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„They say 'a husband crowns a woman's life': How *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* challenge social expectations for married women in Nigeria"

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1. Introduction

"We condition girls to aspire to marriage and we do not condition boys to aspire to marriage,
and so there is already a terrible imbalance at the start."

(Adichie, *Ijeawele* ch. 7)

Marriage is much more than just a bond between two people who love each other. Marriage is a microcosm of society and, therefore, it is political. If women are structurally disadvantaged in a society, this will also be reflected in marriage. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Abi Daré are two feminist Nigerian writers who use their novels to bring attention to issues affecting girls and women in Nigeria. In *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, they take a critical look at social expectations for women who are married – but also at the expectation that every woman should be married. They do this by including a variety of marriages in the novels. However, for the most part, they are not presented in the most positive light and reveal how patriarchy affects women and girls, not just on a political, but also on a personal level. In fact, along with many African feminists, I argue that the personal and the political cannot be separated (Oloka-Onyango and Tamale 693, Imam et al. 7).

In this thesis, I will explore how Adichie and Daré use marriage to highlight different layers of discrimination against girls and women. To do this, I will divide my thesis into three parts. First, I will explain the importance of African feminisms by pointing out the pitfalls of universalising feminism. White, middle-class feminism largely shapes the discourse. However, this kind of feminism would not do justice to the realities of black, African girls and women (who, of course, are not a homogenous group either). For this reason, it has been rejected by many African women's rights activists. I will discuss the problems of trying to apply Western feminisms to non-Western countries before I move on to explain the development of African feminisms in the 20th and 21st centuries. I will talk about the reception of and reservations about feminisms in African countries as well as the need to develop feminist theories that are applicable to African women. In chapter 2.3., I will focus on 21st-century African feminism, which will constitute the theoretical framework for my analysis. In the second part, the application of these theories in Nigerian women's writing will be the focus of attention. In the third and last part, I will use my findings from the first and second part to analyse how Adichie and Daré use marriage to point out multiple layers of discrimination and how they specifically affect the

characters in their books. More precisely, I will compare the different marriages represented in the novels with regard to the intersectionality of gender, race and class, the role of personhood individualism and women's bodies.

<p style="text-align:center">"A husband crowns a woman's life"</p>

<p style="text-align:center">(Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75)</p>

The books I have chosen present a wide range of marriages – from child marriage to couples who love each other, abusive marriages, couples who struggle with infertility or infidelity and widowed wives. What makes these marriages interesting is that they are set in very different social classes: while *Purple Hibiscus* is told from the perspective of a girl from an upper-class family, *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is quite the opposite. Although Adunni, the protagonist of *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is from a poor and Kambili from *Purple Hibiscus* is from a wealthy family, both girls are taught that a "husband crowns a woman's life" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75). This idea, however, is challenged through the various marriages the girls get to observe – and for Adunni, also the marriage that she experiences. Through the authors' use of marriage, the novels, thus, present thought-provoking ideas of African feminisms and draw attention to women's issues in the private and political sphere – through the eyes of young girls.

Fully aware that the marriages in the novels are not representative of all Nigerian marriages and that the analysis cannot do justice to the diversity of Nigerian girls and women, with this thesis, I hope to shed light on some of the issues that living in a patriarchal society entails. In the following chapters, I will explore how these issues are addressed by two feminist Nigerian writers using an image as personal as marriage.

2. African Feminisms

2.1. The Pitfalls of Universal Feminism

Feminism can take on many forms, which is why it is very difficult to define it. However, one of the most common notions of feminism is that it is the "belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests" (Merriam-Webster). Thus, feminism presupposes that women are not politically, economically, or socially equal to men yet and that there is a need to challenge and change this situation. Feminism, therefore, cannot exist in a society without patriarchal structures (Garuba 106). Although feminism has existed throughout several historical periods and in various countries, it is difficult to find an overarching definition that would include the needs and aims of every group of women. In fact, how feminism is defined and applied can differ significantly according to a number of factors, such as nationality, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Adimora-Ezeigbo 13).

One of the problems that transnational feminism is confronted with is the common misconception that a universal feminism must mean a universal adoption of Western values and Western feminist theories. This can be quite problematic as several Western values can contribute to the continuation of oppression in non-Western contexts, even if they helped fight the oppression of women in the West. This is because there is no one-size-fits-all approach to feminism and strategies need to be adapted according to context. In addition, feminism, if understood as in its core simply opposed to gender-based discrimination, is not tied to a specific culture. The idea that in order to form societies in which women have the same rights as men, Western norms must be adopted is what Khader refers to as 'missionary feminism'. Unfortunately, this notion of universal feminism is widespread; especially among Westerners who assume that 'feminist values' are also 'Western values' by coincidence (Khader 3-4).

If Western feminism is accepted as the norm of feminism, we run the danger of reproducing imperialism, not challenging Western ideals and being selective about what women's rights are worth fighting for. It can also lead to simply attributing the discrimination of women to their cultural backgrounds and forcing dominant Western frameworks on non-Western societies without understanding their cultural contexts (Khader 2, McLaren 94). For instance, there is a widespread belief that feminism can occur if people are willing to reject their religions, cultures,

and communal relationships. This comes from the view that Western countries were able to achieve economic, military, and moral progress or success by rejecting these things. However, this is a much too simplified view, a Western perspective on history and a sweeping under the carpet of the West's imperialistic history that also contributed to its ostensible success in the above-mentioned areas (Khader 5).

After reading this, one might wonder: How is imperialism reproduced by setting Western values as standard values for universal feminist theories? Why is this such a dangerous approach and how does it further imperialism? For one, these values can take on the role of justifying militarism, economic exploitation, political domination, and white supremacy by making it seem as though these things serve the improvement of women's situations and that they are necessary to accomplish gender equality in societies that, apparently, are not able to accomplish it on their own. At the same time, these values can be markers of imperialism as they are forced upon a group of people that does not share them but is under a regime of cultural domination (Khader 5).

At the same time, by imposing a Western kind of feminism on all feminists as universal and a "one-size-fits-all solution", we fail to take a closer look at and understand intersectionality, how different women are subjected to different kinds of intersecting discrimination, and how strategies to improve the living conditions of women also affect other areas of their lives. Women can be affected by multiple forms of oppression, including racism, imperialism, classism and ableism, and a single strategy is not sufficient to really transform the multi-layered oppression experienced by some women. For Western feminists it is sometimes difficult to understand why Indigenous women, for example, are so hesitant to engage in conversations with them and criticise their cultures. This hesitancy does not necessarily stem from a clinging to sexist traditions, but from a scepticism towards Western feminists. Voicing concerns about one's own culture in the presence of Westerners historically often resulted in harm to Indigenous communities that was justified by the criticisms brought up from within. In this way, policies that were officially intended to help Indigenous communities frequently served to hurt them in reality (Khader 6-7). Similarly, African women have also been hesitant to voice concerns about oppressive aspects of their cultures out of fear that this would be interpreted as a confirmation of the negative ideas Western people already held against African societies (Eze, *Ethics* 1-2).

Khader argues that the Western concept of individualism is not a value that must be part of universal feminism. What she means by individualism is independent individualism (Khader 8) or atomic individualism (Ogundipe-Leslie 317). This type of individualism derives from the idea that every person should be economically self-sufficient and that only the relationships that they choose should be of value to them. While this is a Western concept, a value stemming from the Enlightenment period, it is not necessarily a feminist one (Khader 8). Aside from that, it seems to be in direct opposition with the concept of *ubuntu* (Zulu/Xhosa for "I am because we are" or "humanity towards others"), a philosophy and concept of African human rights that strongly values community (Eze, *Ethics* 22). Therefore, finding the balance between expressing one's modern, individualist identity while at the same time not forsaking one's African communal identity is a central issue in many African contexts (Pucherova 270). This is why, Khader emphasises that independent individualism should not be mixed up with personhood individualism, which is the understanding that while even though one highly treasures the good of the community, this can only be achieved if the individuals in that community are seen as individuals. Thus, the view of personhood individualism is that within a community, people still have unique and individual interests (Khader 59-60). Personhood individualism, in contrast to independent individualism, is essential for feminism (Khader 8).

The prerequisite to arguing for personhood individualism as an integral part of feminism is to acknowledge that a woman is a person. This may sound obvious, but it is not. How many times is the well-being of a woman compromised for the 'greater good', i.e., the good of a family or community (Khader 61)? Take forced marriages, such as the one between Adunni and Morufu in Abi Daré's *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, for example: Adunni is still a child and does not want to marry Morufu. Being his wife even impedes what she really wants to do, namely go to school, and get a good education. Nonetheless, her needs and wishes are sacrificed for the good of her family, as they are in desperate need for Morufu's financial support. Rather than being seen as a person, Adunni is seen as a vehicle to achieve financial security for her family. For Adunni not to be married off against her will, she must be truly valued and seen as her own person. However, even though Adunni wants to have her wishes respected, she is not individualistic, in the sense that she is only concerned about her own well-being. In fact, her story clearly illustrates that accepting women as people through personhood individualism can help achieve well-being for the community: throughout the book, we can read of Adunni's

desire to invest what she has gained through her education in her community as a teacher. Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* shows this as well: when she finally liberates herself from her husband's tight, oppressive grip, she also liberates her children. Thus, what can be observed here is not an independent individualism that ignores the relationships in a woman's life or conveys the idea that they are not valuable and simply obstacles on their ways to feminist change (Khader 73). Relationships and community matter. However, as explained before, they cannot matter if the well-being of the women in those relationships, in those communities does not matter.

Because of all the pitfalls just described, Khader proposes a non-ideal universalism instead of the above-criticised conceptualisation of universal feminism. Her universalism is non-ideal in the sense that there is not just one ideal cultural form that allows feminism to flourish. Feminism can be established in a variety of cultural contexts. She also emphasises that non-ideal universalism is not to be seen as a movement for justice achievement, but for justice enhancement (Khader 7). While justice achievement aims at creating an ideal world, the aim of justice enhancement is to create a better world. According to Khader, aiming at justice achievement and therefore, an ideal world, means that one must define what exactly this ideal world would look like, which would support the idea that there is only one ideal, and everyone must achieve it. Justice enhancement, however, does not focus on a specific ideal and is therefore less generalising. Feminism that aims at justice enhancement recognizes that strategies to improve the situation of women may vary according to context and can be criticised if they are not effective enough or do not take enough consideration of women's contexts (Khader 44). I argue that justice enhancement approach as well as the concept of personhood individualism are applicable to African feminisms, which also aim at the improvement of women's lives while not ignoring the communities and relationships of these women. Additionally, African feminists emphasise that feminist strategies must always take cultural contexts into careful consideration. I will illustrate this in more detail in the next chapters.

I have now established that Western values such as atomic individualism in the capitalist sense do not appeal to many Africans (Ogundipe-Leslie 317). Other concepts of Western feminism, such as gender eliminavatism (Khader 5), that is eliminating the concept of gender altogether, have also not gained a foothold in the African context – and according to Khader they are not necessary for non-ideal universalism and should not be presented as 'must-have feminist

values' on a global scale (Khader 5). However, there are still many shared goals between feminists from all around the world: respect for the humanity of women, freedom from gender-based violence and discrimination, and acknowledgement of the contributions women make to their societies (Ogundipe-Leslie 318). If we look at transnational, universal feminism as feminism that is opposed to the oppression of women but does not prescribe what strategies need to be implemented and how, if we accept that different forms of feminism can benefit women in different communities, but feminists around the world can support each other in their quests for justice enhancement, that leaves a lot of room for local feminisms. In Africa, various forms of feminism have been developed, defined, and discussed in theory and praxis over the past few decades. These forms are specifically designed for the cultural contexts they emerged in and will be described in the next two subchapters.

2.2. 20th-Century African Feminist Theories

African feminism is centred around the experiences and challenges of African women in particular and is often defined by being distinguished from Western feminism (Eze, *Postcolonial* 56), which lacks concern for issues regarding the equality of the sexes on the African continent. This could be attributed to the underrepresentation of African women in Western feminist theory (Olatokun 215). African feminism does not disregard the problems of many African women for whom basic amenities of life are not always accessible. It aims at investigating oppressive aspects of African cultures without viewing the westernisation of African societies and the denial of African identities as ways to solve these problems (Mekgwe 18). This also suggests that it would be problematic to analyse African literature through the lens of Western feminist theory, which was developed in the West and, thus, it is not only shaped by Western mindsets, but also by Western biases and perceptions of non-Western countries (Mekgwe 14).

Although African women have been at the forefront of movements against patriarchal oppression in Africa for centuries, the body of scholarly research centred on these issues on the African continent has only started to grow significantly in the second half of the 20th century (Ahikire 10). However, the increasing visibility of the feminist movement in both, urban and rural areas, has also been met with a lot of scepticism characterised by the beliefs that feminists are women who want to rule over their husbands and eliminate family values. Some view

feminism as a threat to the institution of family and many men are now confronted with the need to redefine masculinity. If femininity does not mean dependency and subordination anymore, what does masculinity mean (Ahikire 14)? These beliefs and doubts are often accompanied by the misconceptions that feminists hate men, and that feminism is un-African (Adichie, *Feminists* 10). This has led to a widespread stigmatization of the feminist movement in Africa (Ahikire 14). As a result of this and the term's association with Western feminism, many African gender activists have been reluctant to call themselves 'feminists', especially in the 20th century when alternative theories such as Motherism, Womanism, Snail-Sense Feminism and Nego-Feminism were developed for the African context. However, this has changed in the 21st century, as many African feminists have come to appreciate the term's 'political punch', which is crucial to keep the movement from becoming complacent, apathetic, overtly diplomatic and, in the worst case, powerless (Tamale, *Feminism* 39).

As mentioned earlier, the term 'feminism' was controversial in the context of 20th century women's rights activism because of its strong associations with Western feminism. Thus, many African writers and activists expressed doubts about using the label 'feminist' to describe themselves while others have even refused to do so (Olatokun 215). Different alternatives to the term, such as Stiwanism, which was first introduced by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie and is short for Social Transformation Including Women In Africa, were developed in the second half of the 20th century. However, Stiwanism is quite narrow in its focus as it specifically focuses on institutionalised structures that lead to the discrimination of women in Africa. Womanism is another theory of African feminism and was coined by African-American author Alice Walker to describe black feminists and feminists of colour who wanted to emphasise their love for other women. This love can be both, sexual and nonsexual (Mekgwe 18). There are various other 20th-century feminist theories that specifically focus on African women, including Africana Womanism, African Womanism, Nego-feminism, Motherism and Snail-Sense feminism (Garuba 107). In the following, I will shortly describe each of these movements and relate them to my argument that African feminism takes up the idea of personhood individualism, is intersectional and aimed at justice enhancement.

Africana Womanism refers to a type of feminism that was first brought up by an African-American feminist, Clenora Hudson-Weems, in 1987. It is Afro-centric, draws on African cultures and focuses specifically on the needs of women of African descent (Garuba 108).

Hudson-Weems argues that the racist history of white feminism makes it difficult for women of African descent to relate to it, which is why this type of feminism has alienated many black supporters. It was, therefore, necessary to develop a form of feminism that specifically caters to black women in Africa and the diaspora (Hudson-Weems 20). Hudson-Weems draws much inspiration from African-American activists that came before her, such as Sojourner Truth. African-American history is part of the foundation of this theory (Hudson-Weems 14). Africana Womanism distances itself from the term 'feminism'. Instead, the word 'Africana' is supposed to highlight black women's African heritage and the movement's ties to Africa while 'Womanism' serves to stress that the human woman – not a female animal – is at the centre of this movement. Hudson-Weems points out that the relationship between black women and black men is different from that of white women and white men. Whereas white men have historically had institutionalised power to oppress white women, this is not true of black men, who have historically been victims of institutionalised oppression along with black women and children (Hudson-Weems 15). This shows that Africana Womanism is shaped by personhood individualism as it does not only stress that the black woman is indeed a woman and therefore a person, but it also promotes the advancement of the entire black community along with black women. This brings me to my next point: intersectionality. Africana Womanism is intersectional, in that it considers gender, race and class. It acknowledges differences that are related to class and points out that many black women are affected by poverty (Hudson-Weems 11).

A similar concept, which, however, does not include women in the African diaspora, but instead primarily deals with African women in Africa, called African Womanism, was introduced by Chikwenye Ogunyemi in the 1980s. Ogunyemi points out that black women cannot simply join in on white feminists' for equal rights, considering that black women are also confronted with racism (Ogunyemi 79). African Womanism is quite similar to Nego-feminism, which puts much emphasis on negotiation, as its name suggests. Its aim is not to completely abolish patriarchal structures, but to negotiate with or around them, depending on the context (Garuba 107). Thus, it acknowledges that its aim is not to achieve, but only to enhance justice. It was introduced by Obioma Nnaemeka, who stresses that African men and women depend on one another, share many experiences with regards to racism, and should, therefore, look at feminism as a way of finding compromises rather than competing against each other (Garuba 108). Once again, the

importance of community can be identified in this theory, along with the intersectionality between racism and sexism.

Motherism, a concept by Catherine Acholonu, also constitutes an alternative to feminism in the Western sense and claims to be more "authentic to African cultures" (Eze, *Big 'F'* 90). As its name makes apparent, this form of feminism zooms in on the experiences of mothers and tries to improve the image of motherhood by describing it as an essential part of being an African woman. However, while this idea has also been criticised by other African feminists who are sceptical of the role Acholonu ascribes to motherhood for female African identity (Garuba 109), it is important to point out that motherhood is not the only essential component of motherism and that Acholonu emphasises that African women occupy many different roles (Acholonu 2). She also stresses African women's role in healing and creating alongside God and nature. Moreover, supporters of motherism highlight the importance of environmentalism and aim at ending racism, global hunger, malnutrition, child abuse, addiction to drugs, maternal mortality, homelessness, and exploitation on a political as well as economic level. In short, motherism is characterised by the desire to achieve freedom and justice by changing gender ideals and involving men and women to do so (Alemayehu 66). Therefore, the goal of motherism, which is also that of feminism, is to build a society where neither women nor men are oppressed (Alemayehu 67). This emphasis on involving both men and women and guaranteeing equality for both of them also derives from the theory's humanist and love-centred approach. It is built on the idea that love is positive and constructive and can conquer injustice as well as unify whereas hate is destructive. Feminism is not about hating men either, even though that is a common misconception. However, motherism is quite idealistic in its approach and puts special emphasis on love.

In short, motherism is not one-dimensional and should not be misunderstood as solely focusing on elevating motherhood because it is multidimensional and dynamic, highlighting the role of nature in human efforts to build new and rebuild old structures (Khutia 187). One could describe this concept as idealistic, given its big goals for justice achievement, but also as community-oriented (the name alone already emphasises a woman's relationships with her family) and intersectional. The intersectionality of this movement even goes beyond race, class and gender, but also includes the many other above-mentioned problems (e.g., global hunger, addiction,…).

Lastly, Snail-Sense feminism, first introduced by Nigerian author Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, is rooted in the strategies that Nigerian women, from pre-colonial times to now, have used to cope with Nigeria's patriarchal structures. Its name derives from the snail, an animal that can adapt to different conditions and can crawl over a variety of harsh surfaces without being hurt. The snail is not negatively impacted by the weight of the house, its shell, that it has to carry on its back. Thus, a snail is strong, and its strength comes from its ability to adapt and still go unscathed. An Igbo proverb supports Adimora-Ezeigbo's point: "'ire ọma ka ejule ji aga n'ogwu' (The snail crawls over thorns with a fine and well-lubricated tongue)" (Okafor 15). Adimora-Ezeigbo stresses the importance for women to go around obstacles, instead of confronting them and to cooperate with men. Therefore, her theory is more about how women can navigate patriarchal structures rather than changing them (Okafor 15). It is about finding balance between a woman's independent life, her own mind, and her relationships with men (Nwiyi and Edache 3).

While these theories are interesting to study and have surely brought about important developments for African women, many of them take rather diplomatic approaches and seem to try not to alienate African men by being too direct or radical. This has changed dramatically in the 21st century – a change that we can also observe in African women's writing.

2.3.   African Feminism in the 21st Century

21st-century African feminism will provide the theoretical framework for my analysis. I will use it to look at how marriage is used in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Abi Daré's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* to point out and show disapproval of structures and prevalent attitudes that disadvantage girls and women in Nigeria. It is important to note that while there are universal issues regarding women's rights that connect the experiences of women across continents, these experiences are shaped by socioeconomic and political parameters that are specific to every country (Oloka-Onyango and Tamale 697, 698). Hence, even within African feminism, there are different streams due to the diversity of cultures, religious contexts, and ways of thinking on the African continent. However, without negating the fact that the individual and cultural circumstances of women need to be considered, various common cultural values, e.g., community and solidarity, in addition to historical legacies moulded by colonialism, capitalism, imperialism and globalisation can be identified in Africa

(Tamale, *Culture* 49). Another reason to use African feminist theories instead of Western ones is that applying Western feminist theories to literature by African women can be quite problematic, as mentioned in chapter 2.1., since it suggests that Western feminist theories are universally applicable even though they were developed with Western concerns and biases. This could fortify the divisions between the 'self' and the 'other' while, at the same time, suggesting that non-Western feminist theories are not well-developed (Mekgwe 167). Therefore, I will use the next few pages to present 21st-century African feminist theories. I will explain how they differ from Western theories as well as 20th-century African feminist theories, but also point out what they have in common. In doing so, I will highlight aspects of intersectionality and personhood individualism because these concepts are not only important pillars of African feminism, but also of my book analysis. In addition to this, I will bring up a new theme in the African feminist movement, one that distinguishes the 21st century from the 20th century, namely women's bodies and pain.

An important document to look at when trying to understand 21st-century African feminism is the *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists* (Imam et al.). This charter will be used as the foundation for the next few paragraphs. It was signed by more than 100 feminists from Africa and the African diaspora in 2006. However, even though African feminist activists who live in the diaspora were involved in the development of the charter, its focus lies on the women who live on the African continent. The charter defines African feminist principles, goals and guidelines for analysis and practice. These can be used to enhance corporation among African feminists, which is why, apart from common principles and goals, it also contains responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities are individual while others are collective. All these responsibilities contribute to the African feminist movement and the relationships between the people in the movement. The primary use of the charter is twofold: It is there to help build the movement and spread feminist principles in Africa, but also to hold feminist organisations accountable and give them a tool to monitor their own institutional development (Imam et al. 2). All of this, is to promote three main tasks of African feminists, according to the charter:

- "the commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations in Africa" (Imam et al. 2)
- "the duty to defend and respect the rights of all women, without qualification" (Imam et al. 2)

- the commitment "to protecting the legacy of our feminist ancestors" (Imam et al. 2)

After clarifying the purpose and aims of this document, the charter moves on to explain why the term 'feminist' is used. It states that it is possible to be African and a 'feminist' – a term that was rejected by many 20th-century African women's rights activists. Now the term is chosen consciously to politicise the issue of women's rights, raise critical questions about structures that serve to oppress women and find ways to analyse and change them. This makes African feminism theoretical as well as practical. It recognizes that the fight for women's rights is political, critically engages with structures that lead to the oppression of women and is aimed at developing methods of analysis and action to improve the situation of African women by carefully taking into consideration their cultures and changing oppressive, patriarchal structures (Imam et al. 3). This section ends with a powerful statement: "Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'Ifs', 'Buts' or 'Howevers'. We are Feminists. Full stop" (Imam et al. 3). Although in the past, many people shied away from the term 'feminism', Tamale argues against the fear of being called 'radical', as radical, and revolutionary feminism is necessary to end patriarchy (Tamale, *Feminism* 41). Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns against what she refers to as 'Feminism Lite'. She describes this as conditional female equality, that is to assume that even though men are inherently superior, they should treat women well. It is the idea that men are in control, but they can 'allow' women to take the lead at times. According to Adichie, this way of thinking is dangerous and should be rejected completely. She compares being a feminist to being pregnant: "You either are or you are not" (Adichie, *Ijeawele* ch. 4). This is also why Adichie is opposed to whitewashing the struggles and discrimination women have had to deal with for centuries by choosing unprecise expressions to describe them. Therefore, although the term 'feminism' has often been seen as 'too radical', it is necessary to emphasise the existence of issues that women in particular have to deal with. Simply putting everything under the umbrella of 'human rights' is not enough (Adichie, *Feminists* 41). African feminists do not call themselves feminists by accident or coincidence. By using this term, they are making a political statement and claiming a name that many Africans consider too radical, too Western, too un-African.

However, for 21st-century African feminists, calling oneself a "feminist" has nothing to do with being too westernised or wanting to oppress men – an image that many Africans have of

Western feminism. Instead, it is about fighting patriarchy, "a system of male authority which legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal, cultural, religious and military institutions" (Imam et al. 4). This system should not be seen as one that can stand on its own – it is interwoven with other systems of oppression and exploitation, such as racism classism and discrimination based on religion or ethnicity. Feminists have to understand the systems that oppress women in order to dismantle them. And finally, it is important to understand the systems as just that – systems. Feminism is not about fighting individuals; it is about fighting a system (Imam et al. 4).

To understand this system, it is necessary to understand its history. This includes Africa's past and its pre-colonial histories, but also slavery, colonization, struggles for liberation, neocolonialism, and globalization. The charter acknowledges that men and women fought alongside each other to free the continent and give way to modern African states (Imam et al. 5). Taking all this into consideration is important to ensure the development of a feminism that is relevant to Africa, acknowledging its diverse histories and social contexts. However, this does not completely isolate African Feminism from other feminist movements: African feminists are "part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations" (Imam et al. 5). The struggles that African women experience are viewed as related to those of women in other, non-African, countries. Additionally, feminism itself is not seen as an ideology that was imported into Africa from Western countries. Instead, the past resistance of African women to the patriarchy is emphasised and the African feminist ancestors that paved the way for African feminists today are celebrated. These ancestors might not have used the label 'feminist' to describe themselves but are still recognized as trailblazers for the African feminist movement (Imam et al. 5).

This means that feminist movements have been part of the African continent for a long time, but they have also changed and evolved with time. Something that distinguishes 21st-century African feminism from that of the 20th century is its focus on African women's rights over their bodies. While sexual liberation was often seen as an ideal of the West in the 20th-century, 21st-century African feminists put emphasis on the necessity to guarantee African women ownership and control over their bodies (Imam et al. 5). Sexuality is raised as a crucial issue to address in the fight against the oppression of African women. According to Sylvia Tamale, it is necessary for African feminists to understand the relationship between pleasure, choice, power, and

women's oppression. She also criticises how uncomfortable many African societies get when it comes to discussing women's sexual freedom (Tamale, *Feminism* 40).

As pointed out earlier, African feminism seeks to "defend and respect the rights of *all* women" (Imam et al. 2; emphasis added), it does not ignore history, culture, or individual circumstances. This is not possible without acknowledging intersectionality. African women are not only affected by discrimination based on gender. Systems of oppression mutually influence each other, and a woman can be affected by multiple forms of oppression at the same time – based not only on gender, but also race, class or sexual orientation, for example. The aftermath of colonialism and imperialism can still influence African women's lives. For instance, a dark-skinned African woman can be affected by colourism, poverty, and gender-based discrimination all at once. She may even experience discrimination based on her ethnicity, for belonging to an ethnic group that is not dominant where she lives or works. These intersecting forms of discrimination are described in the theory of intersectionality, a term coined by American lawyer and leading scholar of *Critical Race Theory* Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw wanted to draw attention to how discrimination based on race and gender targeted black women on a private and institutional level. Moreover, she argued that black women were usually side-lined in discourses about anti-racism and feminism (Bello and Mancini 12). While oftentimes black men's "experiences are taken as the only point of departure for all conversations" about racism, those of white women are the point of departure for conversations about sexism (Crenshaw). Her theory originally highlighted the intersection of race- and gender-based discrimination. However, it has been expanded to include ableism, classism and other forms of discrimination that may overlap with each other as well. This theory allows African women to discuss how different structures of oppression affect them, but it has often been neglected in mainstream Western feminism, where women were frequently asked to analyse issues only through the lens of womanhood and not through the lens of being black or being poor, for example (Eric-Udorie xiv-xv). Eric-Udorie argues that feminism cannot take "a one-size-fits-all approach". Instead, the aim of feminism must be to free all women of sexist oppression, and this means to acknowledge the different problems and challenges different women face and using a variety of strategies to combat them, so that the strategies are suitable for the women they are designed for. The same strategies are not applicable to everyone, and problems must be analysed through various lenses, taking into account intersecting forms of discrimination against women (Eric-Udorie xx). For this reason, it is essential for feminist movements to take

the contexts of the women they fight for into consideration. While women across the world share many experiences when it comes to gender discrimination, African feminism specifically looks at how different forms of discrimination, including racism, colonial power dynamics as well as historical aspects intersect and contribute to African women's unique experiences with gender inequality (Bakare-Yusuf 8). African feminism may be part of a global feminist movement and community (Imam et al. 5), but to put it in the words of feminist writer Audre Lorde, "community must not mean the shedding of differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (Lorde 99).

Similarly, while many white Western feminists have failed to understand that black women are not only women, but also black, many male black activists seem to struggle to understand that African women are not only black, but also women. Sephodi claims that to many Africans, feminism is divisive and the idea that black women are black first and women second is often encouraged. Some even go as far as to say that feminism is un-African (Sephodi 176). Because black African men and women alike must face racial prejudice and discrimination as well as the consequences of colonialism, it can be easy for women to fall into the trap of defending patriarchal attitudes in an attempt to defend black men (Sephodi 170). Eze points out that in the past, many African feminists believed that Africans could not fight against the oppression of women without fighting colonialism and imperialism first. This implies that African women should accept oppressive patriarchal structures until the issues that also affect African men directly are solved – only then, the liberation of African women from the oppression of their male counterparts could be discussed (Eze, *Postcolonial* 57). Thus, African feminism runs the danger of being watered down to defend African men. However, understanding intersectionality and the various layers of oppression a woman might have to deal with is essential in finding appropriate solutions (Sephodi 170). This requires that black African women are not only seen as members of the black community, but that they are acknowledged and respected as individual people (personhood individualism). Only then, it is possible to see the issues that affect them and consider it important enough to tackle them, even if they do not directly affect the whole community.

According to Chielozona Eze, one of the main problems of African feminism is the desire of many to be seen by the West. Since African people have often been inaccurately defined by Western scholars, many African women scholars see the strong need to tell their own stories.

However, although this is very necessary, Eze highlights the danger originally brought up by Olufemi Taiwo as the 'povery of theory' (Eze, *Postcolonial* 58). As African scholars may feel the pressure to reassert themselves and prove to others that they are and that they think, who they are and what they think can get lost along the way (Taiwo 45). It is important for African feminists to not just develop their theories as responses to Western theories about African women, but independently of the West, so that parts of African history and identity that tend to be overlooked by Western scholars are not consequently also overlooked by African scholars as well (Eze, *Postcolonial* 58). This does not mean that Western imperialism should not be reacted to – on the contrary, it deserves criticism. However, African feminism cannot only be defined by what it is not, and African women must be seen as more than merely victims of Western misrepresentation (Eze, *Postcolonial* 61, 63).

To sum up, African feminism has undergone many changes and new developments in the past few decades and can be described by stressing some of its key features: boldly claiming the term 'feminist', taking Africa's (pre-)colonial past as well as social and political contexts into consideration, emphasizing women's right to have control over their own bodies, not being afraid of being radical and direct, developing intersectional theory and being less concerned about the West. These features are strongly reflected in much of contemporary Nigerian women's writing, which I will focus on in the following chapter.

3. African Feminisms in Nigerian Women's Writing

3.1. Third-Generation Writers and Feminist Empathy

In the past two decades, numerous female African authors have published literary works with clear feminist messages. Many of these authors are Nigerian women. In their literary works, they present feminism as a moral issue that is of high relevance today and women's rights as fundamental human rights (Eze, *Big 'F'* 89). The two authors whose books will be subject to analysis in this thesis, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Abi Daré, both belong to the so-called third generation of Nigerian writers. Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) played an important role in reviving the novel as a genre in third-generation Nigerian writing, which was previously dominated by poetry (Adesanmi and Dunton 11). In this chapter, I will talk about some of the key differences between Nigerian writing of the third generation and that of the first two generations. In doing so, I will explain the link between third generation writing, pain and empathy, mainly following Eze's arguments (*Ethics*) because he does not only highlight how third-generation Nigerian women's writing evokes empathy through pain, but feminist empathy in particular. I will explain his definition of feminist empathy further on in the chapter and take it up once more in my analysis.

One way to determine the boundaries between the third generation and the previous two is to look at the history of colonialism in Nigeria. Most of the writers of the first and second generations were born in the first half of the 20th century, a time when Nigeria was still under colonial rule. However, while writers of the first generation write a lot about the colonial rule itself, writers of the second generation are primarily concerned with its aftermath and the country's newly found independence. Most third-generation authors were born after 1960, that is, after Nigeria became independent, and have, therefore, never directly experienced colonialism (Adesanmi and Dunton 14, 15) and are "not as burdened with the task of defending Africa against Western normative freezing as the generation before theirs was" (Eze, *Big 'F'* 89). This means that while many first and second-generation writers felt obligated to react to an image of Africa that was shaped by the works of non-African writers, third-generation writers are freer to act rather than react. The third generation is marked by more fluid plots and faster-paced narratives. In addition to that, nomadism, exile, and displacement are common themes in third-generation literature (Adesanmi and Dunton 16).

Third-generation authors centre much of their writing on Africa and move away from writing back to Western literature. The African self and questions that explore how Africans relate to each other and how they navigate their local spheres become very important in this new wave of literature. Ethical questions and problems within African communities are addressed whereas in the past, many African writers and literary scholars were hesitant to dive into pain in literature out of fear that this might be seen as a confirmation of negative Western stereotypes about Africa. As the third generation liberates itself from the shackles of responding to the West and defending Africa to Western readers, female writers tell stories about African women's bodies in pain and, thereby, make that pain immediate, poignant, and present. The demand embedded in those stories is clear and simple: equal rights for women and men and recognition of the oppression women are subjected to because of their gender (Eze, *Ethics* 1-2).

What many contemporary feminist writers from Nigeria draw from, is a concept that Eze calls 'feminist empathy'. It is the ability to relate to a woman who is subjected to suffering, simply because of the fact that she is a woman. It is important to understand that empathy does not equal pity or sympathy. There are concerns among feminist and postcolonial scholars that a false understanding of empathy could lead to paternalism or the imposition of Western values on other cultures and people. In this case, it would only be another example of imperialism. When it comes to pity and sympathy, the sympathiser and sympathised are not on the same level. The sympathiser feels supportive of the other person's feelings and feels sorry for their pain. However, if someone feels empathy instead of sympathy or pity, they feel the other person's pain and are on the same level as the person they empathise with. Having empathy with someone means being able to put oneself in the shoes of another person and projecting one's own personality on the issue that is being discussed. This means that to feel empathy, we try to imagine what we would feel like if we were in the same situation as the person we are empathising with. However, at the same time, we must be aware that we are not the one suffering and it is impossible to feel the exact same feelings as the person that is actually suffering. Empathy is based on the imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience (Eze, *Ethics* 15-16).

Although empathy is a feeling that can make people from different races, sexes, ages, and religions, etc., identify with one another, it can also be blocked by indoctrination. This happens if identification with a certain group is suppressed by taking away their humanity and

individuality, by making them inferior, turning them into an anonymous mass and by using them as scapegoats, thereby, turning them into perceived enemies. We can see examples of this all throughout history in different parts of the world: in Germany during the Nazi rule, in South Africa during apartheid and in the United States during times of slavery, for instance. In colonialism and imperialism, the oppressors also try to dehumanise the groups they seek to oppress, which gives them power and keeps people from empathising with the oppressed. It is important to say, though, that the blocking of empathy is not always obvious. Oftentimes, ideologies that result in the oppression of a group of people are woven into ideas that seem harmless, into culture and tradition. For this reason, it can be difficult for women to receive empathy when they are mistreated by their husbands for not giving birth to a son or shamed by others for not being able to carry children (Eze, *Ethics* 17). However, blocking empathy is not the only way to keep certain groups of people from receiving it. Empathy can also be redirected. This means that the pain of person A is consciously highlighted to distract from the pain that person B is feeling (Fischer 440). To illustrate this, I would like to use the example of person A who shot another civilian, person B. Initially, one might feel empathy for person B. After all, he lost his life. However, what if person A gets to lay out his side of the story? Maybe he felt threatened, maybe he feared for his life, maybe person B came off as aggressive and violent. Person B might have been reaching for his phone, which person A mistook for a weapon. And now, he has to live with the guilt of killing an innocent person for the rest of his life. If this side of the story is highlighted, people might start to feel empathy for person A. While empathising with him per se may not be wrong, it could shift the attention away from the innocent man that lost his life and, as a result, keep people from empathising with person B. Oftentimes, shifting empathy is used as a strategy to push political agendas or to keep oppressed people oppressed, by diverting attention from their stories (Fischer 453). Novels can be used as a tool to give a platform to individual stories, including stories that do not usually get a lot of attention, and evoke empathy by giving readers the opportunity to connect with characters. Novels about child marriage, such as *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, give readers who are not very familiar with this issue a very personal insight. They do not just read about child marriage in general or study numbers and statistics, but they are confronted with an individual story, an individual destiny that was shaped by child marriage (Fischer 439).

Feminist empathy is not only a way for readers to connect with characters, to become aware of issues affecting women, and possibly be inspired to action, but it can also be used as a

framework for literary analysis. By using it as a lens to read feminist fiction, for example, literary critics who may not be able to understand exactly what the characters are going through because of their gender, nationality, race, class, etc., can put themselves in the shoes of the characters through empathy. This does not mean that they fully understand the character's experience, in fact, they are aware that they do not, but they try to imagine what the character might feel like. This allows critics and readers to analyse and interpret the texts from a feminist viewpoint (Nkealah 214). It will also allow me to analyse *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Daré through the lens of 21st-century African feminism.

In order to evoke feminist empathy, a character does not have to be likeable. A reader can dislike a character and still feel empathy for them. Rather than liking a character, the reader has to simply think about what they would feel like if they were in the character's situation. This means the reader must move from a single-minded focus of attention to a double-minded one. Whereas the single-minded focus of attention sees other people as objects that can be used, the double-minded focus tries to understand the other person's feelings and thoughts. By applying a double-minded focus, readers switch their perspectives and try to view the situation through the eyes of the character (Eze 2015: 318).

Feminist writers try to get their readers to empathise with their female characters by sketching their lives as African women who experience unnecessary pain, so that readers think about the causes of this pain and how it hinders women from living up to their full potentials or being granted their basic human rights (Eze, *Ethics* 7). The pain many women writers describe in their books is pain that is legitimised by culture and tradition, for example, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, polygamy, or spousal abuse. Problems as these are given a platform in feminist writing and made graspable through the reading experience. This can evoke feminist empathy (Eze, *Ethics* 5-6).

Since pain is something that everyone can experience, describing pain in literary works can get people from a variety of backgrounds to empathise with a character. Writing about pain is more likely to trigger empathy than writing about happiness. This is because pain catches readers' attention by raising their awareness of other people's realities and by showing readers that other

people are just as human and vulnerable as they are. Reading about other people's happiness, on the other hand, often evokes jealousy – which redirects readers' attention to themselves – or at least does not capture readers' attention in the same way that undeserved pain does (Fischer 450). According to Eze, the infliction of needless pain on African women is a violation of their human rights (Eze, *Ethics* 2). As we are situated in the context of postcolonial literature and intersectional feminism, the question whether we can really universalise pain or human rights is, of course, a legitimate one. Human rights, as we know them today, were developed in the West and are not without controversy. Can they really be applied to all countries and all cultures? Are they another way of forcing Western ideals on non-Western countries (Pucherova 269)? If we understand human rights as universal and self-evident, if we argue that they should not be dependent on context, then we can follow along with Eze's argument that all humans, independent of their nationalities, race, or status, can feel empathy if they read about a character being subjected to needless pain and, thus, having their human rights violated (Pucherova 268). This, however, requires that women are seen as people, that their personhood is acknowledged, and that human rights encompass women's rights. The term 'human rights' should not be used as a distraction from women's rights issues. It is necessary to talk about women's rights issues specifically in order to find proper solutions. Since it is a human right to not be discriminated against, women's rights breaches, are automatically human rights breaches as well. Women's rights are human rights, and a country cannot respect human rights without respecting women's rights. To make sure that women's rights are observed, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are problems that specifically affect women. Like Adichie argues, it is not enough to only talk about human rights in general (Adichie, *Feminists* 41). Following the idea of personhood individualism, a group cannot be okay if the individuals in the group are not okay – human rights cannot be observed if women's rights are not observed. While inflicting needless pain on women should also be acknowledged as a violation of their human rights (because women are humans!), this should not lead to shifting attention away from problems that specifically affect women, thereby, neglecting specific issues by getting lost in talking about general ones.

Writers of feminist literature in Africa foreground this necessity of not neglecting individual, gender-specific issues for the sake of more general ones. Rather than writing about nation like many writers of the previous generations, contemporary Nigerian women writers are more concerned with the body of a woman as a violated entity, as the body symbolises the home of an individual self. However, African women's bodies often do not seem to really belong to the

woman alone, but to her society and her culture. This becomes apparent when women's bodies are harmed in cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation, or within contexts where it is seen as socially acceptable, such as marriage. Literature that is critical of this brings up many questions around the relationships of Africans with other Africans, that is relationships within an ethnic group or between African men and women, for example. We may ask: What does an African body mean to another African body? Who does an African woman's body belong to (Eze, *Ethics* 3)?

If a woman's body is not her own and not respected in a patriarchal society, the female body can be considered 'disabled', not in the sense that it is not healthy or that it is naturally inferior to the male body, but in the sense that being a woman in a patriarchal society is a handicap. This is because in patriarchal societies, women's lives are determined by social norms and rules that are often limiting to them. Femininity is defined by a society that favours men and thus, the social rules women ought to adhere to often disadvantage them, while advantaging men. Feminist Nigerian writers are aware of this and understand how a patriarchal society disables women. They address this by highlighting women's individual experiences and showing the female body in pain, thereby evoking feminist empathy, as described earlier (Eze, *Ethics* 6).

Third-generation writing, therefore, addresses problems within African communities more directly than first- and second-generation writing did as it is less concerned with responding to the West. Writers often describe the pain inflicted on African women's bodies and thereby, evoke feminist empathy. This helps readers relate to the characters, even if they have never experienced their pain. It foregrounds the characters' humanity and their feelings and, thus, makes injustice less abstract. Connecting injustice to individual people and stories can help to raise awareness about the intensity of the injustice and the urgent need for change.

3.2.   Features of African Feminisms in Nigerian women's writing

As far as African feminisms are concerned, as mentioned earlier, many female, third-generation writers from Nigeria are unapologetically feminist in their writing. However, the kind of feminism found in their novels is conscious of the flaws of Western, that is white and middle-class, feminism and often points them out. Feminist Nigerian writers are not afraid to highlight the objectification of women as well as political, social, and economic inequalities in their texts.

They draw their readers' attention to how African women's human rights are violated and raise questions about whether we can really consider African women's bodies their own in stories where they seem to belong to men (Eze, *Big 'F'* 90-92). By presenting Nigerian women's lives and conditions in their fiction, Nigerian women writers are able to disrupt patriarchal establishments in a literary world that was dominated by men for a long time. Through their texts, Nigerian women have challenged the representations of women in literature written by men, but also by Westerners. By entering the discourse, they "refuse to inhabit the world passively and reject the myriad of ways in which we are defined under white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Gqola 12-13). Therefore, the act of writing itself can be seen as an act of reclaiming and redefining female Nigerian identities as well as establishing their own African feminism(s) (Nfah Abbenyi 148).

Feminist literature by African women is often characterized by multi-facetted female characters who reclaim their identities by taking on agency and speaking up rather than staying quiet. Female characters who do not want to break free from gender norms that limit women are often given plots that highlight how this impacts their lives in negative, at times even tragic, ways. The texts draw attention to gender-related issues within specific cultural as well as social spaces by making patriarchal structures that oppress women visible. However, in doing so, the fact that this oppression is not only carried out by men but can also be reinforced by other women is not ignored (Nfah-Abbenyi 149, 150, 151). The female protagonists are often placed on a path that leads them to grow in agency and independence in the course of the novel. Even though the characters' journeys often start out in traditional settings that may limit them, as the story progresses the protagonists gain both, agency, and independence. This also helps readers to envision the possibilities for women's liberation in the future. For this, traditional ideals are questioned, and the structures of Nigeria's patriarchy are critically examined. This goes hand in hand with illustrations of the protagonists' disappointment in the country and the recognition of the problems and injustices, especially the ones affecting women specifically (Nadaswaran, *Motif/ves* 381-382). The female protagonists establish their own identities that are not dependent on the male figures in their lives, neither their fathers nor their husbands, or on their often (emotionally or physically) absent mothers. In a way, these novels constitute a Nigerian *Bildungsroman*, in which young female protagonists become critical of the (often gender-related) injustices in their lives and go from being seemingly overwhelmed and helpless to confident, young women who actively participate in shaping their own lives and even contribute

to the betterment of their communities (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 22). This is made possible by allowing the characters to step outside of their usual cultural and social circles, encounter people from different walks of life and form relationships, which can lead the characters to ask more questions, open their eyes to new possibilities and ways of life and thus, trigger further development (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 26).

Such female protagonists were not very common in novels written by first- and second-generation authors, like Chinua Achebe, for example. In these novels, female characters were often treated as accessories (the protagonist's wife, daughter, sister). However, they come to the forefront of third-generation women's writing. Female characters move away from their mostly passive roles and start to question and challenge the dominating male figures in their lives. Oftentimes, the figures that are shown to dominate the lives of these female characters are their fathers or husbands, as is the case in *Purple Hibiscus* (Kambili's father) and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* (Adunni's father and her husband). This resistance and questioning of male authority usually result in a conflict between fulfilling the expectations of the girls' environments and being obedient and pursuing their own dreams, taking on an active part in their own lives and liberating themselves from patriarchal obligations in their families (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 23, 30).

While fathers are often dominant in the lives of the main characters, mothers are often absent. This absence can be either a physical or an emotional one. For example, while Kambili's mother is physically present in *Purple Hibiscus*, she is not present mentally as she tolerates her husband's abuse and ignores her daughter's struggles for the most part of the book. This type of mother represents a second-generation woman who has internalised oppressive aspects of her culture and tradition and has resigned to accepting them, rather than questioning or opposing them. The discrepancy between the mother's and the daughter's characters and reactions to patriarchal oppression typically puts a strain on their relationship (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 26-27). Adunni's mother in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, on the other hand, has passed away and thus, she is physically absent. In general, the moment when the daughter becomes aware of the problems her mother had or has to deal with and the role she played or plays in her relationships with men, usually turns out to be an important turning point in her story: she does not want to live the same life that her mother lived, she does not want to submit to patriarchal structures in the way that her mother did (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 29). The gap that absent

mothers and the lack of solidarity by either them or other female figures in the lives of the protagonists leave is commonly filled by other maternal figures. In *Purple Hibiscus*, for example, this maternal figure is Kambili's aunt Ifeoma whereas in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* it is first Adunni's husband's second wife Khadija and then her mentor Tia. These maternal figures become important role models for the characters, display more agency than their actual mothers and support them in their further transformation into not passive, but active young women (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 27).

In many stories, there seems to be a lack of solidarity among women. While a girl or woman suffers, other women are shown to either stand by, ignore, or even encourage this suffering. However, women's apparent failure to show solidarity for one another brings forth another effect of patriarchal systems: it makes women turn against each other. This is because in many situations, women feel that they cannot speak up for other women as this could threaten their very own existence or safety. Stories of women who actively take part in the oppression of other women reveal that, at times, they internalise the oppression they have experienced themselves. By oppressing other women, they are given an opportunity to be in a position of power. The fact that there are people who are willing to participate in the oppression of others if it grants them certain privileges or advantages, even though they have experienced similar oppression themselves, indicates that the problem of patriarchal societies are not just the structures alone, but also the people who benefit from these structures. As touched on here, even women can benefit from patriarchal structures to an extent (Eze, *Big 'F'* 96, 98).

Women turning against each other can result in mental or physical pain. Talking about the pain inflicted on African women is a marker of African feminism in Nigerian literature and makes readers empathise with the characters. The descriptions of violence and pain we find in feminist literature by Nigerian women are not there to merely entertain the readers, but to humanise the characters, allow people to relate to them and to be moved at the sight of the violence the characters experience, which is symbolic of that experienced by many women in real life. African women's bodies are essential in this as we can often see the violence and pain inflicted on female characters through physical wounds on their bodies, through domestic violence or physical and sexual abuse, for example (Eze, *Big 'F'* 97). The need to fight for the right of control over one's own body, that was described in the *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists*, becomes apparent through this (Imam et al. 5).

Apart from being physical, pain can also be emotional and by reading feminist novels, readers can feel with the characters and empathise with their emotions and worries. A common source of emotional pain is that the characters are objictified and seen and treated as means to an end (Eze, *Big 'F'* 98). To illustrate this, we can use the example of female characters whose main role in their marriages is giving birth to children. Whether or not they are able to give their husbands children, especially sons, oftentimes determines how they are treated and seen by their husbands. If a woman is not able to provide the children a husband desires, she may have to deal with stigmatisation by others as well as with her husband possibly taking another wife. This is a recurrent theme in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Daré and can be seen in the lives of Labake, Khadija and Tia.

Finally, the endings of the novels represent new beginnings rather than closed endings. They show the beginning of the lives of the female leads in the story and are usually optimistic, that is they give a hopeful outlook on what may lie ahead for the protagonist in the future while at the same time leaving the future open and unwritten. We can observe this in both, *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, where the protagonists are freed from the oppressive situations (Papa Eugene, child marriage, Big Madam's home) that held them down during the novel. However, while we do know that there are some new open doors the characters could go through, we do not know exactly how this journey will go for them and where they will eventually end up. In addition to these hopeful endings, the titles of *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* are filled with the same kind of positivity and foreshadow the transformation the protagonists will go through in the novels. Kambili blooms as she is transformed into a confident young woman, just like the purple hibiscus that bloomed in her aunt's garden, and Adunni finds her voice as she grows and learns (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 31-31).

4. Analysis

4.1. Plot and Narrative Styles

Purple Hibiscus is a novel written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and first published in 2003. Even though it was her debut novel, it not only became a bestseller, but also contributed to the revival of the novel in third-generation Nigerian literature (Adesanmi/Dunton 11). It follows the story of a young, 15-year-old girl, Kambili, and her family. Her parents seem to be each other's opposites – her father is very dominant, and her mother is very quiet and submissive. The father, Papa Eugene, is extremely religious and the head of the family. Although he is sometimes violent towards his children and his wife, Beatrice, she does not really speak up against him. She lets her husband take the lead, even when he is wrong or harms the family. Kambili later spends some time at her aunty Ifeoma's house, a woman who is very different from her mother, and opens Kambili's eyes to a lifestyle that she was not familiar with before. She is a widow and, thus, a single mother, educated, independent and not afraid to take charge of her own life and speak her mind. Kambili observes the lives of these two wives and the differences between their lives start to occupy her mind and trigger a big transformation in her.

The Girl with the Louding Voice, published in 2020, is the debut novel of Abi Daré. It is about the 14-year-old Adunni, who is from a small village and a poor family. After her mother's death, her father arranges a marriage between her and the village taxi driver Morufu because the family is in desperate need of money. Even though Adunni does not want to get married and dreams of going to school and becoming a teacher, she has no other choice. She lives with Morufu as his third wife and while she forms a friendly relationship with his second wife Khadija, she is met with coldness by the first one, Labake. After some time, she runs away and starts working for a wealthy businesswoman, who she calls Big Madam, in Lagos, where the young girl is able to observe a little bit of Big Madam's marriage as well as that of another woman, Tia, who becomes Adunni's mentor. Despite Big Madam's unhappiness with her husband, who continuously cheats on her with several women, she feels as though she cannot leave him because it could hurt her reputation. Tia, on the other hand, is in a happy marriage, but struggles with judgement from other people, especially her mother-in-law, because she has not given birth to a child yet.

As can be seen in these short plot summaries, the novels have quite a few similarities: the protagonists are young girls who grow up in environments that do not grant them much insight into other ways of life. For Kambili, it is her conservative family and for Adunni, it is her small village. Both girls are initially dominated by their fathers but leave their homes to grow and get to know new lifestyles: Kambili goes to Nsukka, where her aunt lives, and Adunni goes to Lagos, where she works for Big Madam. Both protagonists are able to observe the older women in their lives and their marriages leave their mark on them. However, while there are many similarities, there are also some key differences that can be traced back to how differently they grew up. In other words, they come from very different social classes and, thus, have different experiences with and perspectives on marriage. In this chapter, I will briefly talk about the narrative styles in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* and describe the narrators' perspectives on marriage. In chapter 4.2., I will highlight the importance of class when comparing these two novels. The similarities between the novels make it possible to draw parallels and show that gender-based discrimination affects women from all walks of life, whether rich or poor, and gender-based violence is legitimised by culture in low-income as well as high-income families. The differences enable me to shed light on sexism and marriage from different angles and perspectives and highlight the importance of intersectional feminisms.

The first chapter of *Purple Hibiscus* is a flashforward, that is an event that only happens later in the plot. This builds suspense as the reader does not know how the event came about and will only come to understand the connection between this part and the rest of the story later (Bennett and Royle 56). After that chapter, the novel shifts to linearity and makes use of a beginning-middle-end sequence, which raises the reader's curiosity to find out what happens at the end (Bennett and Royle 56). What happens to Kambili and her family? How does she overcome her father's strict rule? These are questions that readers may ask while reading the novel and they are resolved at the end. The first few words of the novel, "Things started to fall apart at home" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 3), are not only a reference to Chinua Achebe's famous *Things Fall Apart*, the first novel in his *African Trilogy*, but they also establish the framework of the story: the home. The personal is already made political in the first sentence of the book. This is already a reflection of 21st-century African feminism, where the personal and the political are seen as interrelated (Imam et al. 7).

The Girl with the Louding Voice also follows a beginning-middle-end sequence. While narratives often start with a state of equilibrium that is then disturbed and later re-established (Bennett and Royle 57), the problem that disturbs the equilibrium in Adunni's life is already introduced in the first chapter of the book: Her father tells her that she has to get married to Morufu. From there on, the plot moves forward in a linear sequence. There are no flashbacks or flashforwards – something *Purple Hibiscus* already makes use of in its very first chapter. In the end of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, the conflict of the story is resolved, and equilibrium returns to Adunni's life.

As far as the narrator is concerned, *Purple Hibiscus* is written in first-person narration, with Kambili being the narrator. A narrative can be split into two subcategories, the story (what happens) and the discourse (how it is told). All the events (story) are recounted from Kambili's perspective (discourse) (Bennett and Royle 58). This means that everything we read is filtered through Kambili's perception, including the insights we get into her parents' marriage or her aunt's life. Her narration is subjective, not omniscient, and therefore, she is not always a reliable narrator. As Kambili has never been married herself, she only has an outside perspective on other people's marriages. She does not know everything about her parents' marriage, for example, and because she is young and inexperienced, she also does not understand everything that she observes. Especially in the beginning of the book, there are glimpses she gets into her parents' marriage that she does not seem to want to understand, dots that she does not seem to want to connect. When her father is beating her pregnant mother because she said that she did not feel well enough to see the priest, and Kambili hears the beating from the other room she thinks: "Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it. If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 32-33). Even if Kambili seems to be somewhat aware of what is going on in her parents' room, she tries to deny it – most likely as a defence mechanism. Later, after her mother has returned from the hospital and informed her children that the baby was gone because "[t]here was an accident" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 34) and her father makes everyone pray for the mother's forgiveness – even though the baby probably died because of the violence he used against his wife – Kambili states that she "did not think" and she "did not even think to think, what Mama needed to be forgiven for" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 36). This shows that there are serious problems in the marriage of Kambili's parents. These problems may be obvious to the reader of the novel; however, Kambili does not really want to see them or think about them. Even

though her parents' marriage is the source of much pain for her mother, Kambili does not seem to want to question their relationship. She seems afraid to critically engage with her parents' marriage as an example of patriarchal oppression, and therefore, critically engage with tradition, domesticity, and culture by pointing out her mother's right to a mutually respectful relationship (Imam et al. 7). Doing this could bring pain and danger to Kambili. She would have to admit that her father, who she adores, is an oppressor and should she have the courage to voice her observation, she would most likely have to fear her father's (violent) reaction. I will come back to this passage (the 'accident') in chapter 4.4., where I will discuss the relationship between Kambili and her mother in more detail.

Adunni is the main protagonist and narrator of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, which is written in first-person narration. Just like the narration in *Purple Hibiscus*, the narration in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is subjective, given from Adunni's perspective and not omniscient. Interestingly, in order to win the contest that could grant Adunni her freedom, she has to write an essay in which she tells her story. The act of storytelling is, thus, part of the plot and an act of resistance and a form of power (Bennett and Royle 59). In the novel, being able to tell her story plays an important role in Adunni overcoming the challenges in her life. Adunni needs to tell her story in a compelling way. Thus, she asserts this narrative power to achieve positive change in her life. Writing a good essay seems to be the only option to bring real, lasting change to her life and provide her with the opportunities to follow her dreams, that is to go to school and become a teacher (Bennett and Royle 60). For years, Adunni's life was controlled by the men in her life, dominated by their decisions. Writing is an act of reclaiming her life and redefining her identity (Nfah-Abbenyi 148). Narration, thus, takes on a very meaningful and twofold role in the novel: Adunni's essay, in which she shares her story with her fictional readers, and Adunni's narration in the novel itself, where she narrates her story to real readers who are not part of the plot.

In contrast to Kambili, Adunni also has an inside perspective of marriage, because she gets married herself. This means that we do not only read about her impressions of other people's marriages, but we also get to read about how she herself experiences her marriage with Morufu. Still, because the marriage was forced on her, she seems to want to distance herself from her experiences. For example, she describes her wedding day using the following words:

> My wedding be like a movie inside the tee-vee. My eyes was watching myself as I was kneeling down in front of my father, as he was saying a prayer to be following me to my husband house, as my mouth was opening, my lips parting, my voice saying 'Amen' to the prayers even though my mind was not understanding what is happening to me. (Daré 31)

In this passage, Adunni appears to try to take on an outside perspective, even though she actually has an inside perspective. She expresses how her wedding felt like something she was watching on TV rather than something that happened to her in real life. She does not understand what is happening to her, and even the words that come out of her mouth seem automatized, not conscious, or genuine. She takes on this perspective as a defence mechanism, to shield herself from the truth of what is happening to her: being forced into a marriage with a much older man, something that she may not be able to process at the moment. Therefore, Kambili as well as Adunni try to distance themselves from the marriages that affect their lives. Both girls experience marriage as something traumatizing. This is why Kambili chooses to ignore the domestic abuse in her parents' marriage and tries to imagine that instead of beating her mother, her father is just trying to open a door that got stuck. Similarly, Adunni tries to imagine that her wedding is not actually happening to her, but that it is something that she is watching on TV. Kambili and Adunni both use imagination to distance themselves from the horrible events that are happening to and around them. In both instances, (physical or emotional) pain is inflicted on women and they are denied ownership over their bodies. Beatrice cannot protect herself from her husband's abuse and Adunni cannot walk away from her wedding. For the girls, the only way to process this at the moment seems to be to attempt to imagine away the pain: Kambili does this by imagining that her father is not beating her mother and Adunni does it by imagining that the wedding is only part of a TV show. Nonetheless, the readers are aware of what is really happening and showing that the girls are in denial of their pain makes it even more poignant. It highlights that they are young, innocent, and overwhelmed with what they are experiencing. In other words, it shows that not even children, who are barely able to process what is happening to them, are exempt from the pain inflicted on female bodies through sexism. Their pain is even legitimised through their cultural and religious backgrounds: Adunni is supposed to be thankful for her wedding because the purpose of a woman is to be someone's wife. Eugene is the head of the home, and his punishments are his way of making sure that his family does not stray from their religious values. By highlighting the main characters' innocence and showing that they feel overwhelmed by the pain inflicted on them, the writers manage to capture their readers' attention and evoke empathy (chapter 3.1.). At the same time, they raise awareness about child marriage and domestic violence, show that it affects innocent people, but is legitimised by culture, religion, and tradition. This calls attention to the need for

critical engagement to ensure that neither of these can be used to justify the violation of women's rights (Imam et al. 7).

I have now explained that Adunni has an inside perspective on her marriage with Morufu, even though she tries to distance herself from it. However, apart from Adunni's marriage with Morufu, there are also several other marriages that play an important role in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* and that Adunni watches from the outside. This includes Ms Tia's marriage with 'the doctor', Ken, Big Madam's marriage with Big Daddy, but also Morufu's marriage with his two other wives, Labake and Khadija. While Adunni is still closely connected to the marriage of Morufu, Labake and Khadija, being Morufu's third wife, she is clearly an outsider to the other two marriages. She gets many glimpses at their marriages, but she does not have the full picture. For example, after having asked Big Madam for a lock on her room, she overhears Big Madam and Big Daddy arguing in their bedroom. She is confused and wonders why they would fight like this. Is it because of the question she asked? She wonders if she is the one that caused their problems (Daré 202). What she does not know, however, is that this is only the final straw for Big Madam. It is another piece of evidence of how unfaithful her husband is and how little respect he seems to have for her. Therefore, Adunni is not the cause of the problems in Big Madam's and Big Daddy's relationship. Her question only highlights that she does not know what is going on behind closed doors – both, in the literal and the figurative sense. She is outside of the bedroom while they are arguing inside (behind closed doors), but she also does not know their past or the details and dynamics of their marriage well.

To sum up, while the novels are very similar in that they both have young first-person narrators with subjective, limited views, there are also differences in terms of perspective. Kambili only offers an outside-perspective, while Adunni partially has an inside-perspective. However, even in her own marriage, Adunni sometimes tries to mentally distance herself, as she did during her wedding ceremony. These perspectives filter what the readers get to learn about the marriages in the novels. Nonetheless, there is information that the readers can deduce, even if it is not explicitly explained and the narrators are not completely aware of it, such as Eugene's abuse of Beatrice and Big Daddy's repeated infidelity. The girls' limited perspectives often showcase their young age, naivety, or innocence. This helps readers see that the pain inflicted on them is completely undeserved and that they do not even have the tools to cope with it yet. This has the effect of making the pain even more gripping and the injustice even more poignant. It highlights

the girls' humanity and makes them relatable for the readers. However, at the same time, it is shown that their personhood is not respected, and they do not have control over their bodies. Otherwise, there would not be need for them to be in denial about what is happening to them. In other words, it shows the need for feminist change in their lives: they have to be recognised as people, their needs have to be heard and their bodies have to be their own. In the next few chapters, I will have a closer look at how the novels express the necessity of personhood individualism by describing undeserved pain and the lack of ownership over one's own body.

4.2.   Class and Ethnicity

In the following paragraphs, I will dive into how class shapes the very different experiences of the characters in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. The intersection of class and gender will be one of the main foci of my analysis. I will also shortly address ethnicity at the end of the chapter and explain why I decided to focus more on class than ethnicity for my close reading.

Kambili and Adunni are around the same age and are both protagonists in coming-of-age stories; however, there are fundamental differences between them: Firstly, they are part of two different ethnic groups, Igbo and Yoruba, and secondly, they belong to two different social classes. While Adunni is Yoruba and from a very poor environment, Kambili's family is Igbo and rather well-off. Adunni is a maid whereas Kambili has a maid at home. Adunni cannot go to school and has to marry an older man, so that her family can pay rent and buy food while Kambili's family greatly values her education, and she has a strict daily routine that includes studying and homework. Many of her teachers are European missionaries and she has classmates whose parents also have a lot of money, so that they can even travel abroad during the holidays (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 50).

While Kambili, thus, has regular contact with people who are from abroad (her teachers) or have travelled abroad (her classmates), meeting someone who has left Nigeria, or even Adunni's part of Nigeria, is a rare and special occasion for her. For example, when Adunni meets Ade, her mother's ex-boyfriend, who lives in the UK, she is fascinated: "I have been hearing of this the Abroad, of the Am-rica and the London. I am even seeing it inside the tee-vee, the womens and mens with their yellow skin and pencil nose and hair like rope, but I have

never see anybody from there before with my two naked eyes" (Daré 19-20). Not only is it a completely new experience for her to meet someone who has been abroad, but she also describes how she has never been face to face with a European person. For Kambili, on the other hand, seeing Europeans is nothing out of the ordinary as there are many European missionary teachers at her school. Even her classmate casually asks Kambili if she travelled abroad during the holidays, suggesting that travelling is not something that would be out of the question for her (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 49). This shows that Kambili has had much more exposure to people of different ethnicities and cultures – which means that she has more access to different ways of thinking and living – while Adunni's circle is limited to only the people from Ikati in the beginning of the novel. This only changes when she moves to Lagos.

Given her good education and international environment at school, it is not surprising that Kambili speaks English fluently, just like the rest of her family. To her father, it is more important to teach his children English than to teach them Igbo, which is why he usually only speaks English to them. Even though their mother speaks Igbo with them at home, she is not allowed to do so in public. Eugene associates speaking English with being civilised (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 13), which is a mindset clearly shaped by colonialism. Because of this, he places much importance and value on the English language. This is also done in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, where Adunni is proud to be one of the few people who can speak English in her village. However, her English is not as good as Kambili's, and she does not have the same access to education. Her husband, Morufu, even tells her that if he has sons, he "will send them to school. They will become English speaking taxi-driver and make plenty money. Girls are only good for marriage, cooking and bedroom work" (Daré 37). This insinuates that English is a marker of education and success, but Adunni does not have the opportunity to go to school and learn it properly – on the one hand, because she does not have enough money and on the other hand, because she is a girl. Unlike Morufu, Adunni's father does not even have enough money to send his son, Kayus, to school, which is why Adunni taught him maths, science, and English before leaving to get married (Daré 11). This shows how passionate Adunni is about education and highlights how unfair it is that she does not have access to it.

The Girl with the Louding Voice is written in semi-proficient English. Daré uses Adunni's non-standard English that gets better as the story unfolds for the narration of the novel. By doing this, she shows Adunni's development not only on a personal but also a linguistic level. Adunni

borrows some words and phrases from Nigerian Pidgin English, but also makes up words herself and, therefore, comes up with her own way of speaking English. Her use of English was inspired by the various housemaids that worked for Daré's family when she lived in Lagos. Many of them also had their own non-standard English that was unique to them and just like Adunni, they incorporated different words, depending on what part of Nigeria they were from. In Daré's words, "they navigated their way around the language" (Reading Women) – and so does Adunni. This is already reflected in the novel's title, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*: Adunni's English may not be perfect, but she still finds her voice through education and uses it – loudly. The author, Daré, explained that she made this choice because she wanted to highlight Adunni's uniqueness and to give her a language that reflected how she grew up, but also to stress that one does not have to speak perfect English to be intelligent or witty (Reading Women). This is a realisation that Adunni also comes to during her stay in Lagos. Comparing Morufu and Big Daddy, for example, she wonders what the difference between the two is. She concludes that one of them "can speak good English, and the other doesn't speak good English, but both of them have the same terrible sickness of the mind" (Daré 213). Later in the novel, when she finds out what really happened to Rebecca, she starts to understand that speaking good English is not a measure of intelligence: "Now I know that speaking good English is not the measure of intelligent mind and sharp brain. English is only a language, like Yoruba and Igbo and Hausa. Nothing about it is so special, nothing about it makes anybody have sense" (Daré 287). Thus, Adunni goes through a process of realising that English is only a language and not better than African languages, such as Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. At the beginning of the novel, Adunni ascribes so much importance to the English language and even places it above her own native language, but this changes later. However, at the same time, Adunni's English reflects her journey: the more confident she becomes, the more she learns, the better her English gets. This contradiction highlights that even though Adunni has realised that English (a 'white', European language) is not inherently better than Yoruba (a 'black', African language), she still lives in a society where speaking English well is necessary for success. Despite Adunni's realisation, she has to write her essay in good English in order to win the scholarship. She does not have the option of writing it in Yoruba. This shows that while there may have been change on a personal level, there has not been change on a political level yet. Adunni does not personally view English as more important than Yoruba anymore; however, she still lives in a society where English is considered more relevant than Yoruba and other African languages. This illustrates that change has to be both personal and political. It is not enough to have a

personal realisation if one's life is still embedded in a society that upholds the old, oppressive structures one is trying to let go of.

However, the effects of Adunni's English are twofold: while it does make her unique and can charm the people she interacts with as well as the readers, it sometimes also subjects her to ridicule and makes her life more difficult for her (Onuzo). For example, when she meets Big Daddy, she misunderstands what he is saying because she does not know the word 'innocent'. He laughs at her, but she does not understand why he is laughing. He then goes on to use another figure of speech, one that she does not know either, and, therefore, takes literally (Daré 141). Adunni's English serves Big Daddy's amusement. He laughs at the obvious language barrier but does not explain what he meant. When Adunni tells Ms Tia about the scholarship she wants to apply for, the necessity to improve Adunni's English is brought up immediately. Ms Tia offers her support by teaching her English and by helping her get better at speaking (Daré 180). This insinuates that Adunni's English skills are not good enough and they need to be better, so that she can get the scholarship. To achieve this, it is also not enough that Adunni speaks perfectly fine Yoruba, her mother tongue, in addition to English. The importance of English over Yoruba is emphasised many times throughout the book. At first, we can read about how proud Adunni is to be one of the few people in her village who speak English. This also helps her escape the village and go to Lagos – "She is speaking good, good English" (Daré 109) is among the things Iya says to convince Mr Kola to take Adunni to Lagos and help her find a job there. In Lagos, Adunni continues to be eager to improve her language skills, even before the scholarship comes up. The English language, thus, is not only a marker of success, but also a vehicle to it. Unlike Adunni, Kambili never even worries about not being proficient enough in English, thanks to her background. What distinguishes the two girls from each other is not ambition (Adunni has plenty of it), but money and family. The reason why Adunni cannot continue to go to school and improve her English is due to an intersection of class- and gender-based discrimination. On the one hand, her family is poor, so she does not have the money to go to school. On the other hand, she is a girl, and her future is not seen in education anyway. Her father even says that he does not want her to be too educated because it will make it difficult for her to find a husband (Daré 23). According to his expectations, Adunni should primarily aspire to being a good wife to Morufu in Ikati. Therefore, being educated and being able to speak English is completely irrelevant for her. In contrast, Kambili's family not only has the money to send all their children to school, but the parents also speak English fluently themselves

(unlike Adunni's parents) and they view English as a status symbol. Their English is supposed to underpin that they are an upper-class family, which is why Kambili's father does not want his children to speak Igbo in public. Thus, English is important in Kambili's life because her English shows that she is from a 'good', 'civilised' family. While Adunni also sees English as a marker of success, she does not have to live up to the same expectations as Kambili because she is not from a 'good', wealthy family. She lives in a poor, rural environment, so there does not seem to be a point in learning English. English alone will not make her seem 'civilised' as long as she is still poor and lives in the same village. Considering that not even all the men in Ikati speak English, learning the language becomes even more irrelevant for her. If anyone is going to learn English, it will be the boys (Daré 37). As mentioned before, Adunni's primary role is to be a wife (and ideally mother). She has to get married instead of going to school. Therefore, marriage prevents Adunni from getting an education and learning English. She is expected to be wife and being an educated English-speaker is not only pointless for this purpose, but it could also interfere with it (Daré 23).

When it comes to family life, Kambili seemingly lives in a stable home – at least from the outside looking in. Her father is a successful businessman and makes enough money for his wife to be a stay-at-home mother. Even more so, he is known for donating to charities and supporting various people financially. His family enjoys the luxury of having a housemaid, Sisi, and a driver, Kevin. He can afford to send his children to a private Catholic school, and the house the family lives in is big and nice, with expensive furniture, and both children, Kambili and her brother Jaja, have their own bedrooms. Adunni's family's situation is very different from this. When her mother was still alive, she did not just stay at home, but she sold puff-puffs in the village to make some money to support her family. In fact, she was the one who covered rent, school fees and food. Now, Adunni's oldest brother Born-boy has a job and helps to support his family. Two years ago, when he worked as a dustbin collector, he got the family a broken TV that they put up for decoration, revealing that they cannot afford a TV that works (Daré 4). Now, Born-boy earns money to support the family through his job as a mechanic. In contrast to Kambili's family, Adunni's family cannot afford a maid. In fact, now that her mother is gone, Adunni is the one who has to do most of the chores at home. Every morning, she sweeps the floors, does the laundry, and prepares food for her father (Daré 10). Adunni and her two brothers share a bedroom with only one bed that her older brother sleeps in. The mattress on the bed is old, full of holes and bedbugs (Daré 11). The mother's death brought many financial

issues with it. Even though Adunni suggests that she could finish school and work as a teacher to provide for her family, her father insists that she marry Morufu, so that he can use the bride price to pay his bills. He even points out that Morufu promised him ten thousand naira if Adunni gives birth to a son as their first-born child. According to him, this is the safest way to provide for the family. Becoming a teacher is not an option to him. He voices his concerns that Adunni will only become stubborn and unable to find a husband if she studies too much and gets a job (Daré 23).

As I have mentioned before, Adunni and Kambili come from two different tribes, thus, two different cultural backgrounds. Although they are both Nigerian, Adunni is Yoruba and Kambili is Igbo. I want to acknowledge that their ethnicities are integral parts of their stories. Both girls do not only speak English, but also their native languages. They are familiar with their cultures and cultural conflicts are discussed in the novels. For instance, Kambili is confronted with the challenges of uniting Christianity, traditional religion, and Igbo practices in her family. Her father Eugene is very much against it and often forsakes his Igbo heritage for a new identity shaped by colonialism – which is why his sister even describes him as "too much of a colonial product" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 13). Adunni's Yoruba roots also play an important role in her life. Yoruba is her first language, and, in her village, it is spoken more often than English. The Yoruba culture is also visible in beliefs and practices throughout the book, from the clothes some characters wear, including Adunni and Morufu at their wedding, to the beliefs about twins. Thus, ethnicity is not absent from the novels, but I will not explore ethnic differences in this thesis because with regards to marriage, the differences between *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* are not primarily related to ethnicity, but to class. The characters' languages and cultures are part of their stories and character development; however, as far as my analysis of marriage is concerned, ethnicity is not a distinguishing factor. Both novels include dominant and abusive husbands as well as submissive or independent wives. Class appears to be a much more crucial factor: Adunni's father, for example, forces Adunni to get married at such a young age because he does not have enough money to support his family. Ifeoma, on the other hand, can raise her children as a single mother because she is educated and has a good job. Kambili does not have to worry about being a child bride because her family does not need money so desperately. Big Madam claims that her reason for staying with her husband, even though she is unhappy, is that she does not want the bad publicity that would come with getting divorced. She does not stay with him for money since she could easily

support herself without him. Khadija and Beatrice are unhappy, too – but they depend on their husbands financially, unlike Big Madam. For them, there is more at stake than just their reputation.

Class, thus, can determine many aspects of life: access to education, language proficiency, connections, job opportunities and income are only a few examples. They all mutually influence each other (e.g., no access to education leads to a lack of job opportunities) and codetermine a woman's status in her marriage. Does she need a husband to be financially stable or have the resources (education, language, connections, job opportunities,…) to take care of herself? Can she leave an unhappy marriage without jeopardising the satisfaction of her basic needs? As pointed out in this chapter, even though marriage is considered a woman's purpose in lower- as well as upper-class families, there are still significant differences. While a girl from a wealthy family is expected to be able to speak English well and have a certain level of education to prove that she is 'civilised' – one of the traces left behind by Nigeria's colonial history –, a girl from a poor family does not have to live up to these expectations. In both social classes, a woman is not expected to be more educated than a man. This means that although Kambili is expected to know enough to not appear 'uncivilised', she is not expected to be more intelligent than the men around her. This is illustrated through her aunt Ifeoma, who is a university professor but often criticised for being 'too independent'. As for Adunni, since the men in her life cannot speak English fluently and do not have a very high level of formal education, the expectations for her are much lower. Instead of learning English, a language that even her brothers and husband struggle with, she should focus on being a good housewife and eventually mother. However, apart from the low expectations, Adunni's family does not have the financial resources to send her to school. This makes her a lot more dependent on having a husband because without an education and good English skills, it will be very hard for her to find a good job and make enough money to support herself. In Kambili's case, she is still expected to get married, but even if she chooses not to or loses her husband like her aunt did, it would not be as difficult for her to get by on her own. This, however, does not mean that she would not deal with social stigma for being single. In both, Adunni's and Kambili's lives, gender and class intersect and influence the girls' lives. However, in both stories, the effects of colonialism, for example that English is considered more 'civilised' and 'important' than Yoruba or Igbo, also intersect with class and gender and impact the protagonists.

In the next chapter, I will, among other things, take a closer look at how class, education, a rural/urban environment, and gender can intersect and influence the marriages of the women in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. This intersectionality, which is a key characteristic of African feminism, is explored in both novels and is a deciding factor in how the various marriages play out.

4.3.   Looking for Purpose and a Provider: Marriage and Class

In this chapter, I will examine the pressure that girls and young women feel to get married. Both novels show examples of this: In *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, there are Adunni, Enitan and the other girls in Ikati, and in *Purple Hibiscus*, there are Ifeoma's university students. Even though these examples are taken from different educational backgrounds as well as urban and rural settings, there are some striking similarities in the girls' motivation to find husbands. However, there are also differences. In the following, I will explore how their reasons for getting married are influenced by intersectional forms of discrimination, mainly class and gender, and how personhood individualism ties in with how they are discriminated against and how they want to liberate themselves.

The view that a woman has to be married to be whole is one that African feminists are very critical of. If a woman wants to be married, then there is nothing wrong with it. However, an unmarried woman should not become the target of prejudice and discrimination. The presence of a husband in a woman's life cannot determine her worth. According to Adichie, while a marriage can add joy, love, and mutual support to a person's life, and is, therefore, not a bad thing per se, we should be sceptical of the idea that girls are often encouraged to aspire to marriage, but boys are not encouraged to do the same (Adichie, *Feminists* 13). This is a very present issue in *The Girl with the Louding Voice*.

The pressure on Adunni and other girls in her village to get married is very high – much higher than that on Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus* or other girls from her school. This is because Kambili and her classmates are still very young and in contrast to Adunni and her peers, who are around the same age as Kambili, they have money. Adunni is not only affected by the fact that she is female, and, therefore, expected to get married, but she is also affected by being poor and by not having a good education. This makes the pressure for her to get married much more pressing

and it is what distinguishes her from Kambili. Even though Adunni is expected to become someone's wife sooner or later anyway because being a wife is considered the key function of a woman in her village, money is the driving force for Adunni's father to arrange a marriage with a much older man for his daughter so soon. He desperately needs it and Morufu can give it to him in the form of a bride price. Kambili's family does not need money and, thus, it is not necessary for Kambili to get married at such a young age – even though they probably still expect her to get married in the future. However, it is not only money that forces Adunni into this early marriage. Her lack of education – she has not even completed primary school yet – limits her options and makes her much more dependent on being taken care of by a man. Despite all this pressure, Adunni does not want to get married. Other girls in her village, on the other hand, already aspire to marriage and long for a husband. Adunni's friend Enitan is one of those girls. When Adunni visits her after getting engaged, Enitan is excited for Adunni and tries to convince her that this marriage is a good thing. Adunni explains Enitan's excitement to the readers like this: "Marriage is a good thing in our village. Many girls are wanting to marry, to be a wife of somebody, or of anybody; but not me, not Adunni" (Daré 17). Adunni says that other girls in her village want to be married to 'somebody', without really specifying who or what kind of man they want to be married to. She then makes this observation even less specific by using the word 'anybody'. This highlights that the girls do not really care about who they get married to, as long as they can get married. They do not want to get married because they are in love with a man, they want to get married because they want to be a wife. Adunni, however, makes a distinction between herself and the other girls: Her description of them moves from unspecific to less specific (somebody – anybody), but her description of herself moves from not specific to very specific (me – Adunni). Daré highlights this parallel by using two anaphors next to one another: "*of* somebody, or *of* anybody; but *not* me, *not* Adunni" (Daré 17; emphasis added). By mentioning her name, Adunni's individuality is stressed. In contrast to this, the other girls from Ikati are not named and their potential husbands remain unnamed as well. This insinuates that in their cases, their individuality does not matter. The type of marriage that the girls are hoping for is clearly not a matter of love. Being a wife is who they are supposed to be, it would provide them with a sense of security and stability, it would give them a man who can take care of them. The idea that they could get married to someone that they are in love with, does not even come up here. On the one hand, they want to have someone who can take care of them and their families, but on the other hand, they also want someone who can give them an identity by making them a wife. Adunni does not want to be made someone

through someone else and, thus, rejects this by naming herself and showing that even though she is not married, she is already someone.

Having someone who can provide for Adunni and her family is also the argument that Enitan uses to try to make Adunni see that this marriage is a good thing: "Adunni, you know that this is a good thing for your family […] I know it is not what you want. I know you like school, but think it well, Adunni. Think of how your family will be better because of it" (Daré 18). Enitan acknowledges that this marriage may not be what Adunni wants, but she emphasises that it is what is best for her family (a group of people). Enitan places the wellbeing of the community over the wellbeing of Adunni as an individual and emphasises Adunni's responsibility to improve her family's situation. In other words, a woman's good is compromised for the greater good of a community (Khader 61). Adunni cares about her family's wellbeing, but she does not want to compromise her own in order to achieve theirs. This is 21st-century African feminist thinking because even though community is still valued, the rights of an individual African woman are also extremely important and emphasised: "we also craft new identities for African women, identities as full citizens, free from patriarchal oppression, with rights of access, ownership and control over resources and our own bodies and utilizing positive aspects of our cultures in liberating and nurturing ways" (Imam et al. 5). According to this, African women should have control over what happens to them, it cannot just be prescribed by their cultures or communities. Their personhood must be recognised, i.e., they must be able to claim their identities as full citizens and, thereby, they can nurture the people around them. This is the same mindset that Adunni has. She wants control and ownership over her own body, and even though Adunni loves her family, she does not want to get married and she does not want to accept being forced into a marriage. It is part of the reason why she ends up running away, and why she applies for the scholarship behind Big Madam's back. She wants to take her life into her own hands, rather than letting other people determine her destiny for her. At the same time, however, her family and her village remain very important to her, and she wants to use her freedom and education to make an impact in her community. This is shown every time Adunni thinks about her goals. When Miss Tia asks her why it is so important for her to win the scholarship and go to school, she says that she wants to become a teacher and use the money she makes to build her own school in Ikati, her village. She wants to give young girls in Ikati the opportunity to get a good education and believes that this will eventually help to make Nigeria a better country (Daré 224). Therefore, Adunni's motivation is not just that she wants a better life for herself.

She wants to help her community, but in order to do that, she needs to take care of herself first. Her mindset is shaped by personhood individualism (chapter 2.1.), which is the belief that the good of the community cannot be achieved without recognizing individuals in the community as people (not just as part of the group) and letting them meet their individual needs.

As mentioned earlier, Kambili is not affected by the same intersection of class and gender as Adunni. However, it is clear that even in Kambili's environment, it is important for a woman to be married. When Ifeoma comes to visit her brother's family for the first time in the novel, for instance, she tells her sister-in-law about her university students and how quickly they get married. Many of them do not get married for love, but because they are afraid that they will not find a job after they graduate, and they need someone to provide for them. Beatrice can understand this mindset, and points out that if they get married, they will have someone who can take care of them. Ifeoma, on the other hand, is much more critical of this. She voices concerns about her students getting married younger and younger and how their husbands will eventually "own them and their degrees" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75). She says this after telling Beatrice that when the husbands come and visit the young women, they come in fancy cars and pay for books, furniture, and other nice things for them. Thus, they are investing in them financially, providing for them, so that later, even if their wives could technically be independent, they will still belong to their husbands. Once again, money is the driving force behind women's decision to get married. This time it is not necessarily because they are poor, but because they fear being unemployed. It is an overlap of many issues: the challenge of finding a job as a young university graduate, the additional challenge of finding a good job as a young, *female* graduate (sexism) and probably not having a family inheritance to fall back on in case of unemployment (classism).

This is an interesting aspect because it shows that although these women are getting university degrees, they still long for the same thing that the young girls who have not even completed primary school in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* long for: a husband. In their case, even though they may decide to get married out of fear of the future, they probably do not do it out of the same necessity as the girls from Ikati. These young university students probably do not feel the weight of their families' livelihood on their shoulders and depend on a husband for their families' financial security. It is not that they do not have the option to get an education, they are already in university and have, therefore, already reached a high level of education. It is

also not that they are children whose families decided for them. They are young adults. One could even argue that they choose to be dependent on a husband, even though they are well-educated and could try to find a good job like Ifeoma. The idea that femininity means dependency and masculinity means providing (Ahikire 14) is still deeply ingrained in them. Beatrice says that this is just what they want: "A husband crowns a woman's life, Ifeoma. It is what they want" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75). By saying this, she insinuates that a woman needs a husband to have a good life and to be a 'real' woman. Even if a woman already has everything that she wants and needs, she needs a man to complete her. He *crowns* her life, meaning that he adds value to her life, more specifically, he upgrades it. The choice of the word 'crown' in Beatrice's statement entails that a husband can, at least symbolically, promote a woman from subject to queen, from nobody to somebody. This is not only an upgrade of the woman's life on a private level, but also a political one. It gives her a better status in her society, more power, a bigger platform and ultimately, more respect. In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie gives an example of how this applies in real life. She shares how an acquaintance of hers, a woman who is not married, usually puts on a fake wedding ring when she goes to work conferences. She believes that wearing this ring grants her more of her colleagues' respect and that without it, she is not taken as seriously (Adichie, *Feminists* 13). This shows that even a presumed husband gives her more respect and a better status in her professional life. Therefore, while, on the surface, it may seem like it is a decision they make voluntarily, by taking a closer look at what Ifeoma says about her students, the social pressure to find a husband and the fear of not being able to sustain oneself as a woman, even with a university degree, can be identified behind their decisions. Being a grown woman without a husband or even worse a single mother is frowned upon. To be considered a 'real' woman, one must be married. Marriage is seen as a woman's main purpose. If a woman rejects marriage, she rejects what is considered to be her natural destiny. This can result in financial problems and a lack of respect from others. Young women might fear ending up in this position and, thus, feel pressured to accept a proposal even if the man is not someone they truly love or are loved by. Ifeoma seems to be conscious of this and responds by pointing out that it is not what her students really want, but only what they think they want. She is sceptical of the idea that a woman has to be married and must be taken care of by a man. She believes in her students' right to live free of patriarchal ideologies and oppression and is, thereby, presented as a feminist. However, in contrast to her brother Eugene, she is much more in touch with her Igbo heritage and her character fulfils a decolonising and depatriarchalizing function in the novel (Dube 232). She demonstrates that feminism is not something that was imported by the West but being African and a feminist can go hand in hand

(Imam et al. 5). Then, she continues to say that she cannot blame her students and attributes it to Nigeria's military rule (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75). By saying this, she clearly establishes a connection between the personal and the political – a typical move for African feminists of the 21st century (Imam et al. 7). She highlights that what is happening on a political level has an impact on women's personal lives. In this case, it affects who they marry, how soon and why. Therefore, marriage and politics are not separate from each other. On the contrary, they are linked to each other and influence one another. In other words, a different political landscape could keep young female students from rushing into marriages with men for money.

In summary, *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* show that well-educated as well as uneducated girls and young women in both urban and rural areas struggle with the same thing: the pressure to get married. This can be traced back to girls not being recognised as full citizens and individual people. Instead, they are expected to severely compromise their personal needs and goals for the benefit of their communities, in Adunni's case for the (financial) benefit of her family. Boys are not expected to make the same sacrifices. Sexism, and with it the denial of girls' personhood, is not the only form of discrimination that is at the root of the girls' struggle. As I have outlined in this chapter, it strongly intersects with classism. Financial problems or worries are always part of the reason why young women and girls want to marry a man they are not in love with in the novels. Financial problems limit access to education, which results in a lack of job opportunities. This often leaves women no other choice than to get married, even if they would be willing to accept the backlash and criticism that comes with being a single woman. Many women, however, are scared of not being respected as a single woman and, therefore, want to live up to the social expectations that a woman is only complete if she is married. Thus, the pressure on girls and young women to get married is a result of intersecting forms of discrimination and the failure to recognise women as people in their own right. Women are primarily seen as relative creatures, they only become 'someone' if they are someone's wife or someone's mother. Marriage is how most girls in Ikati hope to become someone. However, even well-educated women with established careers must expect to have their identities questioned if they are not also somebody's wife. Both Kambili's and Adunni's environments see a woman's purpose as being a wife and if she rejects this, she will have to deal with negative reactions.

4.4.   Mother-Daughter Relationships: Marriage Role Models

In this chapter, I will focus on the mother-daughter relationship between Adunni and her mother as well as that of Kambili and her mother. Mothers are able to model healthy or unhealthy marriages to their daughters and, thereby, strongly influence their daughter's ideas of marriage and of being a wife. I will show that Adunni's mother was aware of the intersectionality that affected her life negatively and resulted in an unwanted marriage. Before her death, she wanted to empower her daughter to be able to live a better life. However, this empowerment was limited. She wanted Adunni to have the opportunity to choose her husband; however, she did not criticise that getting married would eventually still be a must for her daughter. Just like some 20th-century African women's activists, Adunni's mother did not want to be too radical. Although she wants her daughter to be more independent by making sure she is educated, can choose her husband, and even leave Ikati, she does not want her to completely reject traditional gender roles. She represents a 20th-century woman, who sees the need to empower women, but is careful not to be too radically feminist. As outlined in chapter 2.2., feminism was often met with scepticism and perceived as an un-African concept aimed at eliminating family values (Ahikire 14). I will contrast Adunni's mother with Kambili's mother, who silently accepts her husband's abuse and does not encourage her daughter to change anything about it or look for a different kind of marriage when she is older. She mainly tries to support her daughter by helping her deal with the abuse she experiences. Thus, she represents a different kind of 20th-century woman, one who has accepted patriarchal oppression and tries to find ways to deal with it. These different kinds of role models influence how their daughters view the world. If feminist efforts are not common, seen as too radical, too un-African, it is hard for a younger generation to view this differently. In this chapter, I will look at how the girls overcome this by seeing their mother's lives as warnings and connecting with women outside of their usual environments like Kambili's aunt Ifeoma.

Adunni looks up to her mother and idealizes her over her father. She often describes how she misses her or how things were better when she was around. Even though her mother did not go to school, she understood the importance of education and of being able to choose a person to get married to, even as a woman. She was not able to make that choice and forced into a marriage with Adunni's father, who she was not in love with. She was in love with another man, Ade, but because she was not educated, his family did not allow him to marry her. Consequently, she ingrained in her daughter that she could not marry the man she loved because

she did not go to school. Not having a good education, thus, had serious consequences on her private life. However, these consequences were not limited to the personal sphere: not going to school also limited her career options. She is very aware of this and tries to instil the value of education in Adunni by saying: "Adunni, God knows I will use my last sweat to be sending you to school because I want you to have a chance at life. I am wanting you to speak good English, because in Nigeria, everybody is understanding English and the more better your speaking English, the more better for you to be getting good job" (Daré 21). There are three points to take away from this quote. First, Adunni's mother emphasises how important it is to her to send Adunni to school ("I will use my last sweat"). She knows what the consequences of not going to school are and, therefore, wants to ensure a better future for her daughter. After stressing the importance of going to school, she gives Adunni a reason for it, which brings me to my second point: she equates going to school to having "a chance at life". This is a very bold statement because it implies that Adunni's mother did not have that chance. She did not get the chance to choose her own husband, choose a career or choose to leave Ikati, which is something that she always wanted to do. She was extremely limited in her options on a personal as well as a professional level. Thirdly, she brings up the role of English. She tells Adunni that being able to speak English will open doors to good job opportunities for her. She also mentions that everyone in Nigeria understands English, which will give Adunni the opportunity to leave Ikati and be able to communicate with Nigerians who are not Yoruba. Therefore, English, as the result of education, will give Adunni the chance to do the things that her mother was not able to do. This sets the tone for the importance Adunni ascribes to the language. English, a European language, is necessary to be successful, even in Nigeria. Not only is this a reminder of Nigeria's colonial history, but it shows that a certain proximity to whiteness is required to be successful, even in black communities.

Adunni's mother understood how education, work and money can influence the way a woman gets to live her life. Having a good education and a well-paid job can give a woman the freedom to choose who she wants to marry – something that she was not able to do because she lacked both. Thus, even though Adunni's mother is not present anymore, before she left, she provided her daughter with a plan to help her live a better life than she did. However, it is important to highlight that while Adunni's mother sees education as the key to be able to choose who you want to marry, she still does not consider the option of not getting married at all. Thus, while education is a vehicle to a better life and a more fulfilling marriage because it can give a woman

more freedom in the choice of a marriage partner, it is not an alternative. This once again shows that marriage is considered a woman's purpose and a way to make her a full person. Women, thus, are still not seen as people in their own right. Adunni's mother has fallen into the trap of what Adichie calls 'Feminism Lite' – it looks like feminism, but on closer inspection, is not feminism (Adichie, *Ijeawele* ch. 4). She believes that if she is educated, i.e., if she meets certain criteria, a woman should be able to choose her husband. However, a woman must still have a husband. Adunni's mother does not question that a woman must get married, she only criticises that sometimes women have to get married to men they do not love and tries to provide her daughter with wisdom to avoid this.

Kambili's mother, on the other hand, does not provide her daughter with tools and advice to avoid the traps she fell into even though she is physically present in Kambili's life. However, she is absent from her daughter's life in the sense that she does not defend her against the controlling behaviours of her father. Even though Beatrice is a married woman, a status that so many young girls aspire to have to finally become a person (chapter 4.3.), Beatrice still does not seem to be a full person. She is physically present, but emotionally absent from her daughter's life. Her main role is being Eugene's wife and there is not much room for Beatrice's own opinions. Marriage, thus, does not make her a person, it makes her somebody else's person. This makes it difficult for her to be present in her daughter's life, especially when she disagrees with her husband. For example, when Kambili is in the hospital because of her father's physical abuse towards her, her mother tries to be there for her by holding her hand. What goes through Kambili's mind is a mixture of contradicting feelings. On the one hand, she wants to get up and hug her, but on the other hand she feels like pushing her away and shoving her so that she would fall (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 213). This shows that even though Kambili loves her mother and part of her wants to be comforted by her, she is also very angry at her and even wants to hurt her. This is probably because her mother did not protect her from her father's abuse. She did not stand up for her, and is only now showing her love quietly, when it is too late and Kambili is already in the hospital. So, while Kambili is glad to have her mother physically present and close to her, she is angry that Beatrice did not also show her presence when her father was beating and kicking her. She could not rely on her when she needed her to step up.

In the same scene at the hospital, it becomes apparent that because of her mother's passivity, Kambili longs for the presence of another woman who has taken on a mother-role in her life, a

woman who is not as passive as her mother is: her Aunty Ifeoma. One of the first things that Kambili does, is ask her mother to call her aunt. When her mother tries to tell her no, by saying that she has to rest, Kambili just asks her again, showing that she really wants to see Ifeoma (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 212). Kambili looks for a different role model because she does not want to have her mother's life, which is so defined by her submission to her husband that she can only express her own feelings privately when nobody is looking. Beatrice's life serves as a warning to Kambili (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 29). She knows that to establish a more independent identity, she must step out of her usual social circle, her nuclear family (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 26). Ifeoma represents what is outside of her usual environment, what she needs to develop an identity that goes outside of the boundaries set for her. In addition to this, Ifeoma serves as an example of a woman who is not afraid to be too radical, too feminist. She is very independent and vocal about women's rights (university students should not have to get married, Beatrice should not have to stay in an abusive relationship,…), but because of this, people often look down on her. Nonetheless, she does not let other people's opinions discourage her. Contrary to what society says about single women, Ifeoma is happier than both, Beatrice and Adunni's mother.

Kambili's conflicting feelings and her deep disappointment in her mother are a result of various incidents, such as the one when Eugene pours boiling hot water on Kambili's feet. While this is happening, she is not even aware that her mother is in the same room at first. In fact, she only notices that she is there when her father is done (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 195). This insinuates that although her mother might have been there even while Eugene was burning Kambili's feet, she did not say or do anything that would have drawn attention to her. She just stood by and watched. Then, even though she wants to help Kambili, she is not able to: "She helped me out of the tub, made to carry me on her back to my room, but I shook my head. She was too small. We might both fall" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 195). This passage has strong symbolic meaning. Beatrice is not only physically unable to carry her daughter on her back in that moment, but in general, she is not able to protect or guide her daughter. If she were to help her, she could get hurt too, in the process – that is what Kambili believes at least. She does not trust her mother to help her, she does not think she is strong enough ("She was too small.") and that if she tried, they would both get hurt ("We might both fall."). Because this is the view that Kambili has of her mother, she refuses to accept her help. Kambili might do this to protect her mother, but she might also do it to protect herself from further disappointment upon realising that her mother is

unable to carry her. It might also be Kambili's way of showing that she does not agree with the way her mother reacted to this situation. Beatrice only offers help after the abuse, but she does not make any effort to help Kambili while it is happening. Her sense of self is too small, she does not dare to stand up to her husband. Instead, she makes herself small, does not interfere and holds back her own opinions. Therefore, Beatrice does not seem to want to support her daughter by changing the dysfunctional structures in her family, the patriarchal oppression that is going on in her own home. Instead, she wants to help her deal with it. Kambili, however, knows that if she accepts her mother's help in learning how to deal with oppression rather than fighting it, she will make herself small as well – and she will fall, just like her mother did. Therefore, by rejecting her mother's help, she does not only spare her mother the extra weight and she does not only want to spare herself the disappointment if Beatrice is not able to carry her. She also rejects her mother's sense of self and shows that she does not want to accept patriarchal oppression and make herself as small as her mother. She does not want to accept the harm that was just done to her body. Her mother's offer is an invitation to accept this harm, the way she accepts it, and Kambili does not want that. By walking out without her mother, Kambili clings to the value of her personhood and her right to be free from patriarchal violence (Imam et al. 7). Just like many other protagonists in African feminist writing, she shows that she does not want to be like her mother, who has given into this oppression (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 29).

Strained mother-daughter relationships are not unusual in third-generation Nigerian women's writing. In fact, absent mothers or mothers that have accepted the patriarchal structures in their lives are common characters in third-generation feminist writing in Nigeria (chapter 3.2.). Including these relationships allows the readers to see various layers of how a patriarchal society can affect women, that not every woman opposes these structures and how these different views can result in women turning against each other. Beatrice and Kambili's relationship illustrates these tensions well. However, it is important to note that Beatrice's lack of solidarity with Kambili is not the result of malintent. It seems like Beatrice is trying to support her daughter, by holding her hand when she wakes up at the hospital and by walking her to her room after boiling hot water was poured on her feet. She probably does not feel like she can stop these things from happening and might even fear that stepping in could worsen the situation for her and her daughter, so she stays quiet. This is an example of what a patriarchal society can do to women – it keeps them from helping one another out of fear that if they speak

up for another woman, they could be punished as well (Eze, *Big 'F'* 96, 98). Beatrice, however, does not completely neglect helping her daughter, but finds ways in which she can support her without dismantling the patriarchal structures that force her to be quiet when unnecessary pain is inflicted on her daughter's body (visiting her at the hospital, holding her hand, helping her out of the bathtub). She does not try to change the rules that her husband makes for the family, but she finds ways to cope with them. One of her coping strategies is to polish her ballet figurines, which symbolise her own fragility (Kaboré 34), or to show her children small gestures of love to help or comfort them. At first glance, this could give the impression that Beatrice is a snail-sense feminist because she finds ways to deal with oppression and slowly tries to work around it by still being there for her daughter in small ways. However, according to the definition of snail-sense feminism, the image of the snail was chosen because it can navigate harsh environments without getting hurt (Okafor 15). This is not completely true for Beatrice. Even though Beatrice can give the impression that she is able to navigate her life with Eugene without getting hurt, as she never complains, she still experiences pain – she only tries to hide it or downplay it. She does not question the patriarchal structures in her home. She has internalised them and accepts them (Nadaswaran, *Rethinking* 26-27).

To summarise, even though Adunni's mother is physically absent from her life, she was able to provide some guidance to her daughter before passing away. She understood that different types of social disadvantages intersect and mutually influence one another (her lack of education resulted in her having to marry a man she did not love, limited job opportunities and the inability to leave Ikati), which is why she insisted that Adunni complete her education. Even though Adunni's mother did not consider education to be an alternative for marriage, she stressed that it could at least give her daughter the freedom to marry someone that she loved. In contrast, Kambili's mother is physically present, but emotionally absent. She fails to protect her children and herself from her abusive husband. Instead of helping Kambili to free herself of patriarchal oppression, she tries to help her cope with it. This implies that girls have to accept patriarchal oppression, even if it hurts them. Kambili sees her mother's efforts, but she is also aware of her mother's failures. This puts a strain on their relationship and leads to Kambili having very conflicting feelings towards her mother. Rather than looking up to her, Kambili starts to look up to her Aunty Ifeoma, who is much more independent and outspoken than Beatrice, who quietly suffers through her husband's abuse. These mother-figures all represent different kinds of 20th-century women. Although Adunni's mother encourages her daughter to get educated, so

that she can have a little more control over her own life, she does not take this encouragement too far and does not question the social expectation for girls to get married. Kambili's mother has seemingly completely accepted patriarchal oppression and only tries to model ways of dealing with it to Kambili. Neither of the girls want to end up like their mothers. Their lives serve as warnings to them. Even though both mothers are married and, thus, accepted by society, Ifeoma, who is widowed, appears to be much happier than them. This shows that young, Nigerian women move in an area of conflict between social and cultural norms and feminist efforts that, if perceived as too radical, result in social stigmatisation, but if not radical enough, result in unhappiness.

4.5. Husband and Wife: Marriage, Gender Roles, and Race

This chapter focuses on the relationship between husband and wife, mainly between Beatrice and Eugene. However, I will also shortly discuss Big Madam's and Big Daddy's marriage. Both marriages are very complex. Although the wives are unhappy and physically and emotionally abused by their husbands, they refuse to leave them for a long time. They must meet various expectations and are punished if they are not able to do so. Beatrice, for example, is not only expected to silently agree with her husband's every move, but also to adopt what Eugene considers good, meaning white, habits. Tying into this, I will take a closer look at Beatrice's strategies of coping with her husband's abuse, point out how her personhood is denied and illustrate that her body being harmed is a consequence of not conforming to her husband and, thus, patriarchal oppression.

Beatrice is not only an (emotionally) absent mother to Kambili, but also a passive wife. When Beatrice is silently watching her husband pour hot water on Kambili's feet, she is not only neglecting her daughter's need for protection, but also not articulating her disagreement with her husband. Beatrice is crying when Kambili notices her, even her nose is running. This shows that she is horrified with what happened and she does not agree with her husband's handling of the situation. However, she does not step in. Even when Eugene is done, she does not talk to him, or voice her disagreement with his decision in any way. Instead, she does not speak until she and Kambili are in Kambili's room (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 195). There, she only tells Kambili that she might need some medicine. She does not say anything about what her husband did, she does not criticise him, not to his face, not behind his back. She makes sure she does not disrespect her husband in any way and does not question his decisions as the head of the family.

Her silence enables her husband's behaviour. Therefore, voicelessness is a weapon of patriarchy, it keeps women in unjust positions (Ifechelobi 23). This is why it so important for Adunni to have a "louding voice" (Daré 21) – she wants to use her voice as a weapon against patriarchy.

Beatrice, however, does not even raise her voice when her husband inflicts pain on her body. When Jaja and Kambili return home from their stay at Aunty Ifeoma's place, their mother expects them with a swollen face and the area around her eye is the colour of an overripe avocado (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 190). It seems obvious that someone must have hurt her, but her children do not even ask what happened to her face. It is a generally known, yet un-talked-about secret that Eugene physically abuses his wife. However, there is an instance when Kambili asks her mother about her wounds indirectly – by asking when she polished the étagère. This is something Beatrice always does after experiencing physical violence by her husband. So, when Kambili asks her mother when she polished the étagère, she indirectly also asks when Eugene beat her. The assumption that this is what Kambili actually wants to know is supported by her reaction to her mother's reply: She stares at her eye, which "appeared to be opening now; it must have been swollen completely shut yesterday" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 192, 193). Kambili watches how her mother remains silent and deals with abuse from an outside perspective. In passages like this one, Kambili's feelings towards her mother encourage the reader to empathise with Beatrice as well. Kambili watches what happens to her from a child's perspective and although she does not always understand everything, she sees that her mother experiences pain that she does not deserve. She empathises with her, but she does not pity her. She does not think she is better than her mother and she still sees opportunities for agency for her mother: she wants to tell her that things in the house needed to change, it was too cold, too empty (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 192). The marble floor, glass, brightness, and impeccable cleanness of the house represent Eugene's striving for whiteness (Heinz 195), which is something that Kambili would like her mother to let go of. The empathy she feels when she sees her mother's pain makes her aware of her oppression and makes Kambili zealous to change something. Thus, she feels feminist empathy. She does not want her mother to remain silent.

However, the only time Beatrice does not immediately comply with her husband's requests ends up putting her in a lot of pain and ultimately leads to the death of the baby she is pregnant with. After church, Eugene wants to see the priest with his family. His wife, however, says that

she would prefer to stay in the car because she does not feel well – probably due to the pregnancy. This could be read as Beatrice's first request for autonomy and, therefore, Eugene's first loss of patriarchal control (Nwokocha 371). As he is unhappy with this request, rather than showing empathy, Eugene asks her if she was sure. He does this until she finally agrees to come with the family (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 29). Beatrice's personhood and, thus, her needs, are not valued in this passage. Eugene only sees her as a member of a group (the family) and, therefore, expects her to come with everyone else. He wants the whole family to appear in front of the priest, so that the family's good reputation can be maintained. Eugene perceives his wife's absence as a threat to the family reputation. In other words, his wife's well-being is subordinate to that of the group. Her little act of rebellion is enough for Eugene to punish Beatrice by harming her body, and with that the body of his own child. When they get home, he beats her up so violently that she has to be taken to the hospital. However, Beatrice's request may not be the only thing that triggers Eugene's reaction. Her pregnancy is a reminder of the fact that he had sex with her, an 'impure' impulse of the body, which he associates with blackness (Heinz 194). He has internalised racism and wants to distance himself from colonial ideas of black people. If he falls back into 'unclean', 'unwhite' habits (e.g., having sex), he resorts to physical punishments. This is reminiscent of how he was punished by white people when they caught him doing something that was considered wrong (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 196). Now, he punishes his wife in the same way. Notably, the pain that was inflicted on Beatrice's body hurts the whole family because now they all have to experience the loss of a child and sibling. Letting Beatrice take care of her needs could have benefitted the whole family by allowing them to welcome a healthy baby later. However, Beatrice never points out the harm that her husband did to her and, subsequently, to the whole family. When she comes home from the hospital, she goes back to being silent about Eugene's actions. She does not say one word about what he did to her. She simply explains the unborn baby's death with the words, "There was an accident" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 34). This might not be completely false, considering that it probably was not Eugene's intention to kill his unborn child. However, this explanation is very vague and most importantly, Beatrice does not implicate her husband at all – she does not even mention him, even though he was the one who caused the so-called accident. She does not say anything else about the miscarriage and tells her children to go about their normal days.

Beatrice copes with her loss by doing what she always does: cleaning the figurines on the étagère. This is a coping strategy she uses several times in the novel. When something bad

happens, she does not talk about it, but she polishes her figurines. These glass figurines are fragile and symbolise Beatrice's own fragility in contrast to her husband's violent character, which is represented by the heavy missal he uses to break the figurines on Palm Sunday (Kaboré 34). The fact that Beatrice always polishes the figurines after something bad happens to her, shows that she is trying to give herself the gentle care her husband does not give her. She may not be able to remove the marks that her husband's violence left on her body, but she can clean the figurines to make sure their bodies remain flawless. Therefore, the figurines also represent the ideal body for Beatrice: although they are fragile like her, they are cared for with gentleness, unharmed. Their skin is white and as ballet dancers, they represent something European – something that her husband idealises and constantly tries to push on her. Because of his internalised racism, he wants Beatrice to be as white as possible. He projects his sense of inferiority onto her (Heinz 194) and expects her, as well as his children, to strive for perfection (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 194), which he associates with being white. However, Beatrice can never live up to this standard, she can never be like the figurines that she cleans whenever she fails. Thus, the figurines do not just represent Beatrice's fragility, they also represent the woman she thinks she should be: as close to whiteness as possible and gentle. It is only when Beatrice finally reaches her breaking point that she does not need the figurines anymore. This breaking point is represented by how the figurines break when Papa Eugene's missal misses Jaja but hits the figurines (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 7). Kambili asks her mother if she will replace them, but Beatrice says no and Kambili realises that she might not need them anymore (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 15). Just like the figurines that broke, Beatrice has reached her breaking point and maybe this is when she decides that she will not let Eugene beat her or her children anymore (Kaboré 34). However, the reader cannot know this for sure, as everything that happens is described from Kambili's perspective. This is only what she perceives, she only gets to see what she can observe, what her mother reveals to her and speculate. Kambili concludes that her mother might not need the figurines anymore, but Beatrice never explicitly confirms this.

What supports Kambili's interpretation, however, is that even a few days before the figurines are broken, Beatrice already shows signs of wanting to rebel against her husband's rule. She has a second miscarriage, but in contrast to the first one, this time she does not try to conceal that it was Eugene's fault. Instead of saying that it was an accident, she says, "You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 248). This time, she mentions Eugene and makes it clear that his actions led to the loss

of the child. After such a long time of enduring Eugene's abuse in silence, Beatrice finally speaks up: she explains what Eugene did. Whereas Jaja was the one who pointed out the blood on the floor after the first miscarriage, this time Beatrice is the one who brings it up (Hillmann 99). She displays agency. After the first miscarriage, the family's chauffeur, Kevin, picks her up in Eugene's car, after the second miscarriage, Beatrice hires a taxi herself and goes to her sister-in-law's house. She tries to suppress her feelings and barely talks after the first miscarriage, but after the second one she cries and talks about what happened to her.

However, even though she seems to have gained the courage to talk about her pain and to leave Eugene for now, it is not enough for her to leave him permanently. As soon as he calls, she agrees to come back to him. Suddenly, she tries to justify his actions by talking about all the responsibility he bears. This is related to a point made by African feminists about black women's relationships with black men: because African men are also often confronted with oppression (colonialism, racism), women are more hesitant to draw attention to how men oppress them (Sephodi 170). Eugene's identity is shaped by colonialism and the pressure to conform to white, European standards. He even rejects his African, black side to do so. Therefore, Beatrice's statement, "He is carrying more than any man should carry" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 250), can also be interpreted as her sense of responsibility to be there for her husband and ignore how he oppresses her because she knows that as a black man, he also deals with oppression. Additionally, she expresses that she does not know where to go if she leaves Eugene (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 250). Beatrice's sense of self used to be very small (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 195), but when she decides to hire a taxi, leave Eugene, and talk about what he did to her, it seems to have gotten bigger. However, after talking to him on the phone and deciding to go back to him, her sense of self becomes smaller again. Beatrice tells Ifeoma that she cannot leave Eugene. Kambili narrates, "Mama lowered herself to the floor" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 250). Her newfound confidence is gone, and she makes herself extremely small again.

Big Madam in *The Girl with the Louding Voice* often makes herself small around her husband as well. Although she is called *Big* Madam, she is successful, she supports her husband financially and she appears very confident, she lets her husband treat her badly. In an argument, she acknowledges that he has always treated her like this. Yet, rather than leaving him, she tries to make him love her. "Why won't you love me? What more can I do to make you see me as I am, as a woman worth loving? A woman who has sacrificed so much for you? […] they don't

like how you treat me, and yet I remain in this marriage because I love you" (Daré 202), she cries. She is aware that Big Daddy does not treat her well, even others have noticed it. However, she is desperate for him to love her. She asks what she can do to show that she is "worth loving", insinuating that she must somehow earn his love and that he does not see her value – despite how much she has done for him. She provides for him, which makes her the kind of woman that many Africans perceive white feminists to be. A woman who has reversed the gender roles in her family and, thereby, disregards her culture. The only way she could make this appearance worse is by divorcing her husband, which is one of the reasons she wants to stay with him. However, she is already paying for reversing gender roles in her home – literally and figuratively. Her husband does not seem to love her and, thus, cheats on her with younger women with whom he can take the traditional role of a man who provides. The money that he gives to his affairs, however, is Big Madam's (Daré 201). This illustrates how even though African women are expected to perform whiteness, like Beatrice (e.g., by speaking English, keeping their house a certain way, or adopting white beauty standards), there is a line they should not cross. They should never surpass their husbands (chapter 4.2.). Otherwise, they could be considered un-African.

Beatrice is only able to protect her family when she claims her personhood and stands up for herself. This conflicts with the idea that a woman must be a submissive wife to care for her family and disproves that she needs a marriage to be a complete person. Beatrice finally claims her personhood as she separates herself from her husband. She attempts to do this when she goes to Ifeoma's place after her second miscarriage without telling Eugene, for example. However, he calls and comes back into her life. Leaving him does not seem to be an option that would work. Beatrice is only able to really separate herself from Eugene when she kills him. At the end of the novel, she reveals that she has been putting poison in his tea for some time, since before she went to visit Kambili and Jaja in Nsukka, but it took some time for the poison to take its full effect. Thus, Beatrice silently kills him, thereby, using silence – something that was used to uphold oppression – against her oppressor (Ifechelobi 24). Kambili, and, therefore also the reader, are not aware of this until after Eugene's death, highlighting Kambili's incomplete perception. Beatrice has been taking steps to free herself, but Kambili did not see that because it happened secretly. However, when the police come, there is not even an opportunity for Beatrice to confess what she has done and, thereby, make her emancipation public. Jaja immediately takes the blame and is arrested. Although it is Beatrice who saved the

family from Eugene, Jaja takes responsibility for killing him and ultimately protects his mother from prison. However, this does not give Beatrice peace because she feels guilty, and she goes back to not speaking much. She tries to save Jaja by writing letters to newspapers and telling people that she was the one who poisoned Eugene, but "nobody listened to her; they still don't" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 296). Therefore, after taking matters into her own hands, becoming an active agent in her life, and trying to raise her voice in the aftermath, she is made silent again by a man (Jaja) who decides to protect her, even though this is not what she wants. When she speaks up, people do not believe her and again, reduce her to somebody's wife and somebody's mother: they assume that she is in grief and denial because her husband is dead, and her son is imprisoned. Thus, she cannot be taken seriously, she is not acting as her own person, but as Eugene's wife and Jaja's mother. Although Beatrice has privately empowered herself and taken control over her life, this does not hold up publicly because she still finds herself in a society where a woman's personhood is not acknowledged, and she is primarily seen in relationship to the men in her life.

To sum up, there are many expectations a wife must meet: from submitting to her husband, not raising her voice, sticking to traditional gender roles, and performing the right level of whiteness to staying with her husband no matter what. Trying to go against her husband's will only results in the infliction of physical pain on a woman's body. Thus, pain is portrayed as a result of rebellion against patriarchal oppression and as a way to maintain this oppression. As outlined in this chapter, the relationship between black men and black women can be very complex. Due to internalised racism, Eugene projects his own self-hatred and aspirations to be as close to whiteness as possible on his wife. This means that Beatrice has to live up to a standard that she can never achieve and that she is not only mistreated for being a woman, but also for being black. Nonetheless, Beatrice as well as Big Madam (who is perceived as too emancipated, too white, and, therefore, cheated on with women who fulfil more traditional gender expectations) feel a strong obligation to stay with their husbands. Both know that leaving their husbands would lead to judgement from other people, but they also know that their husbands have their own struggles. However, when Big Madam kicks Big Daddy out at the end of the novel, she feels liberated. Beatrice accepts Eugene's behaviour for a long time until she finally reaches her breaking point. By killing Eugene and protecting herself from his abuse once and for all, she also finally manages to protect her children. However, this is not acknowledged because Jaja, her son, steps in and takes responsibility for her action. Although she finally manages to

stand up for herself, she is not believed. It becomes clear that even though she is empowered on a personal level, she is still part of a society where women are silenced and once her husband is gone, her son takes on the role of protector. Consequently, Beatrice must deal with emotional pain, stemming from the guilt of knowing that her son is in prison because of something she did. Another man has taken responsibility for her, which means that she is still not free.

4.6. Having children: Marriage and the Objectification of Women's Bodies

In the next few paragraphs, I will discuss how being a mother is considered part of being a wife and how this objectifies women's bodies. As illustrated in the chapters before, women are often shown not to have ownership over their bodies. Because of this, they have to deal with physical harm inflicted on their bodies by other people. However, at the same time, their bodies are also seen as instruments for having children. As discussed in chapter 4.3., women are not expected to be astoundingly educated or to have their own identities because their predetermined identity is to be somebody's wife. In chapter 4.5., I explained that as somebody's wife, a woman is not supposed to override her husband's opinions or decisions. This is why Beatrice, for example, stands by quietly as her husband abuses her children and it is why Adunni's mother had to give up her own dreams when she married Adunni's father (chapter 4.4.). However, I have not yet pointed out one of the key tasks of a wife: being a mother. Just like women do not just get married for love, men do not either. Women expect social acceptance and financial stability, men are expected to be providers. On the one hand, this means that they need someone who can take care of the home while they are at work. However, on the other hand, men are expected to have children, especially sons. Therefore, the main task of a wife is to give birth and raise children. I will discuss the role this place in Adunni's marriage with Morufu, Tia's marriage with Ken and in Beatrice's and Eugene's marriage. These examples show that having to become a mother often objectifies women (reduces them to birth-givers) and takes away their autonomy. However, I will also consider how Ifeoma's role as a single-mother deviates from this.

Being a wife is often seen as synonymous with being a mother in *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice*: Beatrice is a mother and pregnant, Adunni's husband marries her because he wants to have a son, Khadija also feels pressured to give birth to a son, Tia is criticised by her mother-in-law because even though her husband and her have been married

for a bit, she is still not pregnant. In many relationships, being a wife means becoming a mother. When this expectation is not met, the wives are shamed and criticised. One of the reasons why Morufu wanted to marry Adunni, for example, is that his other two wives could not bear him sons. Labake, Morufu's first wife, only had a daughter who is around Adunni's age. Since then, she has not been able to get pregnant again. Because of this, he decided to marry a second wife, Khadija. However, he describes this as a big mistake because Khadija has only given birth to three girls so far (Daré 37). Although Morufu already has four children, he is not satisfied – he insists on having a boy. This highlights that oftentimes more value is placed on sons than daughters. Morufu does not only wish for a son, but he is ready to draw consequences for Khadijah if the baby she is pregnant with now is not a boy. This shows that he blames her for the sex of their children. He says, "I have warned her that if it is not a boy-child inside that stomach, her family will not collect food from me again. I swear I will kick her back to her hungry father's house" (Daré 37). This not only reveals that sons are valued more highly than daughters, but it also makes the wife's financial dependence on her husband very visible. Morufu supplies Khadija's family with food – he can decide how much they get and if he wants to, he can simply stop supplying them. This puts Khadija in a very difficult position and under a lot of pressure to live up to Morufu's expectations. Not only her own financial existence depends on him, but also that of her family. Adunni is in a very similar situation: Morufu does not hesitate to clarify that he wants her to give him a son. Even though he does not explicitly threaten to stop providing for her or her family if this does not happen, the reader can expect that Morufu would treat Adunni the same way he treats Khadija.

Interestingly, even though Morufu points out that his oldest daughter is Adunni's age, he does not seem to see Adunni as a child at all. He says that she has "young blood" (Daré 37-38), but he associates this with better chances of having a son with her. While he would send his sons to school (if he had any), make sure they had access to education and good job opportunities, he is not ready to provide the same for his daughters. As for Adunni, her main role is to be his wife. He openly talks about his intentions of having sex with her (and his other two wives). He makes plans for Adunni to come and sleep with him three nights a week, which is more often than he plans on sleeping with his other wives, because she is young. In other words, he does not want to have sex with her in spite of her young age, but precisely because of it. He does not see her age as an obstacle, but as an advantage. Before he makes this plan, he does not ask Adunni for her opinion or consent, thereby denying her autonomy over her body. The reader

quickly learns that Adunni is a virgin and extremely uncomfortable with the thought of having sex with Morufu: "Is he meaning to say we be sleeping on the same bed like a lovers? Is he wanting to see my naked? To do me the nonsense and rubbish things that adult people use to do? I shiver, put my hand around myself. Nobody ever see my naked. Nobody except of my mama" (Daré 38).

This passage highlights three things: (1) Adunni is a child, (2) she does not want to have sex and (3) she considers Morufu's plan invasive and sees it as harm done to her body. Adunni presents herself as a child by describing sex as something that adults do, thus, suggesting that she does not see herself as one. She also talks about how inexperienced she is, saying that no one but her mother has ever seen her naked. It becomes clear that she does not want to have sex as she calls it 'rubbish' and 'nonsense'. She even questions whether that can really be what Morufu wants to do with her, and she starts to shiver. In addition to this, Adunni's body language suggests that she wants to protect herself from Morufu. She wraps her arms around herself. This way, she builds up a shield to protect her body. African feminists often point out that the female body does not always belong to the woman herself, even though it should. This point is underpinned in this passage. Morufu, a man, wants to decide what happens to Adunni's body. He wants to have sex with her without her consent and even tells her how many nights she must spend with him. Even though it is Adunni's body, her opinion is not heard or considered when this decision is made. Instead, Morufu acts as though having sex is not a choice, but a duty because Adunni is his wife and, therefore, also expected to become the mother of his children. This illustrates Eze's point that women's bodies are not seen as ends in themselves, but as means to an end (Eze, *Big 'F'* 98). Adunni, Khadija and Labake's bodies are all presented as means to have children and as means to experience sexual pleasure.

Similarly, Tia's body is not seen as her own and her main job is supposed to be to have children – at least according to the people in her environment. The biggest problem that Tia has to deal with in the novel is that she has not gotten pregnant yet. Her mother-in-law is very unhappy with this and sees it as a huge failure. Tia is supposed to bear her son's children, so why has she still not done so? Tia's mother-in-law automatically assumes that the problem can be attributed to Tia's infertility. She never even considers that her son could be the one causing the problem. It never occurs to her that Ken could have health issues or that maybe he and Tia decided not to have children, at least not yet. They are married and consequently, everyone expects them to have kids soon. When Adunni and Tia first meet, Tia mentions that she does

not want children, which comes as a great surprise to Adunni. It is the first time that she has ever heard of a grown woman who does not want to have kids. In Ikati, all wives have babies and if they are not able to get pregnant, "their husband will marry another woman on top of them and the adult woman will be caring for another woman's baby so that she don't feel any shame" (Daré 171). Thus, as established earlier a woman's purpose is to be someone's wife, but it does not stop there. Once a woman is a wife, she is expected to be a mother. Not being able to fulfil this purpose is considered shameful. Another woman will have to do her job for her, so that she can at least take part in raising the children – and so that her husband does not have to go without one of the main reasons he married his wife for, namely so he could have children. Therefore, a woman cannot even take ownership over her body in marriage, when she is supposed to be 'real' and 'complete'. Marriage does not make a woman her own person, but somebody else's person. In a society where women are subordinate to men in the public space, they will not be equal to them in private either. Their bodies belong to their husbands and are mainly there to please them sexually and to bear children. Because of this, Adunni is confused that Tia does not want to be a mother, but she can connect with this feeling because she did not want to have children when she was with Morufu either. Knowing this about Tia shows that many women, even women who are grown and well-off, lack freedom of choice and autonomy regarding their reproductive rights (Imam et al. 7).

However, other people are not as understanding as Adunni. As mentioned before, Tia's mother-in-law is disappointed, and others shame her behind her back. Big Madam, for example, expresses her disapproval of Ken marrying Tia when she talks to Adunni. She points out that after one whole year of marriage, she is still not pregnant (Daré 174). Later in the book, it is revealed that Tia and Ken had an agreement and decided not to have children. Tia even tells Adunni that when she told Ken that she had changed her mind, he was unhappy at first. This means that Ken is more opposed to having children than Tia. Nonetheless, the couple decides to keep this from Ken's family. This results in Tia getting all the blame for not getting pregnant while Ken is seen as a victim, who has married the wrong woman. Towards the end of the story, Ken finally reveals that he is the one who cannot have children. Tia has been shamed the whole time and even suffered through an abusive 'bath' that was supposed to help her get pregnant with twins. However, her childlessness never even had anything to do with her presumed infertility. In fact, all this time, Tia would have been able to get pregnant. She only went through all of this because her husband was too scared to tell the truth, so he let his wife take the fall for

him. This shows that people often do not even consider that childlessness could also be the man's 'fault'. At the same time, it highlights how stigmatised male infertility is. Even though Ken seems to love his wife, he struggles to tell the truth and face the stigma that would most likely come with it.

Unlike Tia, who has never been pregnant, Beatrice from *Purple Hibiscus* stands out for her many pregnancies. She is a mother of two children, but she has had several miscarriages. She experienced many of them before she had Kambili and Jaja. However, two later miscarriages are part of the plot. In the novel, Beatrice is almost always pregnant or mourning the loss of an unborn child. The two miscarriages that are described in the novel are Eugene's fault and it is never clarified whether Eugene's violence was also the reason that Beatrice had her first miscarriages. What is clear, however, is that the miscarriages are blamed on Beatrice, who even praises her husband for staying with her and not taking other wives even though she only has two children (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75). She acts as though this is extraordinarily graceful of Eugene, completely ignoring that it is his fault that she does not have more children in the first place. Although this demonstrates that Beatrice views motherhood as her main responsibility, she does not have much say in how Jaja and Kambili are raised. She may be expected to have children and take care of them, but how they are raised is controlled by Eugene. Beatrice is not allowed to have her own opinions and make her own decisions. Rather than a person, she is seen as a child-bearing machine. She is reduced to what her body can do.

Ifeoma, by contrast, is a widow and a single mother who can make all the decisions about how to raise her children. She is aware of how restricted Beatrice is with Eugene, so she tries to encourage her to stand up for herself and offers help. She tries to make Beatrice understand that the way Eugene treats her is not acceptable by sharing that her late husband, Ifediora, never hit her (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 250) and that she loved him (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 74). However, Beatrice does not want to be like Ifeoma. She defends Eugene and expresses that she feels extremely negative about single motherhood, especially considering that it arouses other people's judgement. When Ifeoma remarks that "sometimes life begins when marriage ends" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 75), Beatrice dismisses it as 'university talk'. She often uses this term to dismiss Ifeoma's opinions about marriage, echoing Adunni's father's opinion that an educated woman is not a good wife (Daré 23). However, at the end of the novel, becoming a single mother like Ifeoma and facing possible stigmatisation seems to be the only way-out Beatrice can see to

liberate herself and her body. However, while Ifeoma has to deal with people thinking that she killed her husband, even though she did not, Beatrice has to live with the consequences of killing her husband and letting her son go to prison for it. Thus, once again, women are blamed and punished for not living the life (as wives and mothers) that others intended for them.

Women and their bodies are always blamed for things not going as they should: it is because of Labake and Khadija that Morufu does not have a son yet, Beatrice is blamed for not being able to have more children (even though the miscarriages are due to Eugene's violence), Tia is blamed for not getting pregnant (even though it is Ken who cannot have kids) and Big Madam must be doing something that makes her a woman not worth loving, given that Big Daddy cheats on her. Women are not seen as people, but as child-bearers who are supposed to tend to their husbands' needs. If something does not go according to plan, the woman is made responsible. After all, it is her job to have children, not the husband's, and it is her job to keep her husband happy. Women's needs are often ignored and should they venture out on their own, they will be met with criticism. This makes it clear that their personhood is not respected, that they are objectified and pushed into the roles society and culture have ascribed to them. It takes paying attention to their individual needs, seeing them for who they are (not just their role in society) and being empathetic to take a step towards a society that does not value men more than it values women.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed how marriage is used as a microcosm of society to show the multi-layered discrimination Nigerian girls and women face. Both, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Abi Daré use marriage as a tool to draw attention to bigger issues, but also to establish a clear link between the private and the political sphere. *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding voice* both start in the home, it is the first setting used in each novel. Adichie introduces this setting in a memorable way, namely "Things started to fall apart at home" (Adichie, *Hibiscus* 3). She references Chinua Achebe's well-known *Things Fall Apart* and adds that the home is where everything started; thus, making the personal political and drawing attention to what has been overlooked by many first- and second-generation writers: African women. Highly concerned with responding to Western portrayals of Africa and its people, many first- and second-generation writers were hesitant to draw attention to problems within African communities, including sexism. Adichie and Daré, both third-generation writers, shed a light on the problems affecting girls and women in their novels. However, when looking at discrimination against black African women, merely looking at it through the lens of gender is not sufficient. Adichie and Daré manage to use marriage to illustrate the multi-layered, intersectional forms of discrimination that affects the female characters in the novel. Gender-based oppression is mixed with:

- Classism
- Cultural ideas of womanhood, namely women's role as primarily wives and mothers
- The stigmatisation of feminism, i.e., considering feminism as something imported from the West, not suitable for African contexts
- Racism, oftentimes also internalised due to colonialism
- The objectification of women's bodies, i.e., seeing women as child-bearers, thereby, reducing them to a role in community building and denying them ownership over their bodies, using women's bodies as outlets (e.g., physical abuse as a result of internalised racism)

Describing physical as well as emotional pain as a result of these injustices, but also of resistance, serves as a tool to grasp the readers' attention and humanise the characters. Through their individual stories, the effects of the social expectations for women and the pressure for them to fulfil them are illustrated. Reading about different marriage experiences through the

outside and sometimes inside perspectives of the young narrators, not only highlights their innocence, but takes the reader on an emotional journey of self-discovery and empathy for others. The depiction of pain evokes empathy in readers, but also in other (female) characters who start to recognise the need for action. Through the empowerment of women and girls, communities can be empowered as well: Beatrice frees herself and her daughter, Adunni is able to become a teacher in Ikati, for example. Therefore, women empowerment is not just represented as something that will benefit individual women, but as something that will benefit whole communities.

These stories make the necessity of African feminisms evident. A feminism that is aimed at tackling the issues outlined in the novels needs to be intersectional, sensitised to the women's cultural contexts and consider Nigeria's colonial history and its effects on Nigerians today. As the novels demonstrated, feminist role models play a huge role in encouraging young girls not to settle for unjust circumstances. Adunni, for example, was very inspired by her mother, even though her mother's empowerment was still confined to what she could imagine, and it took Adunni leaving her village and meeting other women to eventually find her voice. Kambili's aunt Ifeoma largely contributed to Kambili's character growth and development. As pointed out in the *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists*, it is important to "draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women" (Imam et al. 5). Both Adunni and Kambili draw inspiration from older women – or see their lives as warnings, resulting in strained mother-daughter relationships. These relationships shed light on how patriarchal structures do not just impact the relationships between men and women, but also those between women and other women.

The lack of feminist role models in the protagonists' lives can be traced back to the bad reputation and supposed un-Africanness of feminist movements in Nigeria. This also explains why many older women, though they are promoting women empowerment like Adunni's mother, are careful not to be 'too radical' in their views. However, not being radical enough in the novels does not result in significantly positive changes in women's lives. Even successful and financially stable women like Big Madam are reluctant to reject the idea that a woman's purpose is to be a wife. However, it is only by taking what is perceived to be a radical step and letting go of this idea, that women can free themselves from oppressive marriages. This

underpins the African feminist argument that it is necessary to be radical to bring upon real change (Tamale, *Feminism* 41).

Overall, *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* use marriage to bring attention to the denial of personhood and right over one's own body of Nigerian girls and women, resulting in discrimination on various levels, including class and race. They show that it affects women from a variety of backgrounds, across ethnicity, age, class, marital status, and number of children. However, everyone is affected differently. Further research could be done into the role of age and marriage in these novels, as it was something that went beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the characters' age and their great respect for older people also plays a role in how they interact with each other (e.g., Adunni and the senior wives or Tia and her mother-in-law).

Not denying that marriages in Nigeria, as well as elsewhere, can be a beautiful union and source of joy for many people, Adichie and Daré use it as a tool in their novels to criticise a bigger, structural issue and, thereby, make what is often seen as an abstract political debate very personal.

"A marriage can be happy or unhappy, but it is not an achievement."

(Adichie, *Ijeawele* ch. 7)

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Appendix

English Abstract

Marriage is more than a union between two people who love each other. In fact, love is not the centre of every marriage, which, considered a microcosm of society, is political. What is deeply ingrained in a society, will be reflected in marriage – including discrimination against girls and women. In this thesis, the novels *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Daré will be analysed to determine how marriage is used to criticise social expectations for married women and the expectation that every woman must become a married woman sooner or later. This encompasses social criticism that goes beyond the personal sphere and, thus, makes the personal political. African feminist theories of the 21st century will serve as the theoretical framework for this analysis. The aim of this thesis is to shed light on how Adichie and Daré, two feminist, Nigerian writers, point out and critically engage with the multi-layered challenges of living in a patriarchal society as a Nigerian girl or woman through something as intimate as marriage.

German Abstract

Ehe ist mehr als nur ein Bund zwischen zwei Menschen, die sich lieben. Tatsächlich steht bei Ehe nicht immer Liebe im Vordergrund und als Mikrokosmos der Gesellschaft, ist Ehe politisch. Was gesellschaftlich verankert ist, spiegelt sich auch im Eheleben wider – somit auch die strukturelle Benachteiligung von Mädchen und Frauen. In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden die Romane *Purple Hibiscus* von Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie und *The Girl with the Louding Voice* von Abi Daré analysiert, um festzustellen, wie Ehe verwendet wird, um gesellschaftliche Erwartungen an verheiratete Frauen, aber auch die gesellschaftliche Erwartung, dass jede Frau früher oder später eine verheiratete Frau sein müsse, zu kritisieren. Damit einhergeht auch eine Gesellschaftskritik, die über den persönlichen Bereich hinausgeht und das Persönliche somit politisiert. Die Grundlage für diese Analyse bieten afrikanische Feminismustheorien aus dem 21. Jahrhundert. Ziel der Arbeit ist es, zu beleuchten, wie Adichie und Daré, zwei feministische, nigerianische Schriftstellerinnen, die Herausforderungen des Lebens in einer patriarchalischen Gesellschaft für nigerianische Mädchen und Frauen auf vielschichtigen Ebenen durch etwas so Intimes wie Ehe aufzeigen und kritisieren.