (JMH: 96), keeps asking about Ujunwa’s occupation despite her disinterest in having a conversation signalised by yawns (cf. JMH: 96), and observes her “intently” (JMH: 96). Ujunwa soon becomes aware of Edward’s looks: “At first, Ujunwa tried not to notice that Edward often stared at her body, that his eyes were never on her face but always lower” (JMH: 106). Ujunwa’s attempts to ignore Edward’s glances indicate that she is highly uncomfortable with the situation and unwilling to face the reality of being objectified and sexualised. When Ujunwa offers her chair in the shade to Edward, his remark is openly sexist and harassing: “Would you like me to stand up for you, Edward?” ‘I’d rather like you to lie down for me,’ he said. The moment was humid, thick; a bird cawed from far away” (JMH: 106). Edward seems to perceive his comment as witty, as he is “grinning” (JMH: 106). The other two witnesses of this exchange are two male workshop participants, one of whom begins to laugh (cf. JMH: 106). Ujunwa joins his laughter, “because it was funny and witty, she told herself, when you really thought about it” (JMH: 106). The laughter of one of the witnesses could either be a sign of his approval of the ‘joke’ or an expression of his embarrassment or discomfort. The silence of the other witness suggests that he does not perceive the remark as a joke but chooses to ignore it.
The fact that Ujunwa has to convince herself to perceive Edward’s comment as humorous indicates that she initially disapproves of the remark and is unsure of how to react. Ujunwa questions herself instead of clearly regarding the comment (and Edward’s behaviour in general) as offensive. The incident occupies Ujunwa’s mind and she wants to tell another female workshop participant about it but then remains silent (cf. JMH: 106). On the following day Ujunwa reproaches herself for her reaction:

[...] Ujunwa felt a self-loathing burst open in the bottom of her stomach. She should not have laughed when Edward said ‘I’d rather like you to lie down for me.’ It had not been funny. It had not been funny at all. She had hated it, hated the grin on his face and the glimpse of greenish teeth and the way he always looked at her chest rather than her face, the way his eyes climbed all over her, and yet she had made herself laugh like a deranged hyena. (JMH: 109)

Only after a day of thinking about the sexist incident, Ujunwa is able to admit to herself her disgust of Edward and his behaviour. She then openly addresses her observation that “Edward is always looking at [her] body” to three other workshop participants, who all reveal to have noticed Edward’s gazes (JMH: 109). Ujunwa feels “strangely betrayed” (JMH: 109), which seems to indicate that Ujunwa had felt alone with her observation and did not expect to be believed, but also that she is disappointed or angry that none of them had addressed the issue. Ujunwa learns that “Edward had just told the Senegalese that he had dreamed of her naked navel” and “envie[s] her confident calm” (JMH: 111). The following passage reveals some of the complexities of sexual harassment: “She felt upset, too, to hear that Edward was making suggestive remarks to someone else, and she wondered what her pique meant. Had she come to see his ogling as her due?” (JMH: 111). Ujunwa’s difficulty in making sense of her emotions shows that she (and other women) might have been socialized to consider (male) attention focused on their bodies as a distinction. This problem is also expressed in Ujunwa’s short story when her protagonist Chioma expects to be perceived in a sexual way and is somehow disappointed when this is not the case (cf. JMH: 104). Through her character Ujunwa, who is aware of and reflecting on her resentment, Adichie is able to show the ambiguous feelings of a woman dealing with sexual harassment without implicitly blaming her for not speaking up. Ujunwa questions the silence when it comes to sexual harassment: “She raised her voice and looked at the others. ‘Why do we always say nothing?’” (JMH: 112). Her question remains unanswered until sometime later when the one workshop participant says that “Edward was connected and could find them a London agent; there was no need to antagonize the man, no need to close doors to opportunity” (JMH: 113). For the first time, the power dynamics of the workshop are directly addressed, as this participant highlights Edward’s power to improve the lives of the group of writers. Edward’s relative
power as the organizer of the workshop responsible for choosing the best story for publication can be seen as a strong motive for Ujunwa’s conflicted feelings about the sexual harassment she is subjected to.

While Adichie’s protagonist Ujunwa does not believe in “fiction as therapy” (JMH: 103), she certainly uses fiction as a way to point out women’s experiences with sexual harassment. Ujunwa gives the protagonist of the embedded story a “common” name (JMH: 100), which might indicate that sexual harassment is a 'common' experience which can happen to ordinary women. The story-within-a-story follows the young female protagonist Chioma, who is applying for jobs in Lagos. It begins with an incident of sexual harassment during a job interview: “After the first few questions, the man says he will hire her and then walks across and stands behind her and reaches over her shoulders to squeeze her breasts. She hisses, ‘Stupid man! You cannot respect yourself’ and leaves” (JMH: 100). The situation in this example is pervaded by power imbalance, since Chioma, as the applicant for the job, is dependent on the male employer’s approval. Still, she defends herself and does not accept the job offer. It is significant that her reproach does not attack the man for his disrespect for women but for a lack of respect for himself. It is made clear that men’s actions towards women should not be determined by reverence for the ‘weaker sex’ but by general human decency, which echoes Adichie’s critique of ‘Feminism Lite’ with its presupposition that men are inherently superior to women and therefore “expected to ‘treat women well’” (DI: 21).

During her next job interview Chioma has a different experience with the interviewer: “She is used to men’s attention and is sulky that he does not look at her as a man looks at a woman [...]” (JMH: 104). Chioma’s expectation of being perceived in a sexual way is not fulfilled, which leaves her irritated. Her irritation mirrors Ujunwa’s resentment when Edward inappropriately comments on another woman. The events in the embedded narrative, as well as in the framing narrative, emphasize that Chioma and Ujunwa feel uncomfortable and disgusted about being objectified and sexually harassed, but at the same time seem to be conditioned to expect the sexualization of their bodies. Chioma starts her job of gaining new customers for a bank and she accompanies her colleague Yinka to an alhaji:

The alhaji speaks to Yinka but looks often at Chioma. Then he asks Yinka to come closer and explain the high-interest savings accounts to him and then he asks her to sit on his lap and doesn’t she think he’s strong enough to carry her? Yinka says of course he is and sits on his lap, smiling a serene smile. (JMH: 104)

It seems tragically ironic that the job interviewer who did not display sexist behaviour hired Chioma to use her body in order to attract wealthy male customers. The alhaji exploits the women’s supposedly professional visit for inappropriate physical contact. The situation seems
unreal to Chioma, who “feels as if she is acting a play” (JMH: 110). The alhaji agrees to do business with the bank, provided that Chioma becomes his personal contact (cf. JMH: 110). When the alhaji offers perfume to the women, Chioma leaves the house and quits her job (cf. JMH: 111). By doing so she refuses to be part of a system based on the objectification of the female body, transforming it into a commodity that is being exploited to enhance business.

The reception of Ujunwa’s story illustrates and eventually disarms criticism of an account of sexual harassment and feminist writing. While some of Ujunwa’s fellow writers consider the story to be “strong,” “believable” and a “realistic portrayal of what women were going through in Nigeria” (JMH: 113), Edward dismisses the authenticity of the story, claiming “‘It’s never quite like that in real life, is it? Women are never victims in that sort of crude way and certainly not in Nigeria. Nigeria has women in high positions. The most powerful cabinet minister today is a woman’” (JMH: 113-114). By having a white, old European man criticize the authenticity of a story whose author and protagonist are his polar opposite, Adichie seems to emphasize the audacity of men who ignore and belittle women’s voices and experiences. Edward seems to imply that sexism is a problem of the past and not relevant anymore, which is a male reaction to feminism, as Adichie notes in We Should All Be Feminists (cf. WSABF: 42). Since Edward is revealed to be a sexist in the course of the story, whose remarks are worthy of the attribute ‘crude,’ which he uses in his evaluation of Ujunwa’s story, his critique can instantly be recognised as hypocrisy. When Edward declares that Ujunwa’s story “[...] isn’t a real story of real people” (JMH: 114), Ujunwa reacts with laughter and explains that the story is an autobiographical account of her experiences (cf. JMH: 114). According to Silvana Carotenuto, “Jumping Monkey Hill” embodies “the required task, the proof of a possible talent, the girl’s laughter in the face of canonical standard and judgemental formality” (Carotenuto 2017: 180). Ujunwa defies the canon as seen by a British Africanist by providing a feminist story about a Nigerian woman’s experiences. The disclosure that the embedded story is a flashback of the framing story’s protagonist which was turned into a third-person narration not only manifests the ‘authenticity’ of the embedded story, but by extension suggests that the framing story is a possible story, close to real life. In other words, the mise en abyme – structure of the story contributes to a confirmation of both stories. Adichie seems to use the metafictional elements in the short story to highlight both the fictionality of the story as well as the function of fiction in mediating real-life experiences and making them accessible to readers. “Jumping Monkey Hill” illustrates the importance which Adichie attaches to everyday examples when addressing sexism (cf. DI: 28) and shows a woman’s struggle to make her voice audible and
believable. At the end of the story, Ujunwa “wonder[s] whether this ending, in a story, would be considered plausible” (JMH: 114).

5.2. “Imitation”

The story “Imitation” opens with Nkem finding out about her husband’s girlfriend. In their American home full of imitations of African masks, Nkem contemplates her life with her husband Obiora, who lives and works in Nigeria for most of the time, while Nkem and the children live in the U.S. all year. Before Obiora’s arrival Nkem deviates from her usual preparations, for example, by cutting her hair. Nkem eventually tells her husband that she wants to return to Nigeria with the children.

Nkem’s reflection on her relationship with Obiora reveals a power imbalance within the marriage, with Nkem tending towards passivity and submission to Obiora’s opinion. Nkem is the focalizer in the third-person narration and shows a vivid imagination. Looking at the imitation of a Benin mask, Nkem recalls what her husband told her about it but also imagines the custodians of the mask “wishing they did not have to behead strangers to bury their king, wishing they could use the masks to protect themselves, too, wishing they had a say” (I: 23). Nkem’s idea of the people’s longing for a more democratic system seems to reflect Nkem’s situation in her marriage. The relationship between Nkem and Obiora is dominated by what Obiora tells Nkem, what he says, decides and does. Numerous times throughout the story Nkem repeats something which Obiora “told her” (I: 23, 25, 27) or something he “said” (I: 24, 25, 26). Nkem is an attentive listener when her husband talks about masks, although she occasionally “doubts Obiora’s facts” (I: 25). Obiora states ‘facts’ concerning the couple’s marriage when Nkem tells him that the neighbours ask about their living separately most of the time: He tells his wife that this is the way white people are, who consider everything that deviates from what they know as strange (cf. I: 24). Nkem remains silent despite knowing many Nigerian couples who share a home (cf. I: 25). This example shows Nkem’s passivity in the relationship as opposed to Obiora’s power. Like Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*, Nkem is yet another example of a silenced wife in Adichie’s fiction, whose husband has occupied language and claims to speak for his wife. Not only does Obiora hold power in terms of language, but he also makes the decisions, including those which impact Nkem and their children. It was Obiora who rented and bought the house in which Nkem and her children live (cf. I: 24); the married couple does not act together. Nkem is aware of her lack of impact on these decisions, since “[s]he liked it when he said ‘we,’ as though she really had a say in it” (I: 26). The couple “never decided that she would stay with the children [...]. It just happened” (I: 26). However, staying in the U.S. did not ‘just happen’ to Nkem, but was
determined by Obiora’s actions, who persuaded Nkem to take computer courses, registered their daughter for preschool and found an elementary school close to their home (cf. I: 27). Again, Nkem remains silent: “She had never imagined that her children would go to school, sit side by side with white children whose parents owned mansions on lonely hills, never imagined this life. So she said nothing” (I: 27). After winning a government contract, Obiora decides to merely visit in the summer (cf. I: 27). The couple’s marriage is characterized by inequality according to Adichie’s standards, since in their marriage compromise is expected of the wife rather than the husband (cf. WSABF: 31), as Obiora is the only decision-maker of the family, to whose plans Nkem silently complies. This description of Nkem’s relationship with Obiora is reminiscent of the metaphors of the man as the head and the woman as the neck, or the man as driver and the woman as the passenger in the front seat, which Adichie attributes to ‘Feminism Lite’ with its reinforcement of male superiority (cf. DI: 20-21).

According to Adichie, inequality in terms of compromise or sacrifice within marriage is based on the idea that marriage is the achievement in life which women should aspire to (cf. DI: 30-31). “Imitation” illustrates Adichie’s stance by showing Nkem’s lack of decision-making power in her relationship in connection to the considerable significance she attaches to marriage. Before her relationship with Obiora, Nkem dated married men, who helped her support her family by paying for hospital bills, repairs and furniture (cf. I: 31). Nkem’s incentive to date, but also to marry, were the expectations she was supposed to fulfil as the eldest daughter in her family; for example, she would have married one of her lovers in order to be able to support her younger siblings’ education (cf. I: 31). Nkem seemed to be under immense pressure to help provide for her family, which is possible for her only through affairs or marriage. Because of Obiora her siblings can attend school and he “moved her out” of her old self-contained flat into a new one with a balcony (I: 32). “When he asked if she would marry him, she thought how unnecessary it was, his asking, since she would have been happy simply to be told” (I: 32). Nkem appears to be completely submissive to Obiora, which may, to a large extent, be due to the stark contrast between Obiora’s wealth and Nkem’s poverty, creating financial dependence and making marriage for Nkem far more important than for Obiora. Nkem seems to regard her marriage as an achievement, a notion which Adichie criticizes (cf. DI: 30), as Nkem was “proudly excited because she had married into the coveted league, the Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Their Babies league” when she first came to America to have her baby (I: 26). After the purchase of their house she feels as part of “the Rich Nigerian Men Who Owned Houses in America
league” (I: 26). For Nkem the ‘achievement’ of marriage is closely linked to social status and wealth.

Obiora’s influence extends to Nkem’s body, which she modifies in order to please her husband. Nkem’s refusal to continue doing so is a first indication that she will speak her mind. Nkem “has planned to get a relaxer touch-up tomorrow, have her hair set in a flip that would rest around her neck the way Obiora likes” (I: 27). It is not clear if Nkem uses a relaxer regularly or if she only has her hair chemically straightened before Obiora’s visits. Still, the focus of her action is clearly Obiora’s preference of a certain hairstyle. The information about Obiora’s girlfriend which preoccupies Nkem the most is the woman’s short, curly hair, styled with a texturizer. Therefore, the girlfriend’s hairstyle is quite the opposite of the one Obiora wants Nkem to wear. Shortly after learning about her husband’s affair, Nkem cuts her hair short and later buys a texturizer (cf. I: 28, 32). This can be seen as an act of rebellion against Obiora’s wishes as well as an imitation of his girlfriend’s hair. In her analysis of the significance of hair in selected works by Adichie, Christina Cruz-Gutiérrez regards Nkem’s ‘Big Chop’ (i.e. cutting her hair) as a sign of the transformation of her circumstances after realizing that her marriage merely imitates the ideal (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 252). According to Cruz-Gutiérrez, Nkem’s transition can be seen as a symbol of claiming agency (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 252, 253). Nkem also caters to her husband’s tastes when it comes to pubic hair, as “she has planned, on Friday, to wax her pubic hair into a thin line, the way Obiora likes” (I: 27). Nkem’s preferences are not mentioned, but it is implied that she removes her hair only to please her husband. However, this time Nkem does not wax her pubic hair (cf. I: 38), which can be seen as a refusal to satisfy the wishes of a husband who cheats on her. After his arrival in the U.S., Obiora asks Nkem why she cut her hair, and tells her that he loved her long hair in response to her question whether he does not like her hair (cf. I: 40). Nkem tells Obiora that she expected him to like her short hair (cf. I: 40), which might be an allusion to his girlfriend or a sincere motivation behind her haircut. Obiora responds in the following manner: “‘Anything will look good with your lovely face, darling, but I liked your long hair better. You should grow it back. Long hair is more graceful on a Big Man’s wife.’ He makes a face when he says ‘Big Man,’ and laughs” (I: 40). This example shows that Obiora exerts control in a charming way, laughing and only offering recommendations. While his is a far more subtle way than the violence Eugene uses in Purple Hibiscus, it appears to be just as effective in silencing his wife. Nkem eventually confronts Obiora with her resolution to move back to Nigeria, which she “had not planned to say […], but it seems right, it is what she has always wanted to say” (I: 41). The fact that Nkem finds
her voice to express what she wants after years of remaining silent is symbolically reflected in the first original, a bronze head, which Obiora brings from Nigeria. The mask imitations which he used to bring can be read as symbols of Nkem veiling her opinions and wishes and of wearing a mask of silent compliance. The original, on the other hand, mirrors Nkem’s emancipation, which results in the open expression of her wishes. She counters Obiora’s way of deciding for both of them by consistently using the pronoun ‘we’ when she speaks of her decision to return to Nigeria. Nkem’s demands take Obiora by surprise: “Obiora continues to stare at her and she knows that he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand. She wonders vaguely if that is what attracted him to her in the first place, that she deferred to him, that she let him speak for both of them” (I: 41). Nkem shows awareness of her past silence and wonders whether her passivity is her most attractive feature to Obiora. His final response is that if that was what she wanted, they would talk about it (cf. I: 42). While the story has a rather open ending without a clear decision where the family will stay in the future and whether or not they will live together, the final sentence emphasizes Nkem’s transformation and indicates imminent change: “There is nothing left to talk about, Nkem knows; it is done” (I: 42). Nkem has taken on an active role in her marriage, has ‘done’ something by speaking up, and something will have to change, because Nkem has changed.

“Imitation” narrativizes the scenario of an unequal marriage in which the wife is the only one who compromises and yields to the wishes of her spouse, an imbalance repeatedly criticized in Adichie’s non-fiction (cf. WSABF: 31, DI: 31). Adichie emphasizes the complexities of power imbalance within marriage by shedding light on Nkem’s financial dependence on Obiora early in their relationship and, as a result, the different value given to marriage in the case of Nkem. Obiora is not portrayed as a despotic patriarch overruling his wife but as a man who speaks for his wife while he has made decisions on his own, and who uses the rhetoric of recommendations and allusions to his preferences to get what he wants. The story shows Nkem’s growing awareness of her passivity and traces her transformation from silent compliance to demanding what she wants.

5.3. “The Arrangers of Marriage”

“The Arrangers of Marriage” is the story of the first few months of a young Nigerian woman in the U.S. with her new husband, a Nigerian physician living in America. The first-person narrator Chinaza soon realizes that the circumstances of the arranged marriage she is living in are different from what was promised to her in Nigeria. Chinaza’s husband is an unfamiliar stranger to her who forces her to perform “wifely duties” (AM: 168) and puts her under constant pressure to assimilate to his idea of American culture. Chinaza subtly resists her
husband’s influence and decides to leave him as soon as she has permission to work and is able to support herself.

The title of the short story already indicates the significance of the persons who arranged Chinaza’s marriage. A flashback reveals that Chinaza’s uncle and aunt established the contact with her mother-in-law (cf. AM: 169-170). Several times the narrator indicates that these arrangers of marriage failed to convey the full knowledge about the match: “The arrangers of marriage only told you that doctors made a lot of money in America. They did not add that before doctors started to make a lot of money, they had to do an internship and a residency program, which my new husband had not completed” (AM: 174). This example implies that the man’s supposed financial status was a major incentive for Chinaza and her uncle and aunt. However, crucial information about the future husband’s income where withheld from Chinaza. Her husband can only afford a shabby flat instead of the house he implied to her. While the term ‘arranged marriage’ already entails that the power of choosing a spouse was taken from either the bride or the groom or both and transferred to the arrangers, the story emphasizes that Chinaza is at a disadvantage in terms of power when compared to the arrangers of marriage or her husband Ofodile, who calls himself ‘Dave’ in America. When Chinaza learns that Dave previously married an American woman to obtain a green card, she points out her right to be informed about such circumstances prior to her wedding (cf. AM: 182-183). In his response, her husband explicitly highlights Chinaza’s dependence on her relatives and her powerlessness in terms of making crucial decisions about her own life: “It would not have made a difference. Your uncle and aunt had decided. Were you going to say no to people who have taken care of you since your parents died?” (AM: 183). Dave also refers to the (supposedly) chaotic social situation and widespread unemployment among university graduates in Nigeria as reasons why Chinaza had no other choice but to marry him (cf. AM: 183). Dave states his reasons for marrying Chinaza in the following way: “‘I wanted a Nigerian wife and my mother said you were a good girl, quiet. She said you might even be a virgin. [...] I probably should tell her how wrong she was’” (AM: 184). This statement uncovers that ‘pleasing’ passivity and virginity are the most significant characteristics of Dave’s conception of an ideal wife. In her feminist non-fiction Adichie criticizes the exclusive connection of these attributes to women by highlighting the troublesome nature of ‘likeability’ (cf. WSABF: 23-24, DJ: 36-38) and showing that women are not considered to be sexual beings in the ways that men are, which can be seen when particular importance is given to female virginity (cf. WSABF: 32). Dave rather coolly acknowledges that Chinaza does not conform to his expectations.
The relationship between Chinaza and Dave is characterized by painful unfamiliarity and power imbalance. The spouses-to-be met merely two weeks before their wedding (cf. AM: 170), and perhaps most remarkably, Chinaza consistently refers to Dave only as her ‘new husband’ or ‘husband’ (cf. AM: 167-185). Chinaza’s neighbour and friend Nia takes notice of this peculiarity, asking Chinaza whether it was “[...] a cultural thing” (AM: 185). Chinaza responds in the negative and explains that “I wanted to say that it was because I didn’t know his name, because I didn’t know him” (AM: 185). For Chinaza and the reader, her husband indeed seems like a stranger in a foreign country, since Chinaza learns about the different name he uses in the U.S., the precise circumstances of his occupation as well as his previous marriage only after migrating to the U.S. (cf. AM: 172, 174, 182). Thus, the unfamiliarity of her husband is paralleled by the unfamiliarity of Chinaza’s new location, the United States. Chinaza’s feeling of displacement with regard to her husband and her location is in stark contrast to the physical intimacy within the marriage. In the short story, Chinaza recounts one sexual encounter which takes place without her consent (cf. AM: 168-169) and another one, where it is unclear whether or not Chinaza consented (cf. AM: 179). In the first instance Chinaza’s husband neither seeks her consent nor does he acknowledge her objection to wait, but instead continues against her will (cf. AM: 168-169).

My husband woke me up by settling his heavy body on top of mine. His chest flattened my breasts. ‘Good morning,’ I said, opening sleep-crusted eyes. He grunted, a sound that might have been a response to my greeting or part of the ritual he was performing. He raised himself to pull my nightdress up above my waist. ‘Wait-‘ I said, so that I could take the nightdress off, so it would not seem so hasty. But he had crushed his mouth down on mine. (AM: 168-169)

The ‘ritual’ performed by Dave is an instance of marital rape in which his body literally and figuratively oppresses Chinaza’s. The narrator does not express a sense of being violated; however, the descriptive language she uses underlines the traumatic nature of the situation, as it denotes Chinaza’s detachment from the situation and her own body. Being unable to move under his weight, Chinaza describes the sounds and actions of her husband, while she is concerned about the appearance of hastiness. This worry indicates that Chinaza might be aware of the fact that she is being raped but has the intention of giving the situation a different appearance. Chinaza describes being silenced by her husband as he “crushed his mouth down on [hers]” (AM: 169). The term ‘crush down’ evokes oppression and paints the image of a violent caricature of a kiss. The narrator continues by reflecting on the feeling and smell of mouths in the morning, comparing the latter to “the rubbish dumps at Ogbete Market” (AM: 169) and noting her husband’s rasping breath (cf. AM: 169). The focus of the narration returns to the experiencing I towards the end of the non-consensual sexual activity: “When he
finally stopped thrusting, he rested his entire weight on me, even the weight of his legs. I did not move until he climbed off me to go into the bathroom. I pulled my nightdress down, straightened it over my hips”. (AM: 169) The word ‘finally’ denotes a sense of relief and thereby emphasizes the duration of and the distress caused by the situation. Again, Chinaza refers to her husband’s weight on her body that oppresses her both physically and mentally. Chinaza’s motionlessness underlines the loss of power over her body and indicates endurance and shock. The act of readjusting the nightdress can be seen as Chinaza’s attempt to regain agency over her body and to return to normality after the traumatic event. In “The Arrangers of Marriage” Adichie exemplifies and details her critique of the notion that women are not expected to be sexual beings (cf. DI: 53) but are instead often subjected to control that “reduces women to mere props used to manage the appetites of men” (DI: 54). Chinaza is simply expected to take part in sexual activities within her marriage while the focus is on Dave’s pleasure. Thereby she is reduced to a mere object and tool of satisfaction for her husband. This observation is also illustrated by the second, very brief description of sex in the story: “That night, I thought of the cookbook as he lay heavily on top of me, grunting and rasping” (AM: 179). It is telling that Chinaza, while being used for her husband’s satisfaction, is thinking about cooking – yet another task aiming at pleasing her husband.

Cooking has a particular significance with regard to Chinaza’s relationship to her husband, as can be seen in Chinaza’s adherence to her aunt’s advice about cooking: When her husband wants to eat at a fast food restaurant Chinaza suggests going home to cook, remembering her aunt’s words: “Don’t let your husband eat out too much [...] or it will push him into the arms of a woman who cooks. Always guard your husband like a guinea fowl’s egg”” (AM: 178). Chinaza’s aunt represents cooking as a quality in women that is particularly attractive to men and an essential requirement for wives who want to keep their husbands, who are supposedly inherently liable to unfaithfulness. Adichie’s character expresses the idea of marriage as a prize to be earned by good cooking, which Adichie criticizes in Dear Ijeawele (cf. DI: 15). Chinaza follows her aunt’s advice and her husband seems to enjoy the meal she prepared (cf. AM: 179). However, the next day he gives her an American cookbook because he does not want to be known for “fill[ing] the building with smells of foreign food” (AM: 179). This gesture is a critique of Chinaza’s cooking and shows the importance of assimilation for Dave. The unfamiliarity between Chinaza and her husband throughout the story proves that cooking has no impact on their marriage other than additional work for Chinaza, who finds herself forced to learn how to prepare American meals.
Chinaza’s marriage and her experience as an immigrant are largely determined by her husband’s efforts to assimilate Chinaza to American culture. Being a more experienced immigrant, Dave has the power of (supposed) knowledge of American culture that Chinaza lacks. In response to comments by Chinaza that refer to habits she had or words she used in Nigeria, Dave states the ‘rule’ of what Americans do or say in particular situations. For example, when Chinaza asks for milk when preparing tea, her husband explains that “Americans don’t drink their tea with milk and sugar” (AM: 171). The fact that Dave uses his immigrant experience to explain Americanness in generalizing statements to Chinaza is an exertion of power within their relationship in the context of migration. Dave not only changed his own habits when he came to the U.S., but he expects Chinaza to change hers as well: “I got used to the way things are done here a long time ago. You will too, baby” (AM: 171). Most notably, Dave controls Chinaza’s language by correcting her expressions for the ‘American’ equivalent, which can be seen in various examples throughout the short story: “‘Busy. Americans say busy, not engaged’” (AM: 170), “‘You should say ‘Hi’ to people here, not ‘You’re welcome’’” (AM: 172), “‘Cookies. Americans call them cookies’” (AM: 174), “‘It’s an elevator, not a lift. Americans say elevator’” (AM: 177). Dave’s most radical assimilative action is changing Chinaza’s name on an official document despite Chinaza’s protest (cf. AM: 172-173):

“You don’t understand how it works in this country. If you want to get anywhere you have to be as mainstream as possible. If not, you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here.’ ‘I never have, my English name is just something on my birth certificate. I’ve been Chinaza Okafor my whole life.’ ‘You’ll get used to it, baby,’ he said, reaching out to caress my cheek. ‘You’ll see.’ When he filled out a Social Security number application for me the next day, the name he entered in bold letters was AGATHA BELL. (AM: 172-173)

Dave’s justification for his philosophy of assimilation is an explicit critique of America, while the imposition of his approach on Chinaza is an attack on her identity (cf. Misra and Shrivastava 2017: 190). In addition to changing the Igbo name ‘Chinaza’ to the English ‘Agatha,’ Dave prohibits Chinaza’s use of Igbo: “‘Speak English. There are people behind you’” (AM: 177). Even at home the couple speaks only English (cf. AM: 182). The way in which Dave forces Chinaza to assimilate in terms of her habits, language and even her name illustrates the power he possesses as the male, more experienced immigrant in the relationship.

In reaction to Dave’s oppressive behaviour, Chinaza develops strategies to undermine Dave’s cultural and linguistic control and retains a sense of independence. With her neighbour and friend Nia, Chinaza drinks tea with milk and sugar (cf. AM: 184), she speaks Igbo to herself while cooking and has taught Nia some Igbo phrases (cf. AM: 182). Chinaza’s
relationship to Nia is a contrast to her marriage to Dave and illustrates the importance of 
female friendship and solidarity. Nia, who is an African American, shows interest in 
Chinaza’s name and explains that she chose a Swahili name when she was eighteen (cf. AM: 
180). As opposed to Dave’s rejection of Igbo language and Nigerian habits, Nia seems to be 
open to cultures and languages that are not part of the American mainstream. When Chinaza 
first meets Nia she describes how her aunt would see her neighbour.

[S]he was the kind of woman Aunty Ada would disapprove of. Aunty Ada would call her an 
ashawo, because of the see-through top she wore so that her bra, a mismatched shade, glared 
through. Or Aunty Ada would base her prostitute judgement on Nia’s lipstick, a shimmery 
orange, and the eye shadow – similar to the shade of lipstick – that clung to her heavy lids. 
(AM: 180; original emphasis)

The narrator bases her aunt’s disapproval on revealing clothing and colourful makeup, which 
illustrates the close association of women’s bodies with shame and its manifestation in dress 
codes criticized by Adichie (cf. WSABF: 33). Chinaza’s own impression of Nia, on the other 
hand, is very positive: “It was not just her hair, held up on top of her head in a natural Afro 
puff, that I found beautiful, though, it was her skin the color of roasted groundnuts, her 
mysterious and heavy-lidded eyes, her curved hips” (AM: 181). With this description of Nia’s 
beauty, Adichie contributes to the visibility of black beauty in a world which primarily 
showcases white beauty (cf. DI: 40). Nia offers Chinaza to help her find a job as soon as she 
receives her work permit (cf. AM: 181), which awakens Chinaza’s longing for independence: 
“Something leaped inside me at the thought, the sudden and new thought, of earning what 
would be mine. Mine” (AM: 181). When Chinaza leaves her and Dave’s apartment with only 
the clothes she arrived with after finding out about his green card marriage, she goes to Nia, 
who offers to call her family and proposes to let Chinaza stay as long as she wants (cf. AM: 
184). Nia proves to be an honest friend when she admits having had a short affair with Dave 
two years before (cf. AM: 184). She advises Chinaza to leave Dave only after she has gotten 
hers papers and suggests how to proceed afterwards: “‘You can apply for benefits while you 
get your shit together, and then you’ll get a job and find a place and support yourself and start 
afresh [...]’” (AM: 186). The ending of the short story indicates that Chinaza follows Nia’s 
advice, which is based on practical considerations: “She was right, I could not leave yet. I 
got back across the hall the next evening. I rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood 
aside, and let me pass” (AM: 186). The narrator’s use of the word ‘yet’ suggests that despite 
her return Chinaza seems to be determined to leave her husband and begin an independent life 
as soon as she has better prospects of supporting herself.
“The Arrangers of Marriage” is a critique of gender inequality and male exertion of oppressive power within a marriage in the context of immigration. Chinaza, the female protagonist and narrator, rather silently resists her husband’s pressure to assimilate and plans for a more independent future.
6. BECOMING ‘A HAPPY AFRICAN FEMINIST’: ADICHIE’S *AMERICANAH*

First published in 2013, Adichie’s novel *Americanah* centres on the young Nigerians Ifemelu and Obinze and their experiences with migration to the U.S. and England. The novel begins with Ifemelu’s visit to a hair salon in Trenton to get her hair braided for her return to Nigeria. Ifemelu contacts her ex-boyfriend from secondary school and university, Obinze. The narrative shifts to Obinze’s present life in Lagos as a wealthy business man who is married and father of a daughter. During the hours Ifemelu spends at the African hair salon, a series of flashbacks illuminate her childhood and youth in Lagos, her migration to the U.S. and her life as an immigrant there. The only child of a low-income family, Ifemelu is an observant, rebellious and outspoken girl. When Ifemelu and Obinze meet, they soon fall in love with each other. Because of almost continuous university strikes Ifemelu applies for a student visa in the U.S., which she is granted. Obinze remains in Nigeria while Ifemelu is confronted with the unfamiliarity of her host country, where she struggles to find a job. After a traumatizing experience Ifemelu breaks off the contact to Obinze. Ifemelu slowly gets back on her feet and starts a blog, extracts of which are inserted throughout the novel, in response to experiences and observations with regard to race in America. Ifemelu’s flashbacks also include her relationships to a white American and an African American man, which inform her blog with regard to race and the different experiences of African American blacks and African blacks in America. Meanwhile, Obinze’s migration experience in England is less successful than Ifemelu’s. After the expiration of his visa, Obinze lives and works in England illegally. When his plan to enter into a fake marriage for papers fails, he is deported to Nigeria where he initially struggles until he does business for a Big Man, which marks the beginning of his wealth. The narrative returns to the present as Ifemelu returns to Nigeria. Ifemelu has to come to terms with how both she and Lagos have changed, and reconnects with Obinze.

Migration is at the centre of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Americanah*; most scholars who have paid critical attention to the novel focus on the theme of migration. In terms of genre, Mary Jane Androne (2017) reads *Americanah* as a migrant bildungsroman, while Maximilian Feldner (2019) regards it as a novel of return migration. Rose A. Sackeyfio (2017) focuses on the implications of migration on consciousness and the self. Investigating Ifemelu’s “transnational mobility” (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ 2017: 199), Gĩnchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩ notes “Adichie’s decision to reverse the traditional migrant narrative” with regard to gender roles (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ 2017: 199). Cristina Cruz-Gutiérrez’ analysis is concerned with the significance of
black women’s hair in *Americanah* and two of Adichie’s short stories (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017).

While (return) migration is arguably the most prominent theme of *Americanah*, Ndígírígí’s and Cruz-Gutiérrez’ analyses of the novel already indicate that gender is another aspect worth examining. In this chapter, I will discuss how *Americanah* reflects Adichie’s feminist critique in *We Should All Be Feminists* and *Dear Ijeawele*. Adichie’s approach of using everyday examples for the demonstration of feminist concerns (cf. *DI*: 28) is illustrated in how Adichie both subtly and explicitly expresses critique through the focalizers of the novel, Ifemelu and Obinze. I will show that the representation of various female characters who either embrace or refuse to conform to female gender stereotypes is reflective of Adichie’s rejection of gender roles (cf. *WSABF*: 34, *DI*: 14). This chapter will also demonstrate that Adichie uses her character Ifemelu to analyse and criticize the power dynamics of heterosexual relationships and attitudes towards marriage within the novel. Moreover, I will show that Adichie juxtaposes discriminatory views on women’s bodies and sexuality with critique and positive attitudes towards female sexuality, and demonstrates the traumatizing force of sexual harassment. Expanding on Cruz-Gutiérrez’ analysis of the role of hair in *Americanah* (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017), I will discuss how Adichie’s character Ifemelu provides criticism on the racism and sexism inherent in common assumptions about black women’s hair and complexion, and the marginalisation of representations of black beauty. This chapter tries to demonstrate that *Americanah* features two main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, who could be considered feminists. While neither of them is idealized, Ifemelu is portrayed as a modern, confident female feminist with a strong voice, and Obinze is represented as a potential male feminist who is questioning and sensitive about gender inequality.

### 6.1. Gender roles

*Americanah* reflects Adichie’s rejection of gender roles and expectations (cf. *WSABF*: 34, *DI*: 14) in the representation of female characters who either conform or refuse to conform to the stereotypes of ‘the likeable young woman’, ‘the compliant wife who is a good cook’, and ‘the devoted mother’. The novel’s protagonist Ifemelu already defies gender expectations as a child, as is evident in comments by her mother and a school friend. Ifemelu’s mother associates her daughter’s rebellious behaviour with that of a boy, displaying stereotypical ideas about girl’s ideal behaviour: “[…] Why must this girl be a troublemaker? I have been saying it since, that it would be better if she was a boy, behaving like this” (*A*: 52). This statement reveals a double standard with regard to rebellious behaviour devoid of the effort to
appear likeable, which Ifemelu’s mother considers to be acceptable for boys but not for girls. Ifemelu’s male schoolmate Kayode describes the qualities which make Ifemelu undesirable: “Ifemelu is a babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agrees [...]” (A: 60). The underlying assumption, which Kayode’s negative judgement is based on, is that girls are supposed to be unassertive, silent and compliant. As a teenager, Ifemelu seems to be aware of some of the expectations she is confronted with. When her boyfriend Obinze’s mother asks her about cooking, she is tempted to lie to conform to the stereotype that girls and women are supposed to be enthusiastic and good cooks (cf. A: 71). However, she chooses to be honest and reveals that she does not enjoy cooking, which Obinze’s mother does not consider as negative (cf. A: 71). Obinze’s mother expresses a feminist stance with regard to gender roles when confronted with a colleague who hits her: After accusing the man of misusing funds, he slaps her, telling her “[...] he could not take a woman talking to him like that [...]” (A: 59). When talking about the incident, “[...] people were saying, Oh, why did he slap her when she’s a widow, and that annoyed her even more. She said she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being, not because she doesn’t have a husband to speak for her [...]” (A: 59). Obinze’s mother rejects the idea that she is in need of a husband for protection but claims her full humanity. She is also confident about herself and aware of the positive impact she had on her husband: “[...] I did a lot of brushing-up on that man after I married him” (A: 70).

Through the eyes of Obinze, the second focalizer of the novel, Adichie presents several female characters who conform to traditional gender expectations. Obinze provides subtle criticism of the roles which the women are led to force themselves into. The following example of Ojiugo shows the contrast between a rebellious young Nigerian woman and her older self, who settled down in England and has discarded the ideals of her teens and early twenties. In a flashback to his youth, Obinze remembers Ojiugo, who is now his cousin’s wife and lives a conventional life in England. Wearing colourful lipstick, torn jeans, being plain-spoken and smoking publicly, Ojiugo “provok[ed] vicious gossip and dislike form other girls, not because she did these things but because she dared to without having lived abroad, or having a foreign parent, those qualities that would have made them forgive her lack of conformity” (A: 238). Ojiugo’s behaviour seems to cause disapproval because it does not conform to stereotypically female behaviour, which would, however, be acceptable if she had any connection to a foreign country. ‘Foreignness’ is thus associated with more unconventional female behaviour. Obinze is surprised by Ojiugo’s transformation from a rebellious, academically successful young woman to a wife and mother entirely absorbed by
the education of her children. “It puzzled him that she did not mourn all the things that could have been. Was it a quality inherent in women, or did they just learn to shield their personal regrets, to suspend their lives, subsume themselves in child care?” (A: 243) Ojiugo’s interpretation of her role as a mother is in stark contrast to Adichie’s advice to the implied reader of Dear Ijeawele to define herself as a complete person instead of a mother alone (cf. DI: 7-8). In Ojiugo’s case, marriage and migration might have led to her acceptance of the stereotypically traditional role of a mother and wife, despite her rebellious youth.

Obinze is represented as very perceptive with regard to the force of gender roles, as can also be seen in his observations about a couple he is acquainted with. To Obinze “the few things [Isioma] allowed herself to say were thoughtful, but she often remained silent, shrinking herself, pretending not to be as intelligent as she was, to salve Jonathan’s ego” (A: 373). Jonathan, on the other hand, “dominated the evening” with lengthy anecdotes about his involvements in business and politics (A: 373). This description of Isioma echoes Adichie’s observation that girls are often expected to “shrink themselves” (WSABF: 27) and temper their ambition and success in order not to pose a threat to men (cf. WSABF: 27-28).

Kosi, Obinze’s wife, is another example of a woman who is very concerned with fulfilling gender expectations. In a conversation with Ifemelu, Obinze characterizes Kosi and his relationship to her in the following way:

‘Kosi never liked the idea of my cooking. She has really basic, mainstream ideas of what a wife should be and she thought my wanting to cook was an indictment of her, which I found silly. So I stopped, just to have peace. I make omelettes but that’s it and we both pretend as if my onugbu soup isn’t better than hers. There’s a lot of pretending in my marriage, Ifem.’ (A: 450-451)

While Obinze acknowledges that his wife’s association of cooking with gender is rather common, he regards her attitude as stupid. This implied connection of adherence to gender stereotypes, which are largely determined by society, with a lack of intelligence seems to be rather problematic. Although Obinze admits that both of them maintain pretence in their marriage, Kosi’s stereotypical ideas about gender are represented as the underlying cause of problems. It is unclear whether or not the couple had an open conversation about gender roles in their marriage. Obinze also recalls Kosi’s first reaction to the birth of their daughter Buchi, which shows Kosi’s internalized sexism and the couple’s estrangement (cf. A: 458-459). Kosi tells Obinze apologetically that their next child would be a boy (cf. A: 458). Obinze realizes that Kosi does not know his character and his views, as he does not care about the gender of the child (cf. A: 458-459). He feels “a gentle contempt towards her” and thinks that he should probably have talked more with Kosi (A: 459). Kosi has internalized gender stereotypes and
sexism, while Obinze, similar to Ifemelu, is sensitive to and critical of gender inequality. Obinze might be considered a feminist in terms of his attitudes with regard to gender. However, instead of discussing gender stereotypes within his marriage, he grudgingly accepts the differences between him and Kosi, feeling a slight superiority.

Kosi’s effort to be perceived as generally likeable is another gender expectation which Adichie rejects (cf. *WSABF*: 23-24, *DI*: 36-37). According to Obinze, Kosi “flatten[s] her personality so that her beauty [does] not threaten” (*A*: 28). “Obinze had always been struck by how important it was to her to be a wholesomely agreeable person, to have no sharp angles sticking out” (*A*: 28). When meeting Obinze’s mother for the first more, Kosi insists on helping to serve food and cleaning up (cf. *A*: 28). This example shows that Kosi connects her endeavour to be likeable with stereotypically ‘female’ domestic tasks. In arguments Kosi “was taking two sides at once, to please everyone; she always chose peace over truth, was always eager to conform” (*A*: 29). This characterization of Kosi’s behaviour is consistent with Adichie’s observation that likeability is constructed as a specific characteristic that excludes “showing anger or being aggressive or disagreeing too loudly” (*WSABF*: 24). Kosi can be seen as a contrastive figure to Ifemelu, who is outspoken and questions gender roles. Obinze feels guilty for disapproving of Kosi’s longing for harmony and likeability, and considers her to be “such a well-meaning, devoted woman” (*A*: 30). Thus, Adichie does not represent Kosi as deceptive or manipulative, but encourages compassion through the eyes of Obinze, who acknowledges her good intentions without concealing the troubling nature of likeability.

6.2. Power dynamics in heterosexual relationships

Adichie shows a wide variety of relationships between men and women in *Americanah*, some of which prompt Ifemelu’s criticism within the novel because of imbalance in terms of power and wealth, or distribution of domestic work. The role of capitalist notions within relationships is introduced early in the novel, when Obinze witnesses Chief, a wealthy Big Man, telling a man who was paying a visit with his girlfriend, “‘I like that girl. Give her to me and I will give you a nice plot of land in Ikeja’” (*A*: 31). Being considered as a man’s property that can be traded for land, the woman mentioned is commodified and denied any agency by Chief, a powerful, influential man. While this situation is not developed any further, the affair between Ifemelu’s aunt Uju and The General, a Nigerian military official, is part of Ifemelu’s youth and also the object of her critical observation. The General uses his money and power to buy Uju, who is his mistress, a car and create a job for her (cf. *A*: 45). Even as a teenager Ifemelu is not naive about the financial imbalance in the relationship, since she is aware of the fact that Uju does not pay for her house, although Ifemelu’s mother pretends otherwise (cf. *A*: 45).
49). Ifemelu regards Uju’s financial dependence on The General as problematic, as becomes evident in her shock and fear for Uju, when Uju admits that she does not have any money on her own account and never receives large sums from The General, but has to ask for money (cf. A: 76-77). Ifemelu accuses Uju of being naive: “If somebody else was doing this, you would say she was stupid” (A: 78). Requiring Uju to ask for money, The General maintains his power, as Uju is kept in permanent financial dependence, which Ifemelu seems to be acutely aware of.

Through Ifemelu’s power of observation and feminist critique, Adichie rejects the expectation of men as the providers in relationships (cf. DI: 59) and demonstrates the significance of language in revealing stereotypes (cf. DI: 26). For Ifemelu’s friend Ranyinudo, relationships between women and men are characterized primarily by materialism, with men as the givers and women as the receivers of goods, as can be seen in the following example. Ranyinudo reproaches Ifemelu for not having called Obinze, who “[...] would have sorted everything out for you [...]” (A: 395). Ifemelu rejects this idea and observes that for her friend, “men existed only as source of things” (A: 395-396). Another friend of Ifemelu, Priye, reveals a materialistic idea of marriage when she explains, “[...] You do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you” (A: 399). While Ranyinudo agrees, she suggests that a combination of love and financial security is possible (cf. A: 399). Priye and Ranyinudo closely associate money and wealth with masculinity, which Adichie criticizes (cf. WSABF: 26). Their materialistic idea of relationships, in which men are supposed to be the providers, entails the financial dependence of the wives, and, as a consequence, unequal relationships. Adichie represents Ranyinudo’s and Priye’s attitudes towards relationships as rather common among young women in Lagos. In her blog, Ifemelu shares her observations on “many young women in Lagos with Unknown Sources of Wealth” (A: 422). Apparently referring to Ranyinudo, Ifemelu states that she is worried that her friend who is dating a rich banker “will end up like many women in Lagos who define their lives by the men they can never truly have, crippled by their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists” (A: 422). Ifemelu’s harsh critique is revealed to be hypocritical to some extent. Ranyinudo accuses Ifemelu, who got her job and her U.S. citizenship with the help of her wealthy white American boyfriend, of being judgemental (cf. A: 422-423). This passage demonstrates the complexity of dependence within relationships, as Ranyinudo raises the question of how her relationship to a rich man is different from the one Ifemelu had in America. Ranyinudo’s anger highlights the necessity of a more nuanced feminist critique than Ifemelu’s. Realizing that her friend is hurt, Ifemelu apologizes for the
invasion of Ranyinudo’s privacy and takes down the blog post (cf. A: 423), but does not explicitly revise her opinion in another way. Giving a concrete example of how “[l]anguage is the repository of our prejudices, our beliefs, our assumptions” (DI: 26), Ifemelu argues that the power imbalance within the relationship between her friend Ranyinudo and her married boyfriend Don is also manifested in language. When Ranyinudo complains to Ifemelu that Don told her that she is no longer “[…] the sweet girl [she] used to be […]” (A: 415), Ifemelu reflects on the phrase ‘sweet girl’ and concludes that “[s]weet girl meant that, for a long time, Don had moulded Ranyinudo into a malleable shape, or that she had allowed him to think he had” (A: 416).

Uju’s relationship with Bartholomew, a fellow Nigerian migrant to the U.S., illustrates Adichie’s disapproval of the idea that domestic work is exclusively ‘female’ work (cf. DI: 10) and her rejection of “[p]ermission and being allowed” as part of the vocabulary of an equal marriage (cf. DI: 22). Uju complains to Ifemelu about inequality in terms of domestic work and money within her relationship to Bartholomew: “[…] Both of us come home at the same time and do you know what Bartholomew does? He just sits in the living room and turns on the TV and asks me what we are eating for dinner” (A: 217). Bartholomew seems to regard cooking as an exclusively ‘female’ task, while Uju implies that she considers his expectation that she ought to do additional work as unfair. Bartholomew moreover demands to receive Uju’s salary. “[…] He said that this is how marriages are since he is the head of the family, that I should not send money home to Brother without his permission, that we should make his car payments from my salary […]” (A: 217). Bartholomew considers himself to be on top of the power hierarchy of the family, for which the only justification seems to be his being a man. His insistence on permission can be seen as a way of establishing and perpetuating a patriarchal hierarchy in the family. Ndígírígí argues that Aunty Uju’s experience points to the question of whether migration strengthens or weakens gender inequality (cf. Ndígírígí 2017: 205). “[Uju’s] acceptance of [Bartholomew’s] very conservative views on the place of women in marital relations affirms cultural traditions that renew patriarchal structures, even as the patriarch in this case demonstrates his need for the income that his modern ‘wife’ brings home” (Ndígírígí 2017: 205). Ndígírígí emphasizes that opposite to Uju’s acceptance of “domestication / double duty,” Ifemelu displays “autonomy / agency,” for example by continuing to work as a babysitter despite her wealthy boyfriend’s wish to spend more time together (Ndígírígí 2017: 205). Ifemelu’s open disapproval of the relationship between Uju and Bartholomew indicates her acute awareness of Bartholomew’s reactionary mindset with regard to gender roles and emphasizes her opposing beliefs.
6.3. Attitudes towards marriage

In *Americanah*, Adichie’s characters negotiate the idea of “marriage as an achievement” for women (*DI*: 30). Ifemelu’s hairdresser Aisha is clearly very eager to marry, as she wants Ifemelu, whom she has met for the first time, to convince at least one of her two boyfriends to marry her (cf. *A*: 17-18), saying, “[...] Any one is okay. I want marry” (*A*: 18). To Aisha, simply being married seems to be of more importance than the person she marries or any feelings connected to this person. Aisha’s desperation illustrates Adichie’s critical stance towards the idea that only men are supposed to propose marriage (cf. *DI*: 57-58).

Through the eyes of Ifemelu we perceive Uju’s boyfriend Bartholomew as a man who has internalised “the idea of marriage as a prize to women” and cooking as an indicator of how worthy of marriage a woman is (*DI*: 15).

He behaved grandiosely, like a special prize that Aunty Uju was fortunate to have, and Aunty Uju humoured him. Before he tasted the gizzards, he said, ‘Let me see if this is any good.’ Aunty Uju laughed and in her laughter was a certain assent, because his words ‘Let me see if this is any good’ were about her being a good cook, and therefore a good wife. (*A*: 116)

Ifemelu expresses Adichie’s critique of marriage as something that has to be earned by women (cf. *DI*: 15). While Uju silently complies with Bartholomew’s assumptions about marriage, Ifemelu’s critical assessment of the situation indicates her rejection of “the idea of marriage as a prize to women” (*DI*: 15).

Among Ifemelu’s group of friends in Nigeria, marriage is a recurring subject, which Ifemelu does not enjoy (cf. *A*: 398). “It surprised her how quickly, during reunions with old friends, the subject of marriage came up, a waspish tone in the voices of the unmarried, a smugness in those of the married” (*A*: 398). Ifemelu is perceptive about her friends’ attitudes when talking about marriage. Both the slight annoyance in the voices of the unmarried and the superiority of the married indicate that for them, marriage is one of the most desirable goals in life. Implicitly, the novel shows that Ifemelu’s Nigerian friends are far more occupied with the topic of marriage than her group of friends in the U.S., where the issue is only raised by Uju and Bartholomew. Ifemelu’s friend Ranyinudo represents the belief that marriage is a personal success, since she regards the information of whether or not a woman is married as essential: “When Ifemelu told Ranyinudo that she had run into an old classmate, Vivian, at the bank, Ranyinudo’s first question was, ‘Is she married?’” (*A*: 398). Ifemelu pretends to be still in a relationship with her ex-boyfriend Blaine in order to prevent her married friends from telling her to be patient and pray, and to avoid being considered “a member of the self-pity party of the single” (*A*: 398). Ifemelu’s surprise about the significance that marriage has for her friends shows that her attitude towards marriage is very different from theirs. Ifemelu does
not seem to reject marriage itself, but the importance that it is supposed to have for women. Her critical distance from her friends’ preoccupation with marriage reflects Adichie’s rejection of “marriage as an achievement” \((DI: 30)\). Only one character, Ifemelu’s female co-worker Esther, comments on Ifemelu’s personality with regard to marriage. Esther tells Ifemelu that she has a ‘spirit of husband-repelling’ because of her hardness (cf. \(A: 419\)). This utterance implies that finding a husband is supposed to be the primary goal in Ifemelu’s life. Although Adichie makes Ifemelu’s rejection of “marriage as an achievement” \((DI: 30)\) and “the idea of marriage as a prize to women” \((DI: 15)\) quite clear, Ifemelu does not discuss her views on marriage with her friends or on her blog, as opposed to other feminist issues such as black women’s hair.

Obinze’s conversations with Kosi and one of his male friends about his wish for a divorce reveal different ideas of marriage that are in conflict with each other. When Obinze tells Kosi that he loves someone else and wants a divorce, Kosi sinks to her knees, which is described as “an easy descent for her [...] because she did that often when she prayed in the TV room upstairs, with the house help and nanny and whoever else was staying with them” \((A: 464)\). Kosi’s action is interpreted through Obinze’s eyes and slightly ridiculed, even though it is Kosi’s genuine reaction to Obinze’s attack on her version of reality. Kosi’s plead for keeping the family together shows that an ‘intact’ family is of more importance to her than the fact that Obinze cheated on her and lied to her.

‘It’s not about another woman, Obinze,’ Kosi said, rising to her feet, her voice steeling, her eyes hardening. ‘It’s about keeping this family together! You took a vow before God. I took a vow before God. I am a good wife. We have a marriage. Do you think you can just destroy this family because your old girlfriend came into town? Do you know what it means to be a responsible father? [...]’ \((A: 464)\)

Kosi’s attitude towards marriage is characterized by the religious promise she made and the idea of raising a child together. Therefore, marriage has a different meaning to her than to Obinze, for whom marriage is connected to romantic love, as he wants to end his marriage to Kosi because of his love for Ifemelu. On the day after Obinze announced his wish for divorce, Kosi prepares outfits with matching colours for the family and acts as if nothing happened (cf. \(A: 465\)). Obinze interprets her behaviour as an attempt to “will normalcy back” and “to will a good marriage into being” \((A: 466)\). The fact that Obinze and Ifemelu are the focalizers of the novel enables more insight into their emotions and motivations, and therefore encourages sympathy for them, which makes Kosi’s attempts to save her marriage an obstacle for the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu. However, Kosi’s religious and family-oriented idea of marriage and her refusal to consider a divorce could be seen in the context of Adichie’s
observation that society teaches girls to aim for marriage, but does not teach the same to boys, resulting in unbalanced relationships “because the institution matters more to one than the other” (DI: 30). Similar to her ideas about gender roles, Kosi’s attitude towards marriage could be regarded as a symptom of her upbringing in a patriarchal society. Obinze’s friend Okwudiba expresses yet another view on marriage, which is characterized by pragmatism. Okwudiba, whom Obinze told about his wish to get divorced and his love for Ifemelu, does not consider divorce to be an option and suggests continuing to see Ifemelu while remaining married (cf. A: 472). Okwudiba comments on marriage from the point of view of men such as Obinze and himself: “‘Look, The Zed [i.e. Obinze], many of us didn’t marry the woman we truly loved. We married the woman that was around when we were ready to marry [...]’” (A: 472). While it is unclear whether ‘readiness’ refers to a mental state or economic circumstances, Okwudiba regards marriage as a rational, pragmatic decision, while the choice of the partner is secondary. Obinze ignores his friend’s advice and after seven months moves out of his house and returns to Ifemelu (cf. A: 477), which implies that for Obinze, romantic love is the most important factor in a relationship. Obinze’s view of marriage and love seems to be consistent with Adichie’s, who states that “[m]arriage can be a good thing, a source of joy, love and mutual support” (WSABF: 29) and for whom “love is the most important thing in life” (DI: 56).

6.4. Views on women’s bodies and sexuality

In Americanah, Adichie criticizes oppressing and sexist attitudes towards women’s bodies and sexuality and contrasts them with liberating and feminist ones. Presenting dress codes from the point of view of women who are affected by them, Adichie criticizes the association of shame and female sexuality, which underscores dress codes and rules of behaviour (cf. WSABF: 33), and the connection of clothing with morality (cf. DI: 44). During her youth in Nigeria, Ifemelu witnesses a girl being reprimanded by a nun for wearing tight trousers: “‘Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial. Any girl that wears tight trousers wants to commit the sin of temptation. It is best to avoid it’” (A: 50). The nun does not issue a rule but uses the rhetoric of advice, revealing a disturbing view on female sexuality which implies women’s inherent guilt (cf. WSABF: 33) and establishes a connection between women’s clothing and morality, as criticized by Adichie (cf. DI: 44). Already as a teenager Ifemelu perceives the nun’s words as harmful and is aware of the role of religion in controlling women’s bodies (cf. DI: 54). It is not religion in itself but the use of religion as a pretext to oppress women, which provokes Ifemelu’s harsh criticism.
When Sister Ibinabo was talking to Christie, with that poisonous spite she claimed was religious guidance, Ifemelu had looked at her and suddenly seen something of her own mother. Her mother was a kinder and simpler person, but like Sister Ibinabo, she was a person who denied that things were as they were. A person who had to spread the cloak of religion over her own petty desires (cf. A: 51).

Adichie demonstrates the discriminatory association of women’s clothing with morality (cf. DI: 44), the supposed inherent guilt of women’s bodies (cf. WSABF: 33), and her observation that many religions attempt to control women’s sexuality (cf. DI: 54) in another scene, which takes place after Ifemelu’s return to Lagos. Her friend Ranyinudo picks her up from the airport on her way home from a wedding and mentions that she was waiting outside during the church ceremony (cf. A: 385-387). In response to Ifemelu’s question why she was outside of the church, Ranyinudo explains that “‘[a]ll the bridesmaids had to wait outside because our dresses were indecent.’ Ranyinudo rolled ‘indecent’ around her tongue and chuckled. ‘It happens all the time, especially in Catholic churches [...]’” (A: 387). While Ranyinudo’s chuckle implies that she considers the rules of clothing she is subjected to as ridiculous, the priest with his authority in deciding on the morality of the women’s clothing literally and figuratively denies the women access to church.

In the context of migration, Adichie illustrates the additional association of women’s clothing and morality with patriotism. Uju’s boyfriend Bartholomew establishes a connection between the homeland and morality, while he represents the U.S. as a place of moral degeneracy. He claims that a Nigerian girl would never wear as short a dress as a young girl in an American TV drama, and that America lacks moral guidance (cf. A: 116). Ifemelu, provoked by Bartholomew being an “exaggerated caricature” and “his false, overheated moralities” (A: 116), contradicts him by saying, “‘Girls in Nigeria wear dresses much shorter than that o’” and “‘In secondary school, some of us changed in our friends’ houses so our parents wouldn’t know’” (A: 116). Ifemelu refuses to remain silent in response to Bartholomew’s false and sexist assertions, thereby deepening the dislike between them without changing Bartholomew’s stance.

Americanah includes examples of the denial and negative perception of female sexuality, reflecting Adichie’s critique that “[w]e teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way boys are” (WSABF: 32). Ifemelu’s mother displays hypocrisry in terms of Uju’s affair with The General after Uju gives birth to her son Dike. “She answered [The General] in monosyllables, as though he had betrayed her by breaking the rules of her pretence. A relationship with Aunty Uju was acceptable, but such flagrant proof of the relationship was not” (A: 85). While Ifemelu’s mother initially does not resent the affair, she shows irritation after the child’s birth proves the sexual nature of the affair, even though this was evident from
the beginning. Her pretence suggests that Ifemelu’s mother denied that Uju engaged in sexual activities with The General.

Obinze’s wife Kosi regards the fact that her employee tries to be in charge of her sexual health as a danger to her marriage. Kosi checks the bag of a new housegirl, as she always does with the belongings of new household employees, and is shocked to find a packet of condoms (cf. A: 33). Kosi accuses the housegirl of being a prostitute, to which the girl responds that her last employer forced her to have sex (cf. A: 34). Kosi does not believe the girl and tells her to leave, whereas Obinze tells Kosi that the girl was raped and was now taking measures to protect herself (cf. A: 34). Kosi shows sympathy neither for the girl’s traumatic experiences nor for Obinze’s compassion (cf. A: 34). Kosi seems to regard the woman’s sexuality as a threat to her marriage and turns her from a victim into a husband-seducing culprit. Kosi’s fear of the possibility that Obinze might begin an affair is described as “great” and “ordinary” (A: 34). “Kosi expected him to cheat, and her concern was to minimize the possibilities he might have” (A: 34). Kosi’s worries seem to be based on a double standard with regard to sexual behaviour that normalises men’s extramarital affairs and demonizes single women.

In addition to critique of discriminating attitudes towards female sexuality, Adichie presents Obinze’s mother and Ifemelu as positive examples of women, who openly address women’s sexual health and sexuality. Obinze’s mother demonstrates an attitude towards sexuality that is devoid of shame. She openly tells Ifemelu that although Ifemelu and Obinze both bear responsibility when they have sex, Ifemelu is the one who might have to suffer the more severe consequences (cf. A: 72). Obinze’s mother wants to ensure that the two “[...] are being responsible” (A: 72). Despite the sensitive topic Ifemelu feels “the absence of shame” (A: 72) and wonders if the reason might be “Obinze’s mother’s tone, the evenness of it, the normalness of it” (A: 72). Obinze’s mother urges Ifemelu and Obinze to use condoms to protect themselves from sexual diseases and prevent pregnancy (cf. A: 97). She suggests they both buy contraception and tells Ifemelu to not rely on a male partner for keeping her safe (cf. A: 97). “If he does not want to use it, then he does not care enough about you and you should not be there” (A: 97). Obinze’s mother empowers Ifemelu to make responsible choices for herself, while she represents sexuality as a normal human aspect without attaching shame to it. Obinze’s mother’s advice to Ifemelu is consistent with Adichie’s demand that every girl should be taught “that her body belongs to her and her alone, that she should never feel the need to say yes to something she does not want, or something she feels pressured to do (DI: 52). As an adult woman, Ifemelu also talks openly about her sexuality and defends herself
against discriminatory assumptions. When Ifemelu admits to her boyfriend that she cheated on him, Ifemelu reveals in his response a troubling attitude towards female sexuality.

‘You gave him what he wanted,’ Curt said. [...] It was an odd thing for Curt to say, the sort of thing Aunty Uju, who thought of sex as something a woman gave a man at a loss to herself, would say. In a sudden giddy fit of recklessness, she corrected Curt. ‘I took what I wanted. If I gave him anything, then it was incidental.’” (A: 288)

Ifemelu displays acute awareness of the sexist notion that women are expected to not express their sexuality in the ways men can (cf. *WSABF*: 32) and that it is primarily men who are sexual beings, while women are only participants for the satisfaction of men.

### 6.5. Sexual harassment

Through the experiences of Ifemelu, Adichie sheds light on sexual harassment and possible consequences for victims. When Ifemelu struggles to find a job to support herself while studying in the U.S., she has a number of job interviews, one of which is a situation permeated by sexism and the objectification of Ifemelu’s body: Looking at her chest, a man tells her, “‘You’re here for the attendant position? You can work for me in another way.’ Then, with a smile, the leer never leaving his eyes, he told her the job was taken” (A: 145). The man’s behaviour is highly inappropriate and humiliating, particularly because the situation is characterized by a power hierarchy in favour of the man, who is Ifemelu’s potential employer. Desperate because of financial problems and her lack of a job, Ifemelu agrees to work for a tennis coach who claims to need “help to relax” (A: 143). Ifemelu is sexually exploited by the man (cf. A: 154). Afterwards she reproaches herself for having let the man touch her and having touched the man, and descends into depression (cf. A: 154-158), feeling “self-loathing” (A: 158) and “shamed” (A: 159), which leads her to break off the contact with Obinze (cf. A: 159). The major consequences which the incident has on Ifemelu’s mental health and her whole life in general emphasize the horror of her experience.

### 6.6. Black women’s hair

Placing hair in the centre of the attention of her protagonist Ifemelu, Adichie describes and criticizes through her character the intersection of racism and sexism inscribed in widespread attitudes towards black women’s hair. Ifemelu’s observations during her childhood and youth in Nigeria establish the significance of hair for women and the beauty norm of straight hair, which she continues to encounter in America. The very first flashback to Ifemelu’s childhood revolves around her mother’s full and beautiful hair, beginning with the observation that “Ifemelu had grown up in the shadow of her mother’s hair” (A: 41). Her mother’s hair, which
is straightened with two bottles of relaxer and admired even by strangers, is the ideal which Ifemelu strives for (cf. *A*: 41). Comparing her mother’s hair to her own, Ifemelu is unhappy about her hair, which “remained bristly and grew reluctantly; braiders said it cut them like a knife” (*A*: 41). Ifemelu’s early experiences with regard to hair already suggest to the young girl that straight hair is attractive, while her natural her is undesirable. Ifemelu is shocked when her mother cuts her hair in response to a religious revelation (cf. *A*: 41). Although this action does not have positive consequences for Ifemelu and the family, it externally reflects her mother’s internal change. Therefore, cutting one’s hair is established as symbol for a woman’s personal change early in the novel and taken up later when Ifemelu cuts her hair as an adult woman. In addition to her mother’s luscious hair, Ifemelu witnesses how her aunt and confidante Uju gets her hair done. During her affair with The General, Uju wears hair extensions, “shiny and straight as could be” (*A*: 77). The expensiveness of the hairstyle and the deference which the hairdressers show towards Uju (cf. *A*: 77) indicate the perceived superiority of straight hair and its association with a high social status. Ifemelu is aware of this beauty standard but begins to criticize it only later when she is personally affected by it in America. In the U.S., Uju plans to have her hair relaxed before applying for a job as a doctor, as she expects that braids are associated with an unprofessional attitude (cf. *A*: 119). Uju’s decision to relax her hair is informed by the standard of straight hair. In *Dear Ijeawele* Adichie addresses the predominant public visibility of white women and their hair, observing “that whiteness is valued” (*DI*: 46), “that the hair texture that is valued is straight or swingy, and hair that is valued falls down rather than stands up” (*DI*: 46). After her graduation, Ifemelu’s career counsellor advises her to “[l]ose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters […].” (A: 202). While Ifemelu laughed when Uju expressed a similar thought, it is implied that Ifemelu’s experience in the U.S. has made her aware of the expectation of straightened black hair and the advantage of relaxed hair in professional life: “Now, she knew enough not to laugh” (*A*: 203). Ifemelu explains the significance of hair texture in professional life to her white boyfriend, who wonders why she does not wear her “[…] full and cool” hair:

‘My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it’s going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky.’ (*A*: 204)

Not only have Uju and Ifemelu learned in the U.S. that straight hair is the norm, but in addition, they have come to realize that a kinky, typically black hair texture evokes negative connotations. People’s reactions to Ifemelu’s short natural hair underscore the beauty standard
of straight hair and the negative associations evoked by women wearing short and natural hair. One co-worker wonders whether Ifemelu’s hair has a political meaning (cf. A: 211), while an African American woman asks Ifemelu if she cut her hair because she is lesbian (cf. A: 211). A black man walking past Ifemelu and her white boyfriend mumbles to her, “‘You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?’” (A: 212) This stranger might suggest that Ifemelu is attractive to her boyfriend because of her supposedly primitive hairstyle.

In addition to the expectations and prejudices surrounding black women’s natural hair, Adichie draws attention to the pain caused by chemically straightening black hair. “Ifemelu felt only a slight burning, at first, but as the hairdresser rinsed out the relaxer, Ifemelu’s head bent backwards against a plastic sink, needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp, down to different parts of her body, back up to her head” (A: 203). The hairdresser understates the damage of Ifemelu’s scalp, and by complementing Ifemelu’s straight hair reveals that the underlying beauty standard for hair is based on white women’s hair: “‘Just a little burn,’ the hairdresser said. ‘But look how pretty it is. Wow girl, you’ve got the white-girl swing!’” (A: 203). The transformation of her hair causes a feeling of alienation and loss of identity in Ifemelu. “She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss” (A: 203). Ifemelu suffers from short- and long-term consequences of relaxing her hair: Two days after straightening her hair she discovers scabs on her scalp, which eventually begin to leak pus (cf. A: 204). Later, when Ifemelu starts to experience hair loss at the temples, a female African friend advises her to cut her hair and stop chemically straightening it (cf. A: 208). Ifemelu starts her process of ‘transitioning,’ which Cruz-Gutiérrez defines as the transition from chemically straightened (‘relaxed’) hair to natural hair (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 246), by cutting her relaxed hair, which is the so-called ‘Big Chop’ (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 246). Unlike her mother’s haircut, which she witnessed during her childhood, Ifemelu’s ‘Big Chop’ is not motivated by an internal transformation, but by her severely damaged hair and scalp. It is the other way around, as Ifemelu’s hair transformation eventually leads to a change within Ifemelu.

After cutting her hair, Ifemelu perceives it as ugly until she becomes part of an online community of women who celebrate natural hair and exchange tips about hair care (cf. A: 208-213). Cruz-Gutiérrez reads Americanah in the context of the third wave of hair movements (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017). Thompson places the first and second hair movements in the historical frame of the Civil Rights Movement and the late 1980s (qtd. in Cruz-
Byrd and Tharps describe the rise of a ‘Natural Hair Movement’ in the late 2000s and its connection to the increasing popularity of social networks (qtd. in Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 246). Ellington notes the significance of the blogosphere for the movement (qtd. in Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 247). Cruz-Gutiérrez refers to the ‘Natural Hair Movement’ as the third wave of hair movements, which in addition to the use of social networks is characterized by “its pedagogic approach and the importance conferred to promoting self-love in children and young Black women” (Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 247). The online community for natural hair, HappilyKinkyNappy.com, and its members display the characteristics of the third wave of hair movements, since the members use an online social platform to educate each other about caring for natural hair and help each other to learn to love their hair (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 255). Aware of society’s marginalisation of black hair textures and health hazards of conventional hair products, the women on HappilyKinkyNappy.com criticize the invisibility of black women with natural hair in black magazines and the harmful ingredients in many hair products (cf. A: 212). The online community of women create “a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal” (A: 212). The representation of these women’s online space, in which natural hair is normalized, shows the significance of the Internet in empowering black women, as it helps Ifemelu to accept and finally love her natural hair. Cruz-Gutiérrez remarks that Ifemelu’s embrace of her natural hair suggests her assumption of power over her identity formation, liberated from “patriarchal epistemological discourses on gender and race” (Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 258). According to Cruz-Gutiérrez, Ifemelu’s hair transition is the key to her critical attitude towards race and gender inequality, resulting in her blog, which potentially influences a large number of people (cf. Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 258).

Significantly, Ifemelu begins to actively engage with the political meanings of black women’s hair after her own transformation that results in her love for natural hair. Through the character of Ifemelu, Adichie explicitly criticizes beauty standards concerning hair and reveals the latent racism underlying these beauty norms. When Uju compares Ifemelu’s natural hair to jute, Ifemelu points out the media’s role in the perpetuation of beauty standards and the arbitrariness of these conventions: “‘What if every magazine you opened and every film you watched had beautiful women with hair like jute? You would be admiring my hair now’” (A: 216). Cruz-Gutiérrez states that Ifemelu’s post ‘A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor’ includes criticism of “the essentialist view of her white friend believing that Michelle Obama’s hair naturally grows straight,” draws attention to the role of contemporary famous black persons with regard to hair politics, highlights stereotypes about
black women wearing natural hair and rejects Afros as Halloween costumes (Cruz-Gutiérrez 2017: 257). Ifemelu describes hair as the “perfect metaphor for race in America” (A: 297). In her blog post she publicly emphasizes that natural hair is in general considered unprofessional, unsophisticated and is simply not the norm (cf. A: 297). Moreover, Ifemelu addresses stereotypical assumptions about people wearing natural hair: “No, it’s not political. No, I’m not an artist or poet or singer. Not an earth mother either” (A: 297). Through Ifemelu’s words, Adichie draws attention to the norm of relaxed black hair, which leads to the misconception that chemically straightened hair is the natural texture of black women’s hair, whereas Afros are ‘artificial’ hairstyles (cf. A: 296-297). “When you DO have natural Negro hair, people think you ‘did’ something to your hair. Actually, the folk with the Afros and dreads are the ones who haven’t ‘done’ anything to their hair” (A: 297). Ifemelu raises awareness of the fact that publicly visible famous black women such as Michelle Obama or Beyoncé do not wear their natural hair texture, and speculates that if Michelle Obama stopped straightening her hair, her husband would lose votes (cf. A: 297). Ifemelu has transformed from an observer during her youth into an outspoken feminist critic of the intersection of sexism and racism in the public discourse surrounding black women’s hair. Moreover, Ifemelu adopts the pedagogic approach of the third wave of hair movements, as she explains ways of caring for natural hair to Aisha, an African hairdresser in the U.S. who wonders why Ifemelu does not relax her hair (cf. A: 12). The representation of Ifemelu’s endeavours to encourage black women to have a positive attitude towards natural hair might be based on Adichie’s advocacy of teaching black girls and women about the beauty of natural hair (cf. DI: 46). Aisha’s resistance to Ifemelu’s positive view on natural hair as well as Ifemelu’s experiences in Nigerian hair salons illustrate the limitations of Ifemelu’s pedagogic mission. In a conversation about hair salons, Ifemelu and some fellow returnees to Nigeria observe that the hairdressers have difficulty styling natural hair, “as though it were an alien eruption, as though their own hair was not the same way before it was defeated by chemicals” and that even Africans do not seem to appreciate their natural hair (A: 407). Ifemelu’s awareness of the “righteousness in her voice, in all of their voices” (A: 408) suggests that she understands that her opinion comes from her own hair transition, which resulted in a process of learning and reflecting. Ifemelu seems to be aware of the power of social norms that value straight hair, which are the basis of the hairdressers’ unfamiliarity with natural hair.

6.7. Preference of light skin

In Americanah, Adichie addresses another intersection of racism and sexism by drawing attention to the preference of women of colour with lighter skin tones. During their school
years in Nigeria, Ifemelu and her friends are made aware of the fact that a lighter complexion is more valued than a darker one. One of Ifemelu’s friends, who is biracial with “caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro-like” (A: 55-56), is always voted Prettiest Girl at school (cf. A: 56). This girl tells Ifemelu that she is convinced that she receives this title only because she is “half-caste” (A: 56). The association of a fairer complexion with increased attractiveness can also be seen in Uju’s attempts to make herself more attractive to The General by avoiding sunlight and applying creams “so that her complexion, already naturally light, became lighter, brighter, and took on a sheen” (A: 74). Kosi, Obinze’s wife, takes pleasure in being mistaken for mixed-race (cf. A: 22). Ifemelu’s and Obinze’s experiences with women’s complexion in Nigeria suggest that the lighter the skin the more the women approximate a beauty standard that is based on white women. Ifemelu’s observations in the U.S. resemble those in Nigeria, with the additional charm of exoticism. In one of her blog entries, Ifemelu observes the preference of light-skinned black women in the U.S., but also in Caribbean and African countries.

American black men like their black women to have some exotic quota, like half-Chinese or splash of Cherokee. They like their women light. But beware what American blacks consider ‘light.’ Some of these ‘light’ people, in countries of Non-American Blacks, would simply be called white. […] Now, my fellow Non-American Blacks, don’t get smug. Because this bullshit also exists in our Caribbean and African countries. (A: 213)

Adichie also shows society’s preference of black women with a light complexion in people’s reaction to Ifemelu and her white boyfriend, an interracial couple. Ifemelu is aware of a certain look of surprise “on the faces of white women, strangers on the street, who would see her hand clasped in Curt’s and instantly cloud their faces with that look. The look of people confronting a great tribal loss” (A: 292). Ifemelu not only attributes this offending astonishment to Curt’s being white, but also his good looks and the air of wealth surrounding him (cf. A: 292), as well as the fact that “she was not the kind of black that they could, with an effort, imagine him with: she was not light-skinned, she was not biracial” (A: 293).

6.8. Representation of black beauty

Adichie’s observation that representations of white beauty dominate the media worldwide (cf. DI: 40) and her demand to provide alternative images of non-white beauty (cf. DI: 46) are reflected in Americanah. During her time in the U.S., Ifemelu is acutely conscious of the omnipresence of images of white beauty and the marginalisation of black beauty. In one of her blogs, Ifemelu criticizes the invisibility of “beautiful dark women” in American pop culture (A: 214) and their representation in movies as “fat nice mammy or the strong, sassy, sometimes scary sidekick standing by supportively,” while they are being denied leading roles.
Ifemelu is aware of the effect of famous role models, since she hopes that Michelle and Barack Obama will bring about change in terms of the visibility of dark-skinned women. Ifemelu demonstrates the invisibility of black women in women’s magazines to her white boyfriend by having him skim the pages of numerous beauty magazines and count the black women featured in them (cf. *A*: 295). She summarizes their result in the following way:

‘So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women’s magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me, so I can’t get clues for make-up from these magazines. […]’ (*A*: 295)

Ifemelu goes on to point out that the articles in the beauty magazines include advice for the hair colours, eye colours and skin tones of white women, excluding the hair, eyes and skin of black women (cf. *A*: 295). Ifemelu thus demonstrates the perpetuation of white beauty standards by women’s magazines, which pretend to be inclusive of all women but in fact exclude black women. The representation of racially ambiguous women, although also marginalised, highlights the preference of lighter complexions.

In addition to Ifemelu’s open critique, Adichie counters the omnipresence of white beauty by a description of Obinze’s mother’s beauty, which Ifemelu perceives with a sense of deep admiration. Obinze’s mother is described as “a full-nosed, full-lipped beauty, her round face framed by a low Afro, her faultless complexion the deep brown of cocoa” (*A*: 68). Adichie emphasizes the woman’s features, which do not necessarily conform to white beauty standards, explicitly mentioning her Afro and her dark complexion. The beauty of Obinze’s mother, a black African woman, is one example of an alternative to mainstream representations of beauty (cf. *DI*: 46).

**6.9. Representation of feminist characters**

Ifemelu, and to a smaller extent also Obinze, is represented as perceptive and critical of a range of feminist issues such as gender expectations, attitudes towards marriage, female sexuality and the intersection of racism and sexism in the marginalisation of black women’s beauty. Ifemelu’s and Obinze’s critique arises from everyday examples, which Adichie considers particularly helpful to demonstrate feminist concerns (cf. *DI*: 28). Ifemelu and Obinze are not idealised as perfect critics: Ifemelu’s critique of her friend Ranyinudo is revealed to be hurtful and lacking in nuance (cf. *A*: 422-423), while Obinze seems to be unable to communicate his values to his wife Kosi. Adichie's voice is remarkably present in Ifemelu and Obinze, since the characters reflect and expand upon topics which Adichie raises in her feminist non-fiction. With Obinze, Adichie provides a male character who is
represented as sensitive of feminist concerns, especially in his reflection and critique of
gender roles, and who might be called a feminist. Ifemelu’s experience of transmigration and
her use of blogs as a platform for her critique render her a more modern feminist than Ifeoma
in Purple Hibiscus. Contrary to Kambili, Ifemelu is already an insightful girl, who, perhaps
similar to Adichie, “became a feminist because [she] grew up in Nigeria and observed the
world” (CNN 2018). Unlike Kambili’s coming-of-age, Ifemelu’s development is about
retaining her power of observation and critique, shaping it in different contexts due to
transmigration, and learning to make her voice heard.
7. CONCLUSION

As could be shown in this thesis, *Purple Hibiscus* is strongly informed by Adichie’s distinct approach to feminism. The beliefs and actions of the Catholic patriarchal figure Eugene meet with “critique from within” (Oduyoye 2001: 12), which is primarily expressed by Ifeoma, Kambili’s outspoken feminist mentor. Using the approach of cultural hermeneutics, Ifeoma engages in critique of discriminatory elements of both Christianity and Igbo culture, while simultaneously embracing and fostering positive aspects. Through the character of Ifeoma, Adichie criticizes gender roles and sexist attitudes towards marriage. While Kambili begins to question her father’s sexist dogmas, her process of transformation from a naive and silent observer to an open critic is shown to be still incomplete.

Despite the stories’ differences, the analyses of “Jumping Monkey Hill,” “Imitation” and “The Arrangers of Marriage” have found the stories’ common theme of female resilience and resistance in the face of patriarchy. As could be shown, the *mise en abyme* – structure of “Imitation” serves to support the Ujunwa’s account of sexual harassment by emphasizing the possible use of literature as a means of mediating real-life experiences. “Imitation” traces Nkem’s reflection on her marriage, which reveals a stark power imbalance. Adichie depicts Nkem’s resistance through her character’s refusal to change her physical appearance to conform to her husband’s preferences. The analysis of “The Arrangers of Marriage” shows that Adichie represents cultural and linguistic assimilation as a tool of patriarchal oppression in the context of migration, which the protagonist Chinaza learns to undermine.

Adichie’s *Americanah* is infused with the author’s feminist critique as outlined in her non-fiction. The discussion of the novel has shown that feminist critique of power dynamics in heterosexual relationships, attitudes towards marriage, and gender expectations is expressed by the focalizers Ifemelu and Obinze. In *Americanah*, Adichie counters sexist views on women’s bodies and sexuality with critique and positive attitudes towards female sexuality. Through Ifemelu, Adichie draws attention to the marginalisation of female black beauty and discriminatory assumptions about black women’s hair and complexion. The discussion of *Americanah* demonstrates that Obinze and Ifemelu are not idealized. Still, Obinze’s sensitivity to and questioning of gender inequality render him a potential feminist, while Ifemelu is represented as a modern, assertive feminist, unafraid to raise her voice.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s fiction illustrates literature’s capacity of making experiences of characters, no matter how similar or different they are from our own, tangible. As this thesis has illustrated, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie employs her fiction as a tool of feminist empowerment by narrativizing black Nigerian women’s experiences.
8. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>DI</td>
<td><em>Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions</em></td>
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<td><em>Purple Hibiscus</em></td>
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<td><em>We Should All Be Feminists</em></td>
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9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Secondary sources


Online sources
