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*The Portrayal of Female Family Members in Selected Works by
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

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Declaration

I declare that I have worked on this thesis, *The Portrayal of Female Family Members in Selected Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, individually using only the sources listed on the Works Cited page. I declare that I have not used this diploma thesis to gain any other degree.

Prague, 15th April 2016

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signature

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the position of women in Nigerian family and to estimate the extent of their emancipation and/or dependence on men in Nigerian society, traditionally considered to be patriarchal. The analysis is based on the interpretation of the novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck*, written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a prominent contemporary Nigerian author. The theoretical part focuses on political, social and economic representations of women in pre-colonial Nigeria and in colonial and modern, post-colonial Nigeria. An antidote to the stereotypical depiction of women in African literature, Adichie's work typically presents female characters who are educated, independent and emancipated. This stands to challenge the image of Nigerian women who are dominated and controlled by men.

KEY WORDS

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Igbo family, patriarchy, women's empowerment, tradition, modernity

ABSTRAKT

Cílem práce je analyzovat pozici žen v nigerijské rodině a odhadnout míru jejich emancipace a/nebo závislosti na mužích v nigerijské společnosti, tradičně považované za patriarchální. Práce je založena na interpretaci románů *Purple Hibiscus* a *Half of a Yellow Sun* a kolekce povídek *The Thing around Your Neck* od Chimamandy Ngozi Adichie, současné nigerijské prominentní autorky. Teoretická část práce se zaměřuje na politickou, společenskou a ekonomickou reprezentaci žen v předkoloniální, koloniální a moderní postkoloniální Nigérii. Adichie dílo představuje protipól stereotypního zobrazení žen v africké literatuře. Ženské postavy jejích děl jsou zpravidla vzdělané, nezávislé a emancipované, čímž nabourává obraz nigerijských žen, které jsou ovládány a kontrolovány muži.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Igbo rodina, patriarchát, posílení postavení žen, tradice, modernita

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to portray women in Nigerian family. Based on the author's personal interest in postcolonial literature and gender discrimination, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel *Purple Hibiscus*, the award-winning *Half of a Yellow Sun*, along with five selected short stories from highly-acclaimed collection *The Thing around Your Neck* have been chosen for the analysis. These works were selected on the grounds of their brilliant depictions of women in Nigerian society, which is typically patriarchal. The thesis seeks to answer the question to what extent Nigerian women are emancipated and/or to what degree they are subjugated. Through this thesis, the author hopes to uncover whether the term "patriarchal society" means the absence of women's rights and to what degree traditionalism on the one hand and the advent of modernity on the other hand has the impact on the position of Nigerian women today. Adichie focuses primarily on Igbo women since she is of Igbo descent and her novels as well as short stories are set mainly in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, where the Igbo ethnic group is predominant, and in the USA, where the author emigrated when she was nineteen years old.

Throughout history, the position of women in Nigerian society has been changing, and depends largely on the specific historical period. The theoretical part of the thesis is divided into two major sections, with one focusing on the role of women in pre-colonial Nigeria and the other one on their roles in colonial and post-independence Nigeria. The depiction of women's participation in politics and their representation in the public sphere are undoubtedly of great significance since gender equality is the natural foundation for any democratic society and both have an enormous impact on the private sphere as well. The thesis focuses exclusively on the sociocultural view of Nigeria, religion is not discussed because for Adichie as an Igbo, religion is not of such importance as for the Hausa-Fulani or Yoruba, the other most populous ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo have been very successful tradesmen and businessmen for centuries – religion has not interfered in their lives to a great degree, although they have officially been Catholics since the British colonial rule. Apart from women's involvement in political, economic and social spheres, Nigerian women, and Igbo female writers in particular, have also used literature as a tool for their empowerment. Adichie, as a fresh female voice of Nigerian

literature, uses her own personal experience and offers her unique dual perspective – as a Nigerian Igbo she can portray real and authentic Nigeria with its diverse people and at the same time as an American immigrant who can observe her country with certain distance. Adichie herself admits that even though she adores Nigeria and is proud of her Igbo identity, America has given her limitless possibilities in the area of education and self-development.¹

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a very significant contemporary writer of Nigerian descent who acts as a mediator between two continents – Africa and the United States, where she also resides. Adichie effortlessly introduces Nigeria to Western readers. She successfully breaks stereotypes and destroys myths about Africa in general, but especially about the representation of a typical Nigerian woman. The author wants to show a different Africa, not the stereotypical image of the “dark continent” connected with negative symbols of hunger, uncivilized and endless wars, diseases or poverty. Regarding women, Adichie depicts primarily female characters who are, despite the negative portrayals of suppressed and submissive women in Western literature, educated, strong, emancipated and fighting for their rights whenever necessary. Thanks to writers like Chinua Achebe, Adichie’s inspiration, who is considered the father of Nigerian literature, she has discovered the power of telling stories about characters she can identify with – real Nigerians. Adichie is a literary descendant of Achebe’s storytelling tradition, but, unlike him, she pays great attention to women and gives them a chance to narrate from their own female perspectives. Adichie’s work represents an amalgam of tradition and modernity, which stands as a parallel to Igbo traditional values and colonial and post-independence modernity. The author observes how traditional and modern ways of living and thinking influence contemporary Nigerian women.

¹ Although immigration is the essential theme of *The Thing around Your Neck* (or Adichie’s most recent novel *Americanah*), the comparison of women living in Nigeria and the USA is not the main aim of this thesis. The thesis focuses predominantly on the portrayal of Nigerian women in Nigeria.

I THEORETICAL PART

1 The Position of Women in Nigeria

The outset of the chapter is devoted to the basic characterization of the most populous ethnic groups in Nigeria in terms of their social organization, religion and legacy. However, the primary aim of this section is to introduce and describe customs typical for Igbo people since the author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is of Igbo descent and narrates stories set within the framework of Igbo culture. The primary attention is turned to three significant historical periods in the development of women's position in Nigeria – the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial time frames since pre-colonial Nigeria represents traditional tribal societies with their values and colonial and post-colonial Nigeria introduces the advent of modernity.² These three historical periods are significantly different in terms of changes in positions of women in society. The following subchapters focus on a typical Igbo family, including traditional procedure towards Igbo marriage, presented in contrast to the modern types of Nigerian families. There is a subchapter dedicated to gender-related issues which impact family organization. Gender bias and discrimination could obviously be found not only within the family framework but also from the point of view of larger social, economic and political structures. The political representation of women is without doubt significant because the equal participation of women in politics is essential to building a democratic society. If women have the chance to influence the situation in the public sphere, they are then able to change conditions in the private sphere, in their homes. Public (social, economic and political structures) and private (family) spheres are strongly connected and influence each other.

² The advent of modernity as a historical period, not thematic modernity as the British colonial rule brought a lot of changes regarding women's rights and certainly a number of them are not considered "modern" from today's perspective.

1.1 Ethnic Communities in Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populous African country. Nigeria consists of more than 250 ethnic groups. Nigeria's largest ethnic groups are Hausa-Fulani (29%), Yoruba (21%) and Igbo (18%). There are 521 languages in Nigeria, including 510 living languages, 2 second languages without native speakers and 9 extinct languages. As a result of British colonial rule, English became the official language of the country and united an otherwise very linguistically diverse country. The major languages are the Niger-Congo languages – Yoruba or Igbo, and Hausa from the Afro-Asiatic language family.

The affiliation of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, the most populous ethnic groups, to separate ethnic communities has an impact on their position in Nigerian society. Firstly, Hausa and Fulani are referred to collectively as Hausa-Fulani in contemporary Nigeria. They are the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria's northern region and the key component of their ethnicity is Islam and a deep-rooted patriarchal³ and patrilineal culture. Politically, Hausa society has been organized on a feudal basis with an emir as the ruler.

Secondly, the Yoruba occupy the south-western part of Nigeria. Having settled in densely populated city-states, the Yoruba are one of the most urbanized ethnic groups in the country. Nowadays they form a majority in Lagos. The group embraces both Christianity and Islam as well as a number of traditional and animist beliefs. Similarly to the Hausa-Fulani, inheritance and succession are based on patrilineal descent.

Finally, the Igbo are a dominant ethnic group, which occupy southeast Nigeria. Before the colonialization, Igbo people lived in autonomous local communities and were not united as a single people. However, a sense of ethnic identity was strongly developed in the middle of the 20th century, which led to the secession and establishment of the independent state of Biafra⁴ in 1967. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the village group was the

³ Patriarchy is “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line” (merriam-webster.com online)

⁴ The Biafran War (also the Nigerian Civil War) was a three-year ethnic and political conflict with estimates of deaths ranging from 500,000 to 3,000,000. In 1966 some 10,000 to 30,000 Igbo people were massacred in the (mostly Hausa) northern part of Nigeria and around one million Igbos were forced to flee as refugees to the Igbo-dominated east. Odumegwu Ojukwu, the head of the Eastern Region, declared the independence and sovereignty of the newly established Republic of Biafra in May 1967. The republic was defeated by Nigerian army in January 1970. Gabon, Tanzania, Zambia and Côte d'Ivoire were the only countries which recognized Biafra as an independent secessionist state.

largest political unit among the Igbo. Authority was entrusted to a council of lineage heads and influential, wealthy men, while members of the group shared a common meeting place and ancestral cults. Contrary to Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba cultures, Igbo society was traditionally decentralized and non-hierarchical, which enabled easier conversion to Christianity by the efforts of European missionaries. Although many Igbos are Christians, traditional Igbo religion promotes the existence of god creator, earth goddess or ancestors, who act as protectors of their living descendants. Along with trading, local crafts or wage labour, most Igbo people have traditionally been subsistence farmers. After Nigerian independence their high literacy rate has helped them to become civil servants and business entrepreneurs, e.g. to hold posts of relatively high status within the newly formed state.

1.2 Pre-colonial Nigeria

Pre-colonial Nigeria lasted from around 2000 BC to the 19th century. Pre-colonial Nigeria as a historical period is crucial for the understanding the position of Nigerian women today. The impact of traditionalism goes back to the time before the advent of colonialism. Because of the fact that Nigerian women today are still affected by traditional ways of thinking on the one hand and the modern perception of life on the other hand, it is necessary to know the historical background in order to understand their current situation.

1.2.1 Traditional Igbo Marriage and Family

In the first stage, known as “izoagbono” and “itu-okpulu”⁵, a man found a suitable girl and informed his parents of his intentions. Afterwards, the parents and other members of their family traced the history and assessed the status of the girl’s family on the grounds of potential disease, insanity or deformity that could prevent the future bride from delivering a child, since children constituted, and still are, a prime factor in Igbo marriages. The future bride had to be a freeborn, not a slave, she could not be related to her husband’s family or come from an enemy family. Premarital virginity was expected from a girl when entering her first marriage, otherwise she was regarded as a disgrace to

⁵ “Izoagbono” is the term used in Onitscha city, located in Anambra State. “Itu-okpulu”, the term used in Oguta, located in Imo State of southeastern Nigeria.

the community. The second step towards marriage took place when, if the prospective partner was eligible and suitable, the parents of both future partners discussed and fixed the date for the engagement ceremony. Nevertheless, the length of the interval before the ceremony depended on the financial situation of the man, as the man had to be prepared to provide the marriage payment. In the meantime, the girl's character was tested. During the engagement ceremony, kinsmen and friends were invited and offered kola nuts and gin whilst praying to their ancestors. Thus the consenting partners were identified and recognized within the community. Thereafter, marriage was formally and publicly contracted during the wedding ceremony. Additionally, any child delivered from this time belonged to the man lawfully and undisputedly (Otitte 22-23). To sum up, the long ceremonious marriage process could be divided into four interrelated stages: asking the girl's consent, working through a middleman, testing the bride's character and finally paying the "bride wealth".⁶

A family functions as a unit of reproduction, education and socialisation. A traditional Igbo family consisted of a man, a wife or wives and children. As wives and children were considered assets, polygamy was desirable among Igbo men. As a result of the first place in the family, the senior wife was well respected by the other wives and children as she was consulted on major family issues. Each co-wife lived in a separate hut. Larger families were useful in various economic activities in farms, but only the most mature and financially secure men were able to have more wives. The more wives an Igbo man could financially afford, the higher social status he had within his tribe. Logically, more wives meant more children. Children were highly desirable within the Igbo community not only because they helped to better the economic situation of their parents, but also owing to the high rate of child mortality. The father figure was regarded as an important authority in the training of the child and in the management of the family relations. Traditionally, rich families or individuals should financially supported their relatives if the need arose. Children were obliged to help and financially assist their parents.

Regarding the breakup of a relationship, a divorce could usually occur on account of witchcraft, adultery (on the part of the wife), cruelty or insubordination to the partner or

⁶ The term "bride wealth" will be further discussed in the chapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family*.

to their kinsmen, desertion or barrenness. Infertility was regarded as a bad omen and a supernatural punishment within the Igbo community.⁷ In the case of divorce, the marriage payment was refunded.

Referring to inheritance, the premarital property of the wife fell within her “kinsmen’s authority”⁸, however, the assets obtained in marriage went to her husband and his people when she died. In case of the family head’s death, the first son assumed control and management of the family. Daughters were not independent, did not stay separately in the compound and were not allowed to inherit property among the Igbo (Otite 25). Whereas young children and daughters stayed with their mothers, older Igbo sons resided in separate houses.

As far as the division of work is concerned, women planted maize, beans or cassava and engaged in trading, adding significantly to the family budget. Men controlled the family expenditure and did the hard jobs. Considering duties within a family organization, it must be stated that pre-colonial Nigerian societies clearly defined the roles of men and women. 90% of women were working mothers who simultaneously traded and farmed to ensure they had a source of income if needed (Agbese 19). This system has continued to function since pre-colonial times.

1.2.2 Women in Pre-Colonial Society

Throughout history, the position of Nigerian women was constantly evolving. Due to the changes in the political, economic and social spheres, Nigerian women experienced different degrees of power and influence. These changes will be further discussed in this section.

Regarding the participation of African women in politics, the two paradigms presented in the corpus of literature are in stark contrast with each other. According to the first paradigm, which romanticizes the political history of African women before the imposition of colonial rule and the Victorian gender ethos, women had enormous political power in their societies. On the contrary, the other model emphasizes women’s political

⁷ The chapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family* is devoted to the problem of infertility among Nigerian women.

⁸ “Kinsmen’s authority” refers to the wife’s father.

subordination and invisibility. According to Chuku (2009, 82) the answer concerning women's power lies between these two paradigms – as proved by the following passages.

Nigerian pre-colonial societies believed that women and men complemented each other. Since the family is one of the oldest and most respected institutions, women gained power and importance in the society on the basis of their family and kinship. Furthermore, as more children meant more power and wealth, the ability to have children has played crucial role in the formation of female identity in Nigeria since that time. Although in pre-colonial predominantly patrilineal societies, inheritance and authority were the domain of male members, seniority, not gender, determined power. Age was a major decisive factor of who could actively participate in government, perform duties or earn titles (Agbese 18).

Thus women in some societies were not excluded from the decision-making processes, they influenced political matters and also acted as leaders in their communities. In the case of Igbo women, political power and influence were determined by their membership in all-female age-grade systems and title societies (Chuku 86) and women had even the right to expel men from their clans (Agbese 19).

Amongst the Igbo, certain women exercised significant political power and authority, such as Isi Ada (the oldest daughter of the lineage), who was regarded as the “Mother of the lineage”, leader and spokesperson of women. Importantly, Isi Ada's reports and advice to women could form the basis for collective actions against their male authority. In addition to Isi Ada's significant position, royal women as well as heads of various women's organizations were also of great importance to women within the male authority structure. Some powerful female “Idido title” holders influenced political decisions more than council members and men with similar titles.

Another significant female position in the Igbo society was Omu, an eminent Igbo female, whose status was characterized by her outstanding character, ability and leadership. She was acknowledged as the female monarch, although dressed like a male sovereign with her own palace, which served as a female court and a council. It is important to say that the degree of Omu's political influence depended on the specific community, the majority of the Omu females, however, were not entrusted with as much political power and authority as their male counterparts. Igbo women such as Earth Goddess, Idemili or Agbala exercised religious, judicial and political functions through

spirituality in some societies, which were dedicated to goddesses (Chuku 84-87). Finally, the Igbo women “are said to have had well defined political rights, and conducted much of their business without male interference” (Pearce 4).

Especially dual-sex political systems encouraged gender equality. They “enabled men and women to protect their rights and to respect what each brought to community development and progress. Not one gender was privileged nor devalued” (Nzegwu 23). In dual-sex political systems the power was shared between both genders in a complementary manner to support the harmony and well-being of the members of society.

So-called “collectives”, associations comprised of either only female or male members, played a crucial role with regard to gender separation in pre-colonial communities. They were the earliest forms of women’s movements in Nigeria. The aim of these social groups was “to share a common goal, trade, ethnicity, or family” (Agbese 19). Women’s collectives were of great importance not only because of their efficiency in fighting male domination, but they also backed the financial and emotional independence of Nigerian women. Specifically, the utmost significance of still existing collectives was manifested through preventing and punishing abusive husbands by “tying up the culprit’s hands and feet and letting him roll down a rocky hill” (Steady 93).

To sum up, pre-colonial Nigeria was not ideal in terms of women’s positions since their influence in some circles was not as strong as men’s and some ethnic groups favoured men. However, there were a number of institutions and female organizations which gave women an opportunity to perform significant and diverse roles to complement and balance those of men. They thus made ample contributions to social, political and economic organizations. However, with the advent of British colonial rule, the position of women changed drastically.

1.3 Colonial and Post-colonial Nigeria

Nigeria came under the British colonial rule at the beginning of the 20th century and continued as a colony until 1960 when it was granted independence. From the historical point of view, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria belong to modernity – in contrast with traditional pre-colonial societies. However, during both colonial and post-colonial eras many changes concerning the roles of women occurred. Some of these changes have remained in existence up to the present, despite the fact that they are not considered

“modern” today. This chapter focuses (apart from the description of the development of women’s roles) on the basic characterization of the contemporary Nigerian family (including the Nigerian-American family) and on still existing gender issues.

1.3.1 Modern Nigerian Marriage and Family

Modern Nigerian family systems include influences of both colonial and independent, post-colonial Nigeria resulting in a hybrid of Western and various indigenous traditional elements. Nigerian family began to change in the 19th century as the result of interactions between various indigenous ethnic groups new invading colonial systems,⁹ which were later united in one Nigeria. The changes in the family have become a stepping stone for the gradual alternation of the wider Nigerian society. However, in spite of colonial legislation, religion, westernization and industrialization, these changes have not resulted in the replacement of traditional systems by the modern (foreign) ones.

There are no significant differences between the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba or Igbo ethnic groups as far as the distinction of modern kinds of marriages is concerned. Three main forms of marriage may be distinguished in modern Nigeria – indigenous (traditional), civil (state) or church (Christian) marriage. A traditional marriage could be Muslim or of indigenous traditional form - and unlike the two other observed types, it consists of polygamy. A civil marriage legally allows one wife to a man at a time, divorce and remarriage is permitted. In case of the death of one of the parties, the married couple has the right to a regular inheritance procedure stipulated by legislation. The Marriage Ordinance was enacted as soon as 1884, with the legislative influence of the colonial powers. The third type – a Christian marriage – has been practiced since the colonial religious intervention of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In comparison to traditional marriage, which is essentially polygamous, Christian marriage is exclusively monogamous. Most Christian authorities do not allow a marriage to take place in a church unless a certificate or registration is issued from the appropriate government ministry or agency (Otite 41).

Concerning the family structure, there are two types of families in modern Nigeria - the nuclear family on the one hand and the agnatically focussed extended family on the

⁹ Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria was established on 1 January 1914 and lasted until the Independence from the United Kingdom was declared and recognised on 1 October 1960.

other hand. Nigerian families can be further categorized into rural, quasi-urban (urbanised) and urban families, with the majority of Nigerian families being rural (75-80%). Rural families, whose members follow tradition, are essentially agricultural. Conversely, for quasi-urban families trading and partial employment in a local industry or a government department is typical. Urbanised families are comprised of poor or lower middle-class nuclear or extended families. Interestingly, a Nigerian urban family is more often formed on the basis of Christian or state marriages, rather than traditional ones. This type of family is unique in the way it significantly differs from the rural and urbanised family forms regarding its structure. There is a tendency to exclude near and distant kinsmen from the group, whereas only the (nuclear) man, his wife and their children are in focus. Furthermore, a greater degree of impersonality among distant family members could be observed.

Although the division into rural, quasi-urban and urban family forms has been made, most Nigerians have one foot in the urban area and the nuclear family system and the other foot in the rural area and the traditional family systems. Membership in the family, town, ethnic, cultural or progressive unions unifies this two-sided life pattern (Otite 44).

1.3.1.1 Gender Factor in Modern Family

This chapter focuses on gender issues in contemporary Nigerian society. Various customs and traditions have been practiced and respected since pre-colonial times and still influence the life of modern Nigerian women.

As was already mentioned, marriage payment (aku nwanya) is a traditional part of an Igbo marriage because it serves to regularize and stabilise the marriage. “Bride wealth”¹⁰ or bride price is a price paid usually in kind to the bride’s family by the bridegroom in tribal societies (Chambers English Dictionary 1992).

Bride wealth is still common in contemporary Nigeria. In patrilineal societies, the person legally entitled to receive the bride price is the father of the bride. However, if he is absent from the family, the male head of his immediate family receives the right.¹¹ The

¹⁰ Importantly, although the term “bride price” is often used interchangeably with dowry, these two expressions must not be confused with each other since dowry means property which a woman brings to her husband.

payment of bride price has recently attracted criticism for its supposed female discrimination. Liberal scholars claim that:

The practice of bride price is a deliberate and mischievous act meant to demean, derogate and belittle the status of women to mere “purchasable” commodities. By implication and application, the practice of bride price has some psychological tolls of trauma and humiliation on women, making it virtually impossible for them to extricate themselves from the cocoon of inferiority complex and social subjugation. (Nwoke 2009)

However, it is vitally important to point out that the term has neither any sale nor any slave connotations. In fact, the bride price suggests that a woman has an independent life and is allowed to file for divorce. She is by no means owned by man only because a marriage payment has been carried out. Thus marriage payment indicates a voluntary entry into a legal contract. According to Nwoke (2009), “the bride wealth (price) is a solid symbol that signifies the completeness of the marriage process as well as a bond between the parties”. Nevertheless, the financial inability to refund the marriage can considerably prolong the formal proceedings of divorce.

Another controversial issue regarding gender discrimination in Nigeria is the inability of women to deliver children. Infertility is in fact a destructive problem for Nigerian women. According to Ulla Larsen (2010), infertile “women in most African societies suffer grief, social stigma, ostracism and often serious economic deprivation”. Larsen, Hollos, Obono and Whitehouse’s research (2010), which focused on the impact of infertility on women’s life experiences in the Nigerian communities of the Ijo and Yakurr people of southern Nigeria, indicates the absolute necessity for a woman to bear in these regions (787).

To illustrate the fact that women occupy a fairly disadvantageous position in Nigerian families, the phenomenon of male child preference may be used as another example. Delivering a desired son is a highly contested issue. Thus family cohesion and lineage continuity is mainly the man’s responsibility. Logically, the absence of a male descendant means a social failure. In her study, *The Gender Factor in Family Size and Health Issues in Modern Nigerian Homes*, Nwachuku (1996, 13-14) adds that education has not weakened the influence of either gender preference or the high birth rate. To have male

children means to meet social standards. The structure of traditional societies and the male's typical dominance have led to the fact that male children are highly prized and thus parents without at least a son feel insecure. On the contrary, it is significant to note that abortion is illegal in Nigeria. There are exceptions if the life of a woman is endangered. However, because of the fact that procedures are often inaccessible even for those who meet these requirements, women are forced to seek out clandestine procedures (womenonwaves online).

Nwoke (2004)¹² claims that the great gender role inequality originates in the traditional, pre-modern value systems. Concerning female education, another controversial issue connected with gender equality, Nwoke (2004) has done research focusing on three minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. The evidence shows that the education of female children is still considered a useless venture. Apart from that, the study suggests the persevering perception of "the place of the girl child should be in the kitchen or be turned into the factory that manufactures children".

Widows have been one of the most marginalized groups since pre-colonial times. They are still considered a very vulnerable group in contemporary Nigerian society. According to the customary law, a widow herself can be simply inherited by a male member of the family after her husband's death. Furthermore, widows do not have the right to inherit property, especially if they have no male descendant. Widow's rights are frequently violated, they are denied dignity and equality. In rural areas, widows are frequently accused of witchcraft and of killing their husbands.

To further elaborate on gender discrimination within Nigerian modern family, an extract from Adichie's essay *We Should All Be Feminists* can serve as a decent example: "We say to girls, 'You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful, otherwise you would threaten the man. If you are the bread winner in your relationship with a man, you have to pretend that you're not. Especially in public. Otherwise you will emasculate him'" (TEDx online).

The writer implores Nigerian society to face up to and attempt to solve the problem of gender discrimination. She suggests a redefinition of the roles of women and men as

¹² Mary Basil Nwoke from University of Nigeria, Nsukka examined the issue of bride price and its implication for Nigerian women.

well as their aspirations: “Now, marriage can be a good thing. It can be a source of joy and love and mutual support, but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same?” (TEDx online).

1.3.2 Nigerian-American Family¹³

Approximately 376,000 Nigerian immigrants live in the USA today, which makes Nigeria the largest source of African immigration in the United States. The highest concentration of Nigerian diaspora could be observed in Texas, California, New York, Maryland, Illinois, New Jersey and Georgia.

Historically, in the 18th and 19th centuries a number of Nigerians came to the USA as they were forced into slavery. At the beginning of 20th century, the Nigerian elite traditionally studied in Europe, mostly in the UK or Germany and then returned to Nigeria. From the point of view of the modern era, the first Nigerians came to the USA for educational purposes. A significant increase in Nigerians in the United States could be seen in the 1970s when the oil boom caused Nigeria to become one of the richest African countries. Apart from that, the implementation of The Immigration and National Act in 1965 facilitated entry to the USA predominantly for Africans who were students or skilled professionals. As a result, a number of Nigerians, who were sponsored by their families or by financial assistance from American universities and colleges, came to the USA. Whereas in the 1970s many Nigerians still returned to their homelands, since the 1980s they began to stay in the USA due to the tragic decline of the Nigerian economy. Because of the high cost of transportation, many of them left their families behind, saving what money they could to send to their relatives. When first arriving, many highly educated Nigerians had to take odd and underestimated jobs. However, due to their industrious nature, the majority of them achieved a high standard of living after some time (Sarkodie-Mensah online).

In Ogbaa’s (2003) view, Nigerian immigrants bring cultural baggage, which to a certain extent clashes with American culture - including cultural areas, ethnic associations, folkways, and attitudes towards education and political culture. Ogbaa

¹³ Immigration is a recurrent theme in Adichie’s fiction, especially *The Thing around Your Neck* and *Americanah* (*Purple Hibiscus* mentions this issue partly as well) explore and compare living in Nigeria and the USA. Although immigration belongs to the whole image of a Nigerian family, the practical analysis of the thesis concentrates exclusively on Nigerian families in Nigeria.

(2003) adds that the tension between the old and new ways of living causes a cultural shock for Nigerians coming to America. However, if the newcomers are positive in their attitudes, they find a way to finally embrace the new culture (39).

Nigerian Americans tend to maintain traditional values of strict obedience, while the younger generation resists this kind of discipline. Even though boys and girls are treated and educated equally within Nigerian American families, parents are more vigilant in keeping an eye on their daughters owing to the rising number of teenage pregnancies in the USA.

According to the analysis of 13 annual Houston-area surveys conducted by Rice University, Nigerian immigrants achieve the highest levels of education amongst all other immigrants. The reason why Nigerians are the most numerous group with post-graduate degrees than any other racial or ethnic group, is that the Nigerian society in general emphasizes the importance of education. Another reason could be the fact that Nigerians are motivated to overcome their doubly marginalized positions as black and African people. Finally, Olutoye adds his own viewpoint: “The typical saying in a Nigerian household is that the best inheritance that a parent can give you is not jewellery or cash or material things, it is a good education” (Kesimir online).

1.3.3 Women in Colonial and Post-Colonial Society

Firstly, it is vitally important to repeat two contradicting views on women’s position in colonial times. Whereas Denzer (1994) claims that British colonial rule granted greater freedom of choice in marriage, legal rights, and economic opportunities to Nigerian women, newer research asserts that colonialism actually repressed women (Johnson-Odim & Strobel; O’Barr & Firmin-Seller; Oyewumi).

British invaders finally succeeded in creating an amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria into a colonial state under the tutelage of Lord Lugard in 1914. The former protectorates consisted of northern Hausa-Fulanis and various southern ethnic groups, where the British colonial rule was applied. As Hausa-Fulanis were unified in terms of language, cultural and political organization, the British were able to rule indirectly through the existing centralized structure, similar to the British monarchy. The British changed the political structure of southern Nigeria, which had a great impact on traditional societies. In case of Igboland, a warrant chief system of native administration

was created and installed, in which case the warrants reported directly to their British rulers (Agbese 20). However, the colonial administrative systems completely ignored their female equivalents.

Generally, the colonial period introduced taxation, Western education, a new monetary system, commercialization, improved transportation system, urbanization and new technologies. While Igbo traditional culture and beliefs were violated, Christianity increased. It is important to note that whereas some factors created opportunities for women, others weakened their status.

The colonial rule influenced the roles of men and women in the way that “men were expected to be in the public sphere, and women in the private” (Okome, 2002 online). Colonial rule legalized gender discrimination and women’s authority and opportunities to participate in social, economic and political spheres were restrained. Women were displaced from agricultural trade due to a cash crop economy which was run by European companies (Agbese 20). Additionally, the new colonial political structure not only weakened women’s socio-political organization, age-grade societies and other institutions but pre-colonial women’s organizations with their leaderships stopped participating in the public sphere (Chuku 88).

According to Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997) at the time of the British colonial rule women were seen only as bearers of children and doers of housework: “Men’s efforts to end their autonomy in the name of foreign principles propagated by missionaries – that women should stay at home, submit to the will of the colonial officials and their husbands, and essentially renounce their economic and social privileges – were intolerable” (161).

On the contrary, some women took advantage of the newly established colonial system. Some of them became employed in the government. The first known evidence of an Igbo woman who served in the colonial government was Omu Okwei (1872-1943), member of the Onitsha Native Court. Ahebi Ugbabe represented the position of a warrant chief as the only woman in colonial Nigeria, later she became the monarch of Ogrute.

After the Women’s War¹⁴ in 1929 there were more women who participated in politics, mainly in the Native Courts (Chuku 90-91).

¹⁴ The Igbo Women’s War (in Igbo history) or the Aba Women’s Riot (in British colonial history) was a protest movement led by thousands of rural women in south-eastern Nigeria in November and...

It is important to state, however, that there was a considerable difference between women in the north and south of the country. Unlike northern women, who were secluded on religious and legal grounds from the public realm, southern women participated in the public sphere. According to Chuku (2009, 89) women responded to the degradation of their authority in the political, economic, social and religious spheres “through a variety of distinctly female political mechanisms: boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, sleep-ins, and protest demonstrations against male authorities”. To illustrate the fact, the important Aba women’s riots of 1929-1930, the Lagos market women’s strikes of 1945 or the Egba Women’s Alliance of 1930s–1950s should be mentioned. Owing to potential taxation, which threatened women to a great degree during the time of the Aba riots, one interviewed female protester stated: “we would make trouble as we did not mind to be killed for doing so” (Leith-Ross 22). Women did not even hesitate to sit on a government messenger – an Igbo custom, which indicates women’s displeasure with men. As Gwendolyn (2005, 89) explains, “female activism has helped bring Nigeria back from the brink of collapse by building local grass roots movement for democracy, human rights, and conflict resolution”. Despite the fact that the colonial authorities often reacted mercilessly, women never surrendered.

Furthermore, unlike northern women, women in southern Nigeria, which was later divided into east and west, could vote in 1954 in the east and four years later in the west. Northern women were forbidden to vote on religious grounds until 1976, 16 years after Nigeria’s independence from Britain. Imam (1993, 131) as quoted by Agbese (2003) explains: During and after colonial rule, “to argue for women’s political rights or possibilities of leadership” was viewed as “anti-tradition, un-Islamic, and anti-Northern”.

“Post-colonial Nigeria was built on a male privileging colonial ideology that empowered local men and their male-dominated, male oriented native authorities, agencies and customary courts and dismissed women” (Nzegwu 6). Even though men fought along with women for independence, Nigerian women occupied subordinate and useless positions in politics after independence.

December of 1929. Igbo women protested against the policies, such as taxation, imposed by British colonial administrators.

There are various explanations for this development. Firstly, Nigerians not only appropriated and internalized a number of British values but they also reinvented themselves in the image of colonialists. Due to the colonial mentality, Nigerian men thought that traditional societies were savage and not civilized. English laws were kept in post-colonial Nigeria and the public image of the woman remained the same as during the British colonial rule. “A woman’s traditional role as mother and homemaker was emphasized ensuring that tradition could be used to determine what a woman could do or become” (Oguonu online).

Secondly, there were neither enough educated and wealthy women nor sufficient national support that could reflect women’s interests. As Nigerian women had a hard time accumulating money during colonialism and after independence, it was not easy for them to participate in Nigerian politics. Nigerian women did not have much chance to be educated because post-colonial Nigeria preferred to educate boys. Furthermore, the absence of rights for women with children to protect themselves from abandonment by their husbands or exploitation and cruelty by relatives after the death of their husbands became alarming (Ajai; Agbese 22).

However, it is necessary to add that Nigerian women were allowed to campaign for public office. Regarding southern Nigeria, a number of women were even elected to local government councils. At least one woman was employed in state cabinets during the military government of Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975), but at the same time there were almost no women at a national level from 1960 to 1975. Gender bias and discrimination were apparent at that time: “Not one woman sat on the fifty-member constitutional drafting committee, thereby limiting the potential influence and participation of women in bringing issues that favoured them to the forefront” (Okome, 2000 online).

Another significant aspect is that women were viewed merely as a means to gain and strengthen the political power of men. As politicians needed female support, they promised to include them in the government and discuss the women’s issues. However, the evidence suggests that although women were encouraged to form political parties and participate in political issues, they did not really take part in any decision-making processes.

One of the crucial moments in post-colonial Nigeria regarding women’s rights was the creation of the Better Life for Rural Women program (BLRW), which the first lady,

Maryam Bagangida, implemented “to purposefully empower rural women socially, economically and politically through adult education and training in fields of education, agriculture, public health, arts and crafts and food processing” (Nwonwu 1). Furthermore, a National Commission for Women was created. Maryam Bagangida (1948-2009), who called attention to the issue of women’s “unappreciated and marginal position” (Bagangida 1), was awarded the 1991 Africa Prize for Leadership. The Family Support Program (FSP) under the patronage of the first lady Mariam Abacha (*1947), whose aim was to improve Nigeria through the family’s social and economic well-being, along with gender issues, followed in 1993.¹⁵ Both programs had an enormous impact on the development of women’s positions in Nigeria. Whereas the BLRW enabled women to strengthen their national voice and helped to raise awareness about the issues affecting women, the FSP directed their aims towards the education of girls and women through legislation. Apart from that, through the Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP) from 1997, families were guaranteed a sense of material security. Moreover, Maria Abacha formed a Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development “to confer institutional recognition on the contribution of women to national development” (Mama 12).

Other significant women’s achievements followed, namely in 1999 when seven of the 48 ministers appointed under President Olusegun Obasanjo (*1937) were women or in 2003 elections, when Sarah Jubril and Mojisola Adekunle ran as presidential candidates. Furthermore, Nigerian women have created organizations such as Women in Nigeria (WIN) or the National Council of Women’s Societies with the emphasis on girl’s and women’s education.

Politically, the 1979 Nigerian constitution guaranteed women the right to participate in active politics. According to Agbalajobi (2009):

There has been a remarkable increase in women’s participation in politics in Nigeria considering the standards such as the number of public offices held by women, number of women who vote in elections, number of women related policies implemented by government etc., yet there is inherently a pronounced level of

¹⁵ According to Mama (1998) the BLRW and the FSP programs “heralded a change in national gender politics and had a positive impact in some realms” (Mama 9).

underrepresentation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts. (Agbalajobi 077)

The most recent political event supports this statement - only one female candidate was running in 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria (Al Jazeera online). However, one of the latest examples of women's empowerment shows the strength and determination of Nigerian women. Six hundred middle-aged women, mainly Itsekiri tribeswomen, threatened to strip as a form of a protest against a US oil giant in the Niger Delta. As Branigan and Vidal explain: "The gesture, known as 'the curse of nakedness', is a traditional way of shaming people and remains as potent as ever" (Branigan, Vidal online).

Unfortunately, northern women's struggle for equality seems to be less successful. Islamic court sentenced two Nigerian women to be stoned to death because they were accused of adultery. This case was one in a series of sentences that were passed under sharia law (Steiner online). Moreover, the Islamic extremist organization Boko Haram, which is based in northeast Nigeria, still poses an enormous threat to Nigerian women. According to Amnesty International, "at least 2000 women and girls have been abducted by Boko Haram since the beginning of 2014, with many targeted because they are Christians or attending school. Captives are subjected to rape, torture, forced marriage and religious conversion" (Smith online).

Although the changes regarding women's rights do not process as easily and smoothly as desired, Nigerian women are patiently biding their time. In spite of facing daily challenges, they are still fighting to defend their rights and ensure they their own way. Nigeria's formal education system was the most crucial change regarding the autonomy of women. A number of intelligent, educated, and confident women in all leading occupations can be observed in contemporary Nigeria (britannica.com online). These women have received the most powerful weapon against their oppression – the education. However, as was shown in previous chapters, Nigerian women have always fought for their rights throughout history. They have used various strategies like uprisings, protests and boycotts to maintain their positions, and they are ready to use them whenever necessary. Apart from participation in social, economic and political spheres,

Nigerian women have also used literature to fight for their rights, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2 The Portrayal of Women in Nigerian Literature

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, literature has been used as a tool for women's empowerment. The Nigerian feminist novel was created as a reaction to the negative images of women in male-authored works. Nigerian literature was long dominated by male authors such as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, or Elechi Amadi. From their exclusively male perspective, the Nigerian woman was often portrayed as a "femme fatale"¹⁶ – such as Ihuoma in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966), she was voiceless – like Okonkwo's wives in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), without power. Apart from that, the Nigerian woman was presented as a mere extension of a man, she was defined by her husband. The woman was marginalized and placed in traditional and domestic roles as a wife and a mother.

Despite the fact that the Western voice has largely criticised Nigerian feminist novels, feminism in Nigeria differs from the Western brands of feminism to a great degree. The African woman rejects the radical aspect of Western feminists who claim they do not need men. Some of the "militant" Western feminists even encouraged learning to get sexual satisfaction without male counterparts (Akung 32). Nigerian feminists, however, desire "that the man and the woman should be in harmony in the home and in the society at large" (Ogini 15). Unlike Western feminism, Nigerian "womanism"¹⁷ believes that the man and the woman have complementary roles of relationship" (Ogini 16). Moreover, Nigerian "womanism" does not accept men and women being alone, without children. A man or woman's inability to have children is considered a tragedy and a social failure. On the contrary, western feminism accepts childless marriages (Akung 28).

Nigerian feminist literature is divided into three time-periods. The first period, known as the first generation, began with Africa's first female novelist, Flora Nwapa (1931-1993), whose literary work re-created Igbo life and customs from a woman's point of view (britannica.com online). Nwapa is widely regarded as the first author who tried

¹⁶ "Femme fatale" as a source of sorrow for the man (Akung 28)

¹⁷ "Womanism" is the dominant strand of Nigerian feminism. As Ogini (1996, 18) defines: "Womanism is a movement that celebrates the woman's strength as a pillar, the strength that brings blackmen to recognize and compromise for harmonious co-existence of both sexes. Womanism is a special culture that reminds men with special indication that without woman's full involvement in the system with the man is incomplete in action as well as in achievements".

to develop authentic and individual identities for African women (Wilentz 43). The author devoted her novels *Efuru* (1966), *One is Enough* (1981) and *Women Are Different* (1986) to women's issues as a "pathfinder" (Akung 29) of the Nigerian feminist novel. Nwapa's female characters, although affected by British colonialism, not only seek for acceptance within their society, but also for independence, greater freedom and full participation in society – their struggle to extend their traditional roles as mothers and wives is echoed (Mears 3).

However, it is the work of Buchi Emecheta (*1944), a second-generation Nigerian Igbo female writer, who became an early inspiration for contemporary Nigerian women writers, and is widely accepted as establishing a milestone in African literature. In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Kehinde* (1994) or *The Family* (1990), Emecheta's female characters not only "challenge prescribed understandings of their roles as women, wives and mothers but they are also womanist representations who achieve their agency, subjectivity, and determination through redefining their responsibilities as women, wives and mothers" (Nadaswaran, 2012, 146).

Whereas the first and second generations turned their attention to the position of women in Nigerian patriarchal society and the effects of British colonialism, the third generation discussed social, political and economic challenges Nigerian women faced from the Nigerian state since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 (Nadaswaran, 2013). Third-generation Nigerian female writers include young, talented voices such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie with her *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) or *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Unoma Azuah with *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) or *Swallow* (2008) or Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005). These young authors reconstruct the former portrayal of women in their stereotypical and subjugated positions. Their modern female characters are educated, career-oriented and strong-willed, while remaining wives, mothers and daughters. Third-generation woman destroys the usual stereotypes that a woman's place is at home.

Nigerian feminist literature has helped to balance the long-time male-dominated Nigerian literary canon. The goal of Nigerian female authors is to liberate the Nigerian woman from patriarchal oppression and to create gender consciousness. Nigerian women writers have enabled their female characters to find their voice and present the world from their unique perspective.

3 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Life and Work

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born as the fifth of six children to Igbo parents, Grace Ifeoma and James Nwoye Adichie, on 15th September 1977 in Enugu, South-East Nigeria. While the family's ancestral village is Abba in Anambra State, Adichie grew up in the university town of Nsukka in Enugu State, where her father became Nigeria's first professor of statistics, and her mother the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria. The family occupied the former house of the internationally acclaimed Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who had been employed as a senior research fellow at the University in the early 1970s.

Adichie was an early reader. She started reading British and American children's books at the age of four and began to write when she was seven. As a very young writer, Adichie related stories about the kind of characters she knew from Western literature: "white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out" (TEDx online). However, she could not personally identify with them. Her writing has changed after she discovered books written by African writers like Chinua Achebe, who has been Adichie's hero and great inspiration. Achebe was a pioneer among African authors who told stories from an African perspective (Mark online). His legacy has become a source of Adichie's empowerment: "Reading Achebe gave me permission to write about my world. He transported me into a past that was both familiar and unfamiliar, a past I imagined my great grandfather lived. Looking back, I realize that what he did for me at the same time was validate my history, make it seem worthy in some way" (Walder 122). Owing to Achebe, Adichie changed her perception of literature and started telling stories featuring characters she could identify with.

After completing her primary and secondary education at the University's school in Nsukka, the writer continued to study medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria, located in Nsukka as well. After three semesters, nineteen-year-old Adichie decided to stop studying as she realised she lacked motivation for the study of medicine, and left Nigeria for the United States, where her eldest sister Ijeoma was living. The author successfully applied for a two-year scholarship to study communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Because her Igbo sister needed

help, loyal Adichie left the university to live with Ijeoma and her son in Connecticut (Calkin online).

Adichie's writing career began with the publication of collected poems *Decisions* in 1997 and her only play *For Love of Biafra* a year later, at the age of sixteen. In Adichie's own words the play is "awfully melodramatic" (Tunca online). Irrespective of her teenage years and lack of authentic experience with the war, the author brought the Biafran War into focus. One of the most important factors, which led Adichie to write about this subject, was her personal experience of growing up in the shadow of Biafra conflict. Adichie had always wanted to write about the war both to pay tribute to her grandfathers, who died in Biafra as refugees, as well as to honour the collective memory of the entirety of Nigeria. As many war issues have still remained unresolved in today's Nigeria, the writer is confident about the importance of history in forming the present. Adichie devoted her following works to the Biafra conflict as well. With her short story *That Harmattan Morning*, she won the BBC Short Story competition in 2002. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* – both the short story (2002) and the novel (2006) – the painful history of Biafra became the central focus and portrayed its disastrous impact on civilian lives. *Ghosts*, a short story which was published in the collection *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009), deals with the disillusionment and political, economic and social changes that have taken place since the dissolution of the secessionist state of Biafra.

Adichie went on to pursue a bachelor's degree in communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University, where she graduated summa cum laude. Two years later she completed her Master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University and in 2008 she received her second Master's degree in African studies from Yale University.

During her senior year at Eastern Connecticut State University, the author started working on her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Shortly after its release in 2003 the book received worldwide attention and wide critical acclaim. This coming-of-age novel was shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and won the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for the Best Debut Fiction and the Commonwealth Writer's Best First Book Prize. Thematically, *Purple Hibiscus* focuses on the liminal stage in the life of Kambili as her family disintegrates and her devastated childhood is left behind. Fifteen-year-old Kambili narrates a story about her own world, which is

“circumscribed by the high walls and frangipani trees of her wealthy family compound” (Tunca online). She lives her life under the control of her father, who, despite being well-respected and perceived as generous in the community, is a repressive tyrant whose fanatical pursuit of Christianity results in the mental, spiritual and physical abuse of all members of the household. *Purple Hibiscus* is a complex story of national and family oppression, social clashes, old traditional and new modern ways of living and thinking and most importantly, of women’s empowerment in Nigerian patriarchal society.¹⁸

At a very young age, Adichie received the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University during her 2005-2006 academic year, which is designated for writers and non-literary artists of extraordinary promise to pursue independent projects (Princeton University online). The writer was only 28 when she became a Hodder fellow, which is very exceptional. The result of this fellowship was the publication of her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which won the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the PEN 'Beyond Margins' Award in 2007. As stated above, the book is set during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70. The story is centred on three main characters whose lives intersect in the war-affected Nigeria. They are repeatedly pulled apart and thrown together as their loyalties are severely tested.¹⁹ The historical novel was adapted for the screen in 2013, directed by Biyi Bandele, starring Thandie Newton and Chiwetel Ejiofor (Bradshaw online). Without any considerable commercial or critical success, the film was considered to be overtly didactic and missing the subtle shadowing of the characters present in the book.

In 2008 Adichie was awarded the MacArthur Foundation fellowship, known as a “genius grant”. The promising author won an obligation-free annual grant of \$100,000 for a five-year period, which enabled her to focus solely on her writing (Irvine online).

With her short stories being published in anthologies and in British and American journals, Adichie published the collection of short stories *The Thing around Your Neck* in 2009. In its twelve stories, Adichie explores the ties that bind men and women, parents and children, Nigeria and the United States.²⁰ This collection is further proof of the

¹⁸ To read more, see the detailed plot summary of *Purple Hibiscus* in the chapter *Characteristics of Selected Works*.

¹⁹ Clare Garner: PS Section (Read on) in *Purple Hibiscus* (2013)

²⁰ Clare Garner: PS Section (Read on) in *Purple Hibiscus* (2013); to read more, see the detailed plot summary of *The Thing around Your Neck* in the chapter *Characteristics of Selected Works*.

author's extraordinary storytelling powers which Chinua Achebe, Adichie's idol, described as prodigious: "We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers" (Premium Times online).

Yet another fellowship (this time sponsored by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University in 2011-2012), enabled the young writer to finalize her third novel, *Americanah*. The book was published in 2013 and received a number of highly regarded prizes including the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction and the *The Chicago Tribune* 2013 Heartland Prize for Fiction. Furthermore, it was selected as one of *The New York Times's* Ten Best Books of the Year. The novel concentrates on a pair of young lovers, who both migrate but are torn apart by the injustice of the immigration policy and whose experiences abroad differ considerably. *Americanah* is, in the words of its author, "an old-fashioned love story" and focuses on issues such as love, race, identity and most importantly, hair (Kellaway online). In the writer's own account hair matters and is a political thing, because people make assumptions based on different styles of hair.²¹

Concerning her recent work, Adichie's live performances at TEDx Talk events were highly significant. TEDx is a non-profit organization devoted to spreading ideas in the form of powerful talks, covering topics from science to business to global issues.²² In 2009 Adichie gave an influential speech entitled "Danger of a Single Story", where she drew the audience's attention to the risk of critical and cultural misunderstanding issuing from the lack of knowledge, the lack of multiple stories: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. When we hear the same story over and over again, it becomes the only story we ever believe" (TEDx online). The author relates the danger with the single story of Africa. It is necessary to break of the clichés and stereotypes in order to find out that there is more than one narrative of Africa. Adichie points out that people should seek diverse perspectives in various stories (Yee online). The author highlights that Africans themselves should write their own stories, not let the West to do so. Adichie is also

²¹ Watch the full interview on *Channel 4 News*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ck2o34DS64>, retrieved 14 September 2015.

²² <https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization>, retrieved 16 September 2015.

sceptical about Westerners who come to Africa to solve their morality issues and celebrities who try to save it from poverty:

What I find problematic is the suggestion that when, say, Madonna adopts an African child, she is saving Africa. It's not that simple. You have to do more than go there and adopt a child or show us pictures of children with flies in their eyes. That simplifies Africa. If you followed the media you'd think that everybody in Africa was starving to death, and that's not the case; so it's important to engage with the other Africa.²³

Apart from essays published in newspaper, magazines and journals, Adichie published one of her speeches from TEDx in a book under the title “We Should All Be Feminists” (2014). In *We Should All Be Feminists* Adichie discusses the subject of gender equality and explains why the chasm between genders and their subsequent discrimination is harmful for both sexes. At the same time, she suggests a new, unique definition of twenty-first century feminism: “Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes” (TEDx online).²⁴ During her monologue, the author confidently states that she decided to call herself a happy African feminist.²⁵ According to Rupert Hawskley, a journalist from The Daily Telegraph, *We Should All Be Feminists* might be the most important book of that year (Hawskley online). The extract of Adichie’s talk was sampled in Beyoncé’s track ****Flawless*. After its release the public called into question whether Beyoncé was a real feminist. From the discussion on various parts of social media it was apparent that some users did not believe so because of the singer’s overt sexuality. During an interview, Adichie criticized all the fuss about celebrating woman’s sexuality. The author defended Beyoncé by pointing out that the singer chose to own her sexuality and there is nothing wrong with that:

If a woman is sexually overt is she still feminist? It’s a question that - obviously for me, the answer is yes. [...] Whoever says they’re feminist is bloody feminist. [...] And I think the reason I find myself reacting so strongly to questions of female sexuality is – there’s something very disturbing to me about the idea that a woman’s

²³ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/08/orangeprizeforfiction2007.orangeprizeforfiction>, retrieved 5 February 2016.

²⁴ Watch online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc, retrieved 15 September 2015.

²⁵ To read more about this topic, see the chapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family*.

sexuality somehow is not hers. [...] So as long as women have the choice – why shouldn't women own their sexuality? Why shouldn't a woman who does whatever with her sexuality identify as feminist?²⁶

The writer expressed her wish that she wants girls and boys to be raised differently. According to Adichie, female sexuality must be viewed as something the girls have the choice to own, be comfortable with, not something they give to their male counterparts (Danielle online).

Adichie is married to Dr. Ivara Esegie and divides her life between the United States and Nigeria, where she teaches writing classes. Her heart still belongs to Nigeria though: “I belong there and the reason I care about it is that I belong. It's very important for me to matter in Nigeria, to make some sort of difference. I want people back home to read my books, for women to feel empowered by them, and for people to be inspired to be writers”.²⁷ Although married, the author insists to be addressed as Miss, instead of Mrs. Adichie. In her opinion it is responsible that people be called what they want to be called (naji.com online).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents a fresh female voice from Nigeria, whose work represents an amalgam of tradition and modernity. As previously stated, Adichie refers to the work of her male predecessor Chinua Achebe and “continues his practice of writing as an Igbo and a Nigerian, while maintaining thematic lines of conversation with the United States”. It is important to note, however, that Adichie does not merely carry on with Achebe's story-telling tradition²⁸, she extends it and takes new and interesting directions (Andrade 92). Adichie connects various dichotomies such as traditional Igbo beliefs with Christianity, Igbo with English language²⁹ or traditional village life with modern city life. However, the author is not prejudiced in favour of one or the other but she sees the strength in binding both tradition and modernity.

²⁶ <http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2014/03/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-defends-beyonce-asks-shouldnt-women-sexuality>, retrieved 21 December 2015.

²⁷ Clare Garner: PS Section (Profile) in *Purple Hibiscus* (2013)

²⁸ Story-telling has a long tradition in Nigeria. A long time before the written word, oral story-telling was not only used to entertain and pass knowledge and experience from one generation to another but also to bring people together.

²⁹ Although Adichie writes in English, she skilfully inserts Igbo expressions and phrases into her fiction, which makes her stories more authentic.

Adichie tells stories based on her own personal experience and enables readers to see Nigeria from a totally different perspective than they would expect from a Nigerian novel. In her work she often portrays privileged female characters, who are educated, strong, independent and confident, which is a quite unusual representation of an African woman. Adichie's background is significant because it is reflected in her work to a great degree and enables the author to describe Nigeria from a dual perspective. On the one hand, as a Nigerian Igbo from a middle-class intellectual family with strong ties to the rural life of her ancestors, she is able to observe Nigeria from the inside. On the other hand, as a US immigrant, the author can describe her homeland from the outside. One of Adichie's essential themes is immigration. The author experienced the US way of living both as a black Nigerian and a migrant. Adichie's characters often stand between two continents, as the author herself does. Adichie started to realize her identity only after she moved to the USA - to be spoken down to by white people because of her skin colour or to be told what her country is really like. However, she loves the USA and she is grateful for the education she received there. She would never be as empowered as she is now if she stayed in Nigeria.

4 Characteristics of Selected Works

This chapter focuses on the summary and brief analysis of leitmotifs in Adichie's two novels, her literary debut *Purple Hibiscus* and her breakthrough *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and five selected short stories from the highly acclaimed collection *The Thing around Your Neck* where she draws on her experience of living both in Nigeria and the US.

4.1 *Purple Hibiscus*

Purple Hibiscus is a coming-of-age novel centred around fifteen-year-old Kambili Achike's development from a child to a mature woman. Kambili and her brother Jaja are very quiet and withdrawn children. As it is revealed later, this is due to them being regularly physically and emotionally abused by their religious father Eugene. He happens to be a public defender of freedom of speech and social justice in Nigeria and a corruption fighter, although at the same time he is a tyrannical father and husband. Apart from that, his obsession with discipline and his religious fanaticism forces his children and his wife Beatrice to sever contacts with the outside world. Kambili focuses only on achieving the highest grades at schools, fulfilling her father's exacting tasks and a time-consuming schedule. She becomes obsessed with satisfying her father and terrified when she happens to fail his expectations. Kambili becomes an outsider at her school and is considered a snob among the children of the same age.

Eugene is a very prominent person who owns a pro-democracy newspaper and generously donates to his parish, schools and also people in need. He is extremely popular with people, celebrated for his generosity and is regarded as a synonym for justice in Nigeria despite the fact that he uses his masculine power to control his family members and often uses violence to achieve his goals.

For Christmas the family usually goes to Abba, their ancestral town. Eugene allows his children to see their grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu only for fifteen minutes every time because he considers him to be a heathen, still following nonsense Igbo traditions. The children also visit their aunty Ifeoma's family in Nsukka, where they get to know an utterly different family environment, full of laughter and noise and freedom, respect and intellectual curiosity which aunty Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, supports to a great degree. Ifeoma teaches their children to question everything, not to simply accept what they are told.

Kambili and Jaja's lives start to change after their stay in Nsukka. Kambili also meets Father Amadi, a Catholic priest, who she falls in love with. Thanks to him, her cousin Amaka and aunty Ifeoma, who is a role model for her, Kambili learns about her African Igbo identity and becomes more confident and aware of herself.

As far as the socioeconomic status of both families is concerned, there is a wide gap between the rich and poor in *Purple Hibiscus*. Whereas the Achikes are a privileged upper-class family, Ifeoma struggles to make ends meet. Ifeoma, an educated yet poor university lecturer fails to overcome her financial insecurities and is forced to unwillingly emigrate from Nigeria to the United States after being dismissed from her job.

Meanwhile, Ade Cooker, Eugene's co-worker, is murdered. Eugene gets stressed and is under constant pressure. When he finds out that Kambili owns a painting of her heathen father, he brutally beats her. She ends up in hospital. Aunty Ifeoma decides to take the children to her house and they spend some time there. Eugene also attacks his wife who has a miscarriage. Beatrice always excuses Eugene for his brutal and violent actions but then the readers learn about her killing him by poisoning his tea. Her son, Jaja, takes the blame for the murder upon himself, and is then sent to prison. Only after Jaja's release can the family finally live freely and be satisfied.

Interestingly, Adichie used her own life to create the background for her characters in *Purple Hibiscus*. Like Kambili, Adichie was born in Enugu and spent her childhood in the university town Nsukka, like Ifeoma's family.

4.2 *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half of a Yellow Sun concentrates predominantly on the Biafra War³⁰ (1967- 1970) - before, during and after the war time. The story is narrated from three different perspectives: the Nigerian lower-class is represented by Ugwu, an uneducated but very intelligent village boy; Olanna, a privileged daughter of a very wealthy Lagos businessman, stands for the upper-class; and the third perspective is depicted through Richard, a British writer who comes to Nigeria to learn about Igbo-Ukwu art. He falls in love with Kainene, Olanna's twin sister.

³⁰ To learn more about the Biafran War, see the theoretical part of the thesis, page 4.

Two women stand in the centre of the novel – the twin sisters Olanna and Kainene, who seem to be very different from each other. Olanna is a very good-looking woman, kind, loving and self-sacrificing, but some people take advantage of her beauty and politeness. For example, Olanna’s parents offer her as a sexual bait in exchange for their business. Kainene, on the other hand, is a highly skilful businesswoman, whose power is not her looks but her tongue. She is very sarcastic, cold and down to earth: “The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait. They are not using me as sex bait” (*HYS* 35). Both sisters graduated from excellent British universities.

Despite the protests from the side of her parents, Olanna falls in love with Odenigbo, a revolutionary professor from Nsukka, where she moves and takes the position of sociology teacher at Nsukka University. Odenigbo hosts political evenings for his university friends, where current affairs are regularly discussed. Kaneine moves to Port Hartcourt to run her father’s business. She starts dating Richard and later moves in with him.

Odenigbo’s mother, a traditionalist village woman, attacks Olanna while visiting her son’s house in Nsukka. She is convinced that Olanna is a witch because she was not breastfed. Olanna is offended by this and moves back to her own apartment. Later, Olanna finds out that Odenigbo cheated on her with Amala, his mother’s maid. Odenigbo keeps apologizing for his cheating but puts the blame on his mother. When Amala gets pregnant, however, Olanna decides to adopt Amala’s baby girl. Meanwhile, Olanna takes revenge on Odenigbo and has sex with Richard. When Kainene finds out, their relationship completely falls apart. Odenigbo and Olanna decide to get married.

The characters are excited about the newly established secessionist state Biafra but their lives deteriorate drastically, despite their expectations. The characters are torn apart from one another and thrown back together again throughout the course of the novel. They experience times of fear, hunger, poverty, despair and alienation. Their beloved relatives start dying. Odenigbo’s mother is killed in Abba because she refuses to leave the town. Olanna and Kainene’s family in Kano, northern Nigeria, are murdered too. Olanna, Kainene and Richard experience terrifying situations, which change their perception of life – dead bodies everywhere, massacred children and uncompromising Hausa soldiers slaughtering Igbo citizens. Their personal relationships change as well. Odenigbo starts drinking and becomes alienated from Olanna. Both twin sisters engage

with the Biafran cause to a great degree – Olanna teaches in a refugee camp and Kainene starts running one. Both of them experience terrible situations of the cruelty of war and, yet, they find a way to each other again. Ugwu is forcefully conscripted but after some time he comes back – luckily still alive. The excitement about the war slowly disappears when the characters learn about the losses of life during the war. Unfortunately, before the end of the war, Kainene goes to the Nigerian side to get supplies to her refugee camp but she never comes back.

Half of a Yellow Sun criticizes the role of Western journalism in the Biafran cause – one dead white man equals thousands of dead Igbo people. That is why Richard is asked to report on Biafra because his European perspective would be taken seriously by the Western world. But surprisingly, not Richard but Ugwu writes a book called *The World Was Silent when We Died*, about the Biafran War. Even if Richard considers himself the real Biafran, Igbo people should write their own stories and not let the West do it for them.

4.3 *The Thing around Your Neck*

The Thing around Your Neck is a collection of twelve short stories focusing on Nigerian women living in Nigeria and the United States. These women experience loneliness because of living far from their homes and disappointment with their unhappy marriages. They also have to cope with difficulties resulting from the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society. Five short stories were chosen for this analysis because they all focus on women and their struggle to achieve their goals of liberation from men. *Tomorrow is Too Far* depicts young siblings in Nigeria when visiting their grandmother. The short story discusses the difficult position of Nigerian girls – as boys are often preferred and girls are supposed to stay at home and deliver children. *Tomorrow is Too Far* is thus a very sincere confession of a girl who happens to be a second-class citizen in Nigerian patriarchal society. *The Headstrong Historian* is a story about an emancipated and truly inspiring woman living in an Igbo tribe in pre-colonial Nigeria right before the British colonizers came. *The Thing around Your Neck*, *The Arrangers of Marriage* and *Imitation* feature women residing in the United States, who struggle with living in a foreign country, deal with decaying marriages and try to find their hidden voices to oppose their male counterparts.

4.3.1 *Tomorrow Is Too Far*

Tomorrow Is Too Far tells a story about two siblings, a boy and a girl, who spend one summer at their grandmother's house in Nigeria. During this summer the girl's brother died. In the course of the story, the readers learn about the girl's dark secret. The desperate girl kills her brother, on purpose. The girl's grandmother has always preferred her grandson over the girl, no matter what. She has always been exaggeratedly protective towards him, praised him and appreciated him for his masculinity.³¹ His sister has never been praised by her grandmother for her skills, even if they were better than her brother's. She is only expected to serve her husband, not to be skilful. *Tomorrow Is Too Far* addresses the difficult position of women in Nigerian patriarchal society, society's expectations of women and men and deeply rooted gender roles.

4.3.2 *The Headstrong Historian*

The Headstrong Historian is thematically connected to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, however, the protagonist of *The Headstrong Historian* is a female character Nwamgba, a sharp-tongued and strong-willed girl. *Things Fall Apart* features a stubborn patriarch Okonkwo, who also appears briefly in Adichie's short story. The story is set in pre-colonial Nigeria, in an Igbo tribal society right before the advent of British colonialism.

Nwamgba is a truly strong and emancipated woman, who determinedly chooses her husband by herself. The story touches on the very sensitive issue of infertility.³² Nwamgba suffers from bareness and her husband's cousins urge him to find another wife but Obierika refuses. Nwamgba is worried about her childlessness more than her husband and decides to find a wife for him by herself. Finally, Nwamgba gets pregnant and delivers Obierika a healthy son. Unfortunately, her husband dies and Nwamgba is suspicious of her husband's cousins. She becomes a widow, which is a very difficult position for women in Igbo patriarchal society. Besides other downsides, the widow

³¹ To read more about this topic, see the subchapter *Gender Factor in Nigerian Family* in the theoretical part of the thesis, page 11-14.

³² To read more about this topic, see the subchapter *Gender Factor in Nigerian Family* in the theoretical part of the thesis, page 11-14.

cannot decide who will inherit her dead husband's property.³³ The inheritance automatically goes to Obierika's cousins, not to Nwamgba's son.

However, Nwamgba does not give up and starts fighting for the rights of her son. Meanwhile, the British start to get control of local offices. From a friend of hers she finds out about white people who spread their powerful learnings and she decides to send her son Azuka to missionary school to learn the white man's language. Unfortunately for Nwamgba, her son Azuka starts changing his behaviour and turns his back on his mother. Nwamgba's son adopts Christian learning completely and has contempt for everything traditional, which he calls heathen.

Azuka gets married to a Christian girl and she delivers a baby girl, who Nwamgba considers a reincarnated Obierika. She adores her granddaughter called Grace and starts to call her Afamefuna, a traditional Igbo name, instead. Before she dies, Azuka forbids his family members to go to his mother's heathen funeral because they are Christians. He tries to persuade his mother to convert to Christianity but is unsuccessful. Grace is not allowed to visit her grandmother either but she breaks her father's rule and comes to say good bye to her grandma. After Nwamgba's death, Grace changes her name to Afamefuna permanently. She starts studying at university, becomes culturally conscious and embraces her African identity.

4.3.3 The Thing around Your Neck

The Thing around Your Neck is a short story from the United States, narrated from the perspective of a young woman named Akunna, who decides to emigrate from Nigeria to the USA. She describes hard beginnings in a foreign country, far from home and her family. She tells the shocking truth about her family friend, who provides accommodation for her when she arrives. She feels at home in this house. Nonetheless, after the family friend molests her and offers her various things in exchange for her body, she decides to leave his house. Young girls, who come on their own to America, are frequently exploited by older men. These girls do not know their new environment yet and are completely dependent on them, on their experienced advice. After leaving the house, Akunna starts working as a waitress in a restaurant and starts earning money, which she regularly sends

³³ To get more information about inheritance, see the chapter *Traditional Igbo Marriage and Family* in the theoretical part of the thesis, page 5-7.

to her parents in Nigeria. She meets a young American who she starts dating. Despite various stereotypes, prejudices and cultural clashes she experiences as a black Nigerian woman in America, she finally feels that life is going to be better for her,

4.3.4 *The Arrangers of Marriage*

As was said before, *The Arrangers of Marriage* is a short story set in the United States. The main character is Chinaza, an Igbo girl of lower-class background, who is going to get married to a Nigerian doctor living in the USA. Chinaza's uncle and aunt arranged the marriage for her and they show their niece ostentatiously that she should be grateful for it. For a poor Igbo girl it is a privilege to marry a doctor in America – because he is considered wealthy and powerful regardless of reality. Chinaza describes the everyday life of immigrants residing in America and the hardships they must undertake at the beginning of their journey. It soon becomes clear that reality is completely different than her uncle and aunt imagined.

The Arrangers of Marriage shows the subjugated position of Nigerian women through Chinaza, who is forced to agree with her future husband, even if she does not feel any affection for him. She simply gives consent to the contract to live with a strange man for the rest of her life. Chinaza has no other choice because she respects her relatives and she is not financially independent. Her husband, although Nigerian, blindly adopts American culture and disdains and dismisses everything of Nigerian descent and loses his Nigerian identity. However, Chinaza does not want to give up her cultural heritage. She makes a new friend and starts thinking about leaving him and earning her own money.

4.3.5 *Imitation*

The short story *Imitation* concerns Nkem who lives in an American suburb with her children, while her husband, a businessman and an art collector, resides in Nigeria and visits his family only twice a year. The story begins when Nkem learns about her husband's infidelity and moving his young lover to their house in Lagos. Nkem feels that she is becoming alienated from her husband. At the end of the story, Nkem decides to take a stand, to speak up and she tells her husband that they are moving back to Nigeria, together as a whole family. Her husband stares at her in disbelief and silently agrees with her decision. Adichie compares the husband's extramarital relationship to the imitation

of Benin masks, which her husband passionately collects, even though he is contemptuous of mere imitations of originals. *Imitation* is primarily about women's empowerment, about a silent woman who finally finds her voice and stands up for her cause. She fights for her position of a lawfully wedded wife and adamantly adopts a negative stance on her husband's infidelity.

II PRACTICAL PART

The practical part provides the analysis of the aforementioned novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck* in view of the portrayal of women and their position in Nigerian family.

5 The Portrayal of Women in *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck*

5.1 Family Systems: Balancing Tradition and Modernity

The family is portrayed as a microcosm of Nigeria in Adichie's prose. The writer depicts "a politics of the family while quietly but clearly telling stories of the nation" (Andrade 91). The family in *Purple Hibiscus* mirrors the instability of the Nigerian political situation – economic difficulties, oppression of its citizens, corrupted political system and social injustice. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, just as in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie draws a parallel between the political situation of postcolonial Nigeria with the lives of the main characters. However, in this book, readers experience a much more specific representation of Nigerian political climate than in *Purple Hibiscus* – the birth of the new nation Biafra, from its idealistic beginning to its bitter and disappointing end.

The two Igbo family units presented in *Purple Hibiscus* differ in various aspects. On the one hand, there are the Achikes who take central stage in the novel. Unlike the "matrifocal family"³⁴ of widowed "Aunty" Ifeoma, the Achike family is strongly patriarchal, headed by authoritative and tyrannical "Papa" Eugene. On the other hand, even though the eldest son Obiora assumed the role of the man of the house after his father's death, Ifeoma's household is still largely characterized by the presence of a liberal leading mother and the absence of a father figure. *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* are set mainly in the Igbo region of post-colonial Nigeria, although the author allows the readers to explore other areas outside the Igboland as well, such as Kano in northern part of the country, where Hausa and Fulani people are the predominant ethnic groups

³⁴ "Matrifocal family" (also known as "matricentric") – a family unit in which the mother functions as the head of the family. There are various reasons for the absence of the father in the household – the husband either abandons his family, refuses to take responsibility for his children or he dies.

and one of the largest African cities, Lagos, which is situated in the Yoruba southwestern part of Nigeria. Adichie provided readers with a well-balanced portrayal of urban³⁵ modern families and the ancestral and kinship-based countryside (Bell-Gam online). The urban environment of the hilly Enugu city, the capital of Enugu State, contrasts with the rural idyll of Papa-Nnukwu's ancestral village of Abba in *Purple Hibiscus*. The setting is crucial to understanding the lifestyle of the characters. Firstly, Papa Eugene's luxurious compound in Enugu, surrounded by high walls, symbolizes not merely true unsociability but also the unapproachableness of its residents. Because of the fact that citizens of urban areas like Enugu head towards a greater degree of anonymity, impersonality and individuality, urban nuclear families have a tendency to deviate from the traditionalist perception of kinship and frequently separated from most members of their extended families. To illustrate the assertion, "Papa" Eugene is constantly trying to cut ties with his traditionalist father. Kambili and Jaja are rarely allowed to visit their grandfather and if so, only for a very limited amount of time. However, owing to the fact that rich families are obliged to provide financial assistance to their parents, Eugene's duty involves providing money to support his extended family, regardless of his effort to exclude them emotionally. Apart from that, Eugene is a zealous Catholic and represents a true product of colonial education, blindly despising and disdaining everything traditional while admiring all westernized commodities. His corrupted faith forced him to turn away from his African identity.

Secondly, Papa-Nnukwu represents the majority of Nigerians living in rural regions, who keep their traditions alive and try to preserve indigenous Igbo culture, beliefs and customs. The fact that Papa-Nnukwu discusses family issues with the members of his "umunna"³⁶ shows that tradition plays an important role in his life and still has a certain impact on his decisions. In "umunna" meetings he often expresses his concern regarding the situation of being isolated from his grandchildren. However, the "umunna" members often side with Eugene due to the generous financial support he provides. As a result, "Papa" Eugene is a highly regarded member of the village community.

³⁵ To read more about the structure of a modern family, see the theoretical part, pages 10-11.

³⁶ "Umunna" – an Igbo word meaning "my siblings" (brothers/sisters).

Thirdly, Eugene's sister Ifeoma is a university intellectual and a devout but open-minded Catholic, who respects traditional beliefs of her ancestors. Ifeoma does not abandon her traditionalist father but maintains intimate connections with him. Unlike her brother, Ifeoma discovers a perfect balance between tradition and modernity, which is a source of her "female" power. Ifeoma symbolizes "a modern traditionalist woman" - she combines the strength from the traditional spirituality of her ancestors with education, whose role as a modern tool for women's independence Adichie frequently emphasises throughout her work.

Similarly, *Half of a Yellow Sun* portrays an upper-class, super-rich urban family residing in Nigeria's largest city Lagos, which is contrasted with the urbanised family of Auntie Ifeka's in Kano. In the course of the novel the readers get to know various "village" families as well, such as Ugwu's rural or Odenigbo's ancestral family in Abba, headed by his quick-tempered mother. Adichie shows cultural clashes based on the differences between the traditional and modern way of living and thinking. The author especially contrasts "traditional" village women with "modern" privileged women and highlights that real female power is created by fusing traditional and modern elements.

In *The Thing around Your Neck*, Adichie focuses not only on the life of women in Nigeria but also in the United States and pays attention especially to the difficulties connected with living between two different worlds. The women presented in *The Thing around Your Neck* are sometimes trapped between Nigerian traditional customs and the new, modern lifestyle they are forced to adopt in their new home in America. Women and their struggle to attain independence in a patriarchal society is the central focus of the following chapters.

5.2 Female Voices in Nigerian Family

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as a proud Nigerian-born literary descendant of Chinua Achebe, already pays tribute to his *Things Fall Apart* in the opening sentence of *Purple Hibiscus*: "Things started to fall apart when my brother Jaja did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (*PH* 3).³⁷ However, the fact that Adichie used only one clause of the sentence

³⁷ Source: Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013. [Subsequent page references preceded *PH* are given in parentheses in the text]

to refer to Achebe's internationally acclaimed novel indicates that her writing goes far beyond Achebe's legacy and crosses the boarder of his storytelling tradition. Despite numerous thematic and narrative analogies between *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus* – both novels feature dominant and stubborn patriarchs, depict family tensions across three generations and deal with the struggle between tradition and modernity – Adichie contests Achebe's portrayal of female characters. In contrast to *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo's wives have not yet found the courage to tell their own stories, the female characters of *Purple Hibiscus* have finally discovered their hidden voices by confronting patriarchal dominance (Kurtz 34). Adichie expresses dissatisfaction with the silencing of the female voices in Achebe's work and enables the main character Kambili (in case of *Purple Hibiscus*), Olanna (*Half of a Yellow Sun*) and the main female protagonists from *The Thing around Your Neck* to speak up and narrate the story from their own, female perspectives. Moreover, *Half of a Yellow Sun* enables the readers to compare the female perspective of the story (through Olanna) to the male's views (through the Englishman Richard and the houseboy Ugwu).

The following chapters focus on women who perform various significant roles in Nigerian families – they are mothers, daughters and/or wives. However, although they have considerable responsibility for the well-being of the whole family, their roles and duties are quite often underestimated and devalued. The women must overcome a great deal of difficulties caused by men or the society they are living in. Even though they use various strategies to attain their desired goals, they all want the same – to be liberated from male domination, oppression and injustice based on their gender. From the traditional point of view, women are treated as wives and mothers who are supposed to stay at home and look after their children and household. Daughters are raised to become good wives for their future husbands. With respect to modern influences, women gain freedom of choice, the possibility of education and building a career, so that they have chance to become independent of their male counterparts.

5.2.1 Patriarchy as a Tool of Female Oppression

This chapter is devoted to female characters who suffer from male dominance and who experience various kinds of oppression – physical violence, rape or emotional abuse.

Female characters in *Purple Hibiscus* are forced to confront patriarchal dominance perpetuated by a religious zealot - the tyrannical father and dominant husband Eugene. Eugene uses strong masculine authoritarian power to control and manipulate his immediate family members.

“Papa” strictly fulfils his duty to protect his children from bad influences. As a result of her isolation, Kambili becomes a class outcast. Although Kambili’s unsociability is regarded as snobbish among her classmates, the only thing she can think of is to satisfy her father. Analysing the response to Eugene’s violent and brutal treatment, Kambili is obsessed with pleasing her father under any circumstances. Kambili’s god-like admiration of Eugene and her desperate desire to be recognized by him is primarily seen when she is competing with her brother Jaja to taste Eugene’s “love sip”: “A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved. But it didn’t matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa’s love into me” (*PH* 8). Kambili is constantly fighting with her brother to get appreciation from their father. However, she feels that Eugene favours Jaja over her. Unlike Kambili, Jaja always excels at school, even though Kambili tries so hard. Apart from that, Jaja is a boy and male children are preferred in Nigerian patriarchal families.³⁸

Unfortunately, Kambili’s constant effort to ingratiate with her father is connected with her consequent sense of guilt and feelings of failure in spite of being praised by others: “My form mistress, Sister Clara, had written, ”Kambili is intelligent beyond her years, quiet and responsible”. The principal, Mother Lucy, wrote, ”A brilliant, obedient student and a daughter to be proud of”. But I knew Papa would not be proud. [...] But I had come second. I was stained by failure” (*PH* 38).

Kambili sees her father as an infallible person who is closer to God than anyone else. She has internalized his patriarchal authority to such a degree that she has accepted his own interpretation and perception of life. She is emotionally deprived and longs hopelessly for physical contact with her beloved father. “I wanted to make Papa proud, to do as well as he had done. I needed him to touch the back of my neck and tell me that I was fulfilling God’s purpose. I needed him to hug me close and say that to whom much

³⁸ To read more about the topic, see the subchapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family* in the theoretical part, page 11-14.

is given, much is also expected. I needed him to smile at me, in that way that lit up his face that warmed something inside me” (PH 38).

Despite the fact that Kambili believes that she should feel a limitless admiration and respect for her father, she is simultaneously terrified of him. Thus there is “a complex correlation between Kambili’s need to please her father and the fear she has of displeasing him” (Nadaswaran, *Out of the Silence*, 114). Kambili’s anxiety about disappointing Eugene manifests itself in stomach disorders, when “[she] tried to pace [her] breathing as [she] waited, knowing all the while that [she] could not. [Her] stomach was making sounds, hollow rumbling sounds that seemed too loud, that would not stop even when [she] sucked [her] belly” (PH 39).

Paradoxically, Kambili feels safe with her Papa. Despite the fact that Eugene causes harm to his daughter, he also gives her a sense of stability. Kambili knows exactly what to expect from him and without Eugene, she is completely lost. He makes her feel secure. Kambili was brought up very strictly and she has never been given the chance to express herself at home. When Kambili and Jaja are sent to their Aunty Ifeoma’s house in Nsukka, Kambili is paralysed and is not able to relax. Kambili must think about her father all the time. She is totally dependent on his presence.

The husband-wife relationship is another kind of patriarchal dominance in *Purple Hibiscus*. As a result of being a victim of gender-based violence perpetrated by her husband, Beatrice remains passive for almost the entire novel. In spite of domestic violence, rape and emotional abuse Kambili’s mother often experiences, Beatrice has certain respect for her husband. In respect to Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, where the amount of violence against women and children is presented as something typical and justifiable, Eugene would be considered an ideal husband. Beatrice praises Eugene for not giving up on their marriage after the number of miscarriages she underwent. Beatrice’s inability to deliver a male child led the villagers and members of their umunna interfere in Beatrice and Eugene’s private matters. They “even sent people to [Kambili’s] father to urge him to have children with someone else” (PH 20). Due to the fact that the absence of a male child signifies a social failure in Nigerian society, both Beatrice and Eugene were subjected to pressure to deal with this situation. To illustrate, Beatrice explains the solution procedure which was initiated by the community to Kambili: “So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too.

They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us" (*PH* 20).

Beatrice constantly defends Eugene and gives excuses for his violent behaviour. It is obvious that on the grounds of the economic benefits of marriage with Eugene and years under the influence of traditionalism she feels obliged to him:

'He is carrying more than any man should carry.' [...] "Do you know that Eugene pays the school fees of up to a hundred of our people? Do you know how many people are alive because of your brother?" [...] "Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go?" "Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them, even, and not to bother paying a bride price?" (*PH* 250)

If Eugene had not married Beatrice, she would have been forced to stay alone, without a husband because of her miscarriages. However, Beatrice also tries to excuse her passive actions towards her husband. She is not able to protect her children from their tyrannical father and that is why she feels guilty and escapes emotionally from the family, to her own imaginary world.

Half of a Yellow Sun also portrays a patriarchal family, whose head is not a religious zealot like Eugene but a "Big Man"³⁹, Chief Ozobia, who controls his family through his power in society. Eugene and Chief Ozobia are very influential and powerful in the public sphere of Nigerian society and both of them transfer and apply the public power to their families. However, unlike Eugene, who admires his children and is convinced that he does the best for them, Olanna and Kainene's father misuses his daughters for his financial benefits. Especially Olanna becomes a victim of his immoral businesses and unethical practices thanks to her "illogical beauty"⁴⁰. Not only Chief Ozobia, but also his wife, Olanna's mother, participates in this awful practice with their stunning daughter. To illustrate, they criticize Olanna's partner Odenigbo and try to pair Olanna off with a wealthy and respectable Chief Okonji. Odenigbo, a poor university lecturer who fights against Nigerian corrupted society and injustice, is not a suitable partner for their beautiful

³⁹ "Big Man" is an expression meaning very powerful and influential businessmen in Nigeria.

⁴⁰ "Illogical beauty" is a phrase which Miss Adebayo used when encountering Olanna for the first time at Odenigbo's house.

daughter. The fact that Olanna speaks up, defends Odenigbo and decides to live with him despite the disapproval of her parents, shows that she is an emancipated and educated woman.

Kainene, on the other hand, does not become a victim of her parent's evil practices. Thus Kainene is "a masculine power" of the family. Her father even says that Kainene substitutes for not one but two sons. This is why she can freely choose her partner without her parents' intervention. Her relative lack of beauty and "tough" personality enable her to be spared from her parents' intrigues.

Concerning the marriage of Olanna's parents, it seems to be a mere arrangement based on the fact that Mrs. Ozobia is financially dependent on her husband and there is neither visible nor hidden affection between them. As Olanna observes: "She had never heard her own parents making love, never even seen any indication that they did. The artificiality of her parents' relationship always seemed harder, more shaming, when she was here in Kano (*HYS* 43)". Similarly to Obiora in *Imitation*, Chief Ozobia takes advantages of his patriarchal power and wealth to control and silence his wife, while keeping a mistress. Nonetheless, in contrast to Mrs. Ozobia, who does not stand up for her rights as a wife, Nkem (to her husband's surprise) speaks up and decides to end his affair. It is apparent that Mrs. Ozobia does not respect her marriage because instead of fighting for her relationship, she rather urges Olanna to fix it.

Having a mistress seems to originate in the traditional Igbo polygyny.⁴¹ The fact that some female characters like Olanna's mother and partly Nkem in *Imitation* quietly accept the infidelity is connected to the continuation of the tradition when men frequently had more than one wife. However, younger characters like Olanna furiously refuse their partner's lovers, which could be viewed as the influence of modernity.

5.2.2 Silence as an Invisible Weapon

Silence does not only function as a weapon to control women but it could be also used as a tool of self-defence.

The house of the Achike family is surrounded by silence:

⁴¹ See the chapter *Traditional Igbo Marriage and Family* in the theoretical part of the thesis, page 5-7.

‘Our steps on the stairs were as measured and as silent as our Sundays; the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time, when Papa gave us a scripture passage or a book by one of the early church fathers to read and meditate on; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterwards. Even our family time on Sundays was quiet, without chess games or newspaper discussions, more in tune with the Day of Rest’. (PH 31)

Eugene’s acts of violence, strict discipline and aggression suppress the voices of his loved ones. At the same time, all family members use silence to protect themselves from Eugene’s physical and psychological abuse. Firstly, Beatrice uses silence as an instrument to protect herself from her abusive and tyrannical husband. “Mama seldom speaks and if so, she [speaks] the way a bird eats, in small amounts” (PH 20). Throughout the novel, Beatrice silently does everything her husband requires from her. At the end, she cunningly kills him.

Silence is also used as a way of communication between Kambili and Jaja in *Purple Hibiscus*. Unlike their cousins, who express themselves very loudly, Kambili and Jaja avoid words and use eye contact to express their opinions. They never discuss their mother being beaten, her having a miscarriage or any other private family matters. They only communicate through thought transmission because they are forbidden to speak up and express themselves. Thus silence functions as a means of defence from their father and the way of keeping their sense of freedom. Kambili admires her cousin Amaka, how courageous and easy-going she is: “I wondered how Amaka did it, how she opened her mouth and had words flow easily out” (PH 99). Amaka is irritated by Kambili’s lack of confidence, when they first meet: “Why do you lower your voice? You lower your voice when you speak. You talk in whispers” (PH 117). However, it is finally Amaka, who inspires Kambili not only to speak louder than before, but especially to express her opinions and stand up for herself later in the novel.

Eugene is proud of his children being so quiet and disciplined. However, Eugene does not realize that if he does not give his children space to express themselves or chance to be heard, he is behaving exactly the same way as the corrupted Nigerian government, which he fights against. Similarly to Eugene, the Nigerian government tries to silence its

opponents. While hypocritically preaching one thing, Eugene does another. Although he is a dogmatic tyrant in his private life, Eugene paradoxically represents a self-acclaimed advocate of freedom and justice in public. Eugene fights for freedom of speech, fights against the suppression of Nigerian voices and yet, at his home, he tries to silence everyone. As his pro-democracy co-worker, Ade Coker, aptly remarks:

They are always so quiet, he said, turning to Papa. ‘So quiet.’ ‘They are not like those loud children people are raising these days, with no home training and no fear of God,’ Papa said, and I was certain that it was pride that stretched Papa’s lips and lightened his eyes. ‘Imagine what the Standard would be if we were all quiet.’ It was a joke. Ade Coker was laughing; so was his wife, Yewanda. But Papa did not laugh. (PH 57)

Finally, Ade Coker dies. He is murdered when opening a package bomb. He was successfully silenced.

Another person, who is supposed to be silent in the public sphere, is aunty Ifeoma. She is expected to keep silent but she complains that the teachers do not get paid for their jobs and criticizes the management of the university. Ifeoma is dismissed from the university and is forced to leave for the USA, despite her resentment. As Ifeoma’s children observe: “The university becomes a microcosm of the country. They are telling Mom to shut up. Shut up if you do not want to lose your job because you can be fired fiam, just like that“. [...] “She should have been senior lecturer years ago” (PH 223).

Concerning *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chief Ozobia’s family is reminiscent of the inaccessibility of Achike’s family. Nonetheless, their relatives in Kano are, unlike Chief Ozobia’s family, very open. The fact that they leave their doors open and the room fills immediately with much noise, chatter and laughter signifies accessibility, friendliness and hospitability for everyone, not only for wealthy businessmen. Lagos is, on the contrary, a very inaccessible place – similar to Achike’s high compound walls. Like the house of aunty Ifeoma’s, who teaches her children common sense, creativity, confidence and freedom of speech, aunty Ifeka’s house in Kano gives a similar impression. When Olanna has personal problems, such as her arguments with Odenigbo, she does not ask her parents for help but she goes directly to Kano because she feels at ease there.

Like Kambili and Jaja from *Purple Hibiscus*, Olanna and Kainene could communicate without using words when they were little: “Olanna wished she still had those flashes, moments when she could tell what Kaneine was thinking. In primary school, they sometimes looked at each other and laughed, without speaking, because they were thinking the same joke” (*HYS* 31). Unfortunately, things changed and they have hardly ever communicated since that time. Silence became a weapon of protection against each other. However, during the war they find the way back to each other and their secret silent language starts working again.

Also Olanna and Odenigbo’s relationship is plunged in silence in the second part of the novel. Odenigbo is depressed because of his mother’s death and he drinks a lot and loses control over himself: “His drinking in Nsukka [...] had sharpened his mind, distilled his ideas and his confidence so that he sat in the living room and talked and talked and everybody listened. This drinking silenced him (*HYS* 380)”. Similarly, Olanna cannot bear the finality of Ugwu’s supposed death. She turns her back on Odenigbo and stops speaking to him and sleeping beside him. Both of them are on the edge of a precipice. Silence is their tool of escape from their fears.

Regarding Richard and Kainene, their partnership is based on a lot of moments of silence. Kainene’s leaves a note for Richard, which is very untypical of her, saying: “Is love this misguided need to have you beside me most of the time? Is love this safety I feel in our silences? Is it this belonging, this completeness? (*HYS* 150).” Thus silence signifies feelings of absolute certainty for Kainene. It reminds Kainene of her and Olanna’s silent language when they were little. With their secret language, they both felt secure. Thus silence works for Kainene as a self-defence mechanism to avoid disappointment.

All the female characters mentioned in this chapter use silence as a tool to protect their fears and concerns. It helps them to feel secure either from a tyrannical male figure or to find security in their relationships. As far as the silence imposed by a tyrannical father or government is concerned, silence is used as a weapon to control and manipulate members of the family as well as citizens of Nigeria.

5.2.3 The “Absent Mother”⁴²

Beatrice from *Purple Hibiscus* represents a mother who is emotionally detached throughout the novel. To cope with the unbearable situation of domestic violence and torture, she creates her own imaginary world. The burden of guilt she bears – the guilt of not standing up for her children – leads her to make an elaborate plan to destroy Eugene. She poisons her husband. Nobody from her family knows about it and nobody would ever accuse her of such a terrible crime. The reason why she commits murder seems obvious. Nonetheless, after Eugene’s death she fails as a mother again. Beatrice lets her son to pay for her sins. It is questionable, however, whether she would stop Jaja from going to prison if she were not so faint-hearted. Besides, Jaja is a boy, a male heir. He is young enough to be released early from prison. Beatrice would be killed for such a crime. As it is evident that Beatrice’s husband was poisoned, it is better and safer to blame Jaja. However, Beatrice is not mentally prepared to bear such guilt and she starts telling everyone that she has killed her husband. After Jaja is released from prison, she finally feels free. Jaja’s sacrifice helps not only his mother to liberate from the patriarchal dominance of her husband, but also Jaja’s sister, Kambili, who breaks free from emotional dependence on her father.

Concerning the relationship between Beatrice and Kambili, Kambili always feels that her mother is not emotionally present. After the incident with her father, when Kambili ends up in hospital, beaten badly, she cannot tolerate her mother’s attitude anymore. After Kambili realizes that life does not have to be full of strict discipline and violence, Kambili aims towards independence from her parents. Kambili’s contradictory feelings for her mother symbolize the critical point of her journey directing to her self-realization. But her mother still tries to justify her husband’s actions and underestimates the seriousness of the problem:

‘My precious daughter. Nothing will happen to you. It does not mean anything. They give extreme unction to anyone who is seriously ill, Mama whispered.’ “Mama, call Auntie Ifeoma,” I said. Mama looked away. “Nne, you have to rest.” “Call Auntie Ifeoma. Please.”” Mama reached out to hold my hand. Her face was puffy from

⁴² Shalini Nadaswaran: *Out of the Silence: Igbo Women Writers and Contemporary Nigeria* (2013)

crying, and her lips were cracked, with bits of discoloured skin peeling off. I wished I could get up and hug her, and yet I wanted to push her away, to shove her so hard that she would topple over the chair. (*PH* 194)

Since Beatrice does not function as a role model for Kambili (owing to her emotional instability), Auntie Ifeoma completes the empty space. Ifeoma symbolizes a model mother, who is independent, courageous and emancipated. Ifeoma does not hesitate to warmly welcome Kambili and Jaja at her house and immediately accepts them as equal members of her family. In Ifeoma's house Kambili experiences a lot of laughter and unusual warmth and spontaneity compared to the tenseness, seriousness and silence she knows from her home.

Olanna and Kainene's mother in *The Half of the Yellow Sun* is similarly to Beatrice from *Purple Hibiscus*, emotionally detached from her family but for different reasons. Mrs. Ozobia is a very pretentious lady whose own interests are more important than her children's. Mrs. and Mr. Ozobia's grandiose and luxurious lifestyle enables both twin sisters to possess anything they wish, nonetheless they suffer from the absence of both parents. Like auntie Ifeoma, who substitutes for Beatrice, auntie Ifeka replaces Mrs. Ozobia: "Olanna examined the plain face and wished, for a brief guilty moment, that Auntie Ifeka were her mother. Auntie was as good as her mother, anyway, since it was Auntie Ifeka's breasts that she and Kainene had sucked when their mother's dried up soon after they were born. (*HYS* 39)"⁴³ The fact that auntie Ifeka breastfed Olanna, symbolizes a very tight bond between them, comparable to the one between mother and her daughter.

Mrs. Ozobia has never developed an attachment to her children, she has not even tried. At the beginning of the war, she visits Olanna and asks her to come to Britain. When Olanna refuses, she remarks: "How can I leave my children and run to safety? But Olanna knew she could and she would. Her mother wiped her eyes with her palm, although there were no tears (*PH* 188). Olanna's parents run away from Biafra and leave their daughters in Nigeria in spite of the war.

⁴³Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014. Print. [Subsequent page references preceded *HYS* are given in parentheses in the text]

5.2.4 Financial Dependency

A few women who appear in *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck* are financially dependent on men. They keep their relationships merely for the sake of financial security. Lower-class and uneducated women do not have many options to stand on their own feet and free themselves from their dependence on men. They are forced by society to be dependent on their husbands. Nonetheless, Adichie also portrays women who are self-supporting and contrasts them with those who are not able to acquire the things they need for living without men's help. Surprisingly, given the standing of Nigerian women in society, the number of financially independent women is shockingly high. Nevertheless, this chapter concentrates exclusively on women who are financially supported by men. This serious problem is the cause and effect of traditionalism as it was believed that the women should stay at home, not pursue a career and be independent.

Beatrice is dependent on Eugene and tolerates his physical and emotional abuse because of his financial background, which is a common feature of traditionalism. She is convinced that she would be lost without him and cursed by society. As a woman who has experienced several miscarriages, she does not have a chance to find a proper husband. Furthermore, the woman who is not able to deliver children is often ostracized and marginalized in Nigerian society.⁴⁴ Apart from that, Beatrice is not strong and confident enough to leave him. She regards the man as the head of the family and fully identifies with the patriarchal model of society, where the woman stays at home and looks after her children only.

Olanna's mother is the next woman who preserves her marriage despite the fact that she knows about her husband's mistress. However, it seems that Mrs. Ozobia cares more about her reputation than the fact her husband is in love with another woman. Mrs. Ozobia is offended that her husband's lover is a Yoruba girl⁴⁵ who she has contempt for: "The

⁴⁴To read more about this topic, see the subchapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family* in the theoretical part of the thesis, page 8-10.

⁴⁵ The fact that Mr. Ozobia's lover is a girl of Yoruba descent plays an important role at the time of the story. Not only her lower-class background but also her ethnicity contributes to Mrs. Ozobia's contempt for the girl. Igbo people were considered very successful and skilful business- and tradesmen, they were educated and wealthy in contrast to Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani people. Mrs. Ozobia's disrespect for the girl could also originate in ethnic conflict. For more information about the ethnic groups in Nigeria, see the theoretical part, page 4-5.

worst part of it is the woman is common riffraff”, her mother said. ““A Yoruba goat from the bush with two children from two different men. I hear she is old and ugly”” (*HYS* 217). She is concerned for her public image only. As a prominent Igbo woman, she looks down on poor “bush girls”⁴⁶. Apart from that, Mrs. Ozobia is obsessed with luxury and wealth. To illustrate her dependence on material possessions, she leaves her daughters for England tightly carrying her handbag full of jewellery. Mrs. Ozobia’s respect only for wealthy people and her arrogant behaviour towards domestic staff make Olanna angry and very annoyed:

‘And you know, they say he never wears any outfit twice? He gives them to his houseboys once he has worn them.’ Olanna visualized his poor houseboys’ wood boxes incongruously full of lace, houseboys she was sure did not get paid much every month, owning cast-off kaftans and agbadas they could never wear. She was tired. Having conversations with her mother tired her. (*HYS* 42)

Nkem from *Imitation* has first-hand experience with her husband supporting a young woman as well. When Nkem was younger, she used to date men because of money. She knows how it feels like to be a poor village girl who is obliged to pay for her family and is not able to. Her only possibility is to find a wealthy man. Nkem’s friend precisely summarizes behaviour of some men, who the situation of a long-distance marriage is convenient for:

‘Our men like to keep us here’, she had told her. ‘They visit for business and vacations, they leave us and the children with big houses and cars, they get us housegirls from Nigeria who we don’t have to pay any outrageous American wages, and they say business is better in Nigeria and all that. But you know why they won’t move here, even if business were better here? Because America does not recognize Big Men’. (*TN* 28-29)⁴⁷

Successful businessmen, who are called “Big Men” in Nigeria, like to show their power and wealth. In Nigeria they are praised and respected, while in the USA they do not get such attention. Men feel lonely without their wives in Nigeria, so they find young

⁴⁶ “Bush girls” is a term for a lower-class village girl, usually uneducated.

⁴⁷ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *The Thing around Your Neck*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009. Print. [Subsequent page references preceded *TN* are given in parentheses in the text]

women to spend time with and take them to various unofficial business meetings and parties. And again, these women are attracted to these men because of their money.

Another reason for a woman to be financially dependent on men is the duty to respect and honour her relatives. Like Nkem, Chinaza from *The Arrangers of Marriage* is a lower-class girl who gets married because of money. But, unlike Nkem or the other aforementioned women, she does not even know her husband before their marriage. Chinaza would probably never marry such a man if she had the chance not to do so. Chinaza's relatives have arranged the marriage for her and she must respect it. The family and good relationships are very important among the Igbo and it is not acceptable to break the bond and not to do what the family requires. Besides, her uncle and aunt have taken care of her since her parents died.

The terrifying reality of marriage arrangements is shown in the following extract when Chinaza's husband gets angry because Chinaza puts up resistance to him: "I wanted a Nigerian wife and my mother said you were a good girl, quiet. She said you might even be a virgin? I should probably tell her how wrong she was. You were light-skinned. I had to think about my children's looks. Light-skinned black fare better in America" (TN 184).

Chinaza's husband talks about choosing his future wife like she were a mere object. Nigerian patriarchal society enables him to behave this way, especially if he is a doctor in America. Nigerian people think that his money can help them with their financial difficulties so they sell their daughters and make a contract with the husband. The girl becomes a victim of her relatives and her unknown future husband. Still she does not have any other choice than to obey her relatives and marry him. Later Chinaza realizes that in America she can earn her own money after she gets her immigration documents. But she is trapped in a hopeless situation because she is dependent again on her husband to arrange the papers for her. So she must wait.

5.2.5 Female Sexual Roles

The woman is viewed as a sexual object in both of the novels and the short stories. However, there are also a number of women who take pleasure from sex, the woman can represent an active sexual agent as well.

Half of a Yellow Sun serves as the best example for how women can be subjected to verbal and physical abuse or sexual harassment - the novel is set during the Biafran War

and it is a common fact that during the war women were often raped and became victims of sexual violence. Especially among soldiers, who were trapped in a terrible environment of everyday violence, women were often regarded as mere sexual objects. Ugwu, Olanna and Odenigbo's houseboy, experiences a horrific situation when his fellow soldiers gang rape a waitress. When he comes to the bar, he is invited to participate in that terrible sexual act. Ugwu refuses but the soldiers start mocking him, so he takes off his trousers and rapes the girl. After the incident, he is not able to think about anything else. He cannot understand why he has done such a condemnable crime. Soldiers like Ugwu are exposed to such intense violence for such a long time that they just start considering it as a part of their lives. Apart from that, the war forces men to constantly prove their masculinity because strength is the most important "skill" they can have. If they did not show it, they would lose their dignity and the war would become hell even outside the battlefield.

Concerning female characters from *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna is a victim of her parents. They sell their daughter's body for their business purposes: "She was used to this, being grabbed by men who walked around in a cloud of cologne-drenched entitlement, with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together. She pushed him back, finally, and felt vaguely sickened at how her hands sank into his soft chest. Stop it, Chief" (*HYS* 33). Influential men like Chief in the previous extract think that they can control any woman very easily. They suppose their money and public power is the key to manipulating women and doing with them whatever they wish. They consider women sexual objects, without brains, only mindlessly seeking money. Similarly, Akunna from *The Thing around Your Neck* is subjected to sexual harassment by her family friend. She is misused by this man because he automatically assumes that a young girl in a foreign country without her family must be completely lost without a man's help. He takes advantage of her and offers her his help only if she sexually satisfies him.

However, Olanna does not remain a victim of sexuality but the other way round - she also takes pleasure in sex. Adichie vividly and explicitly describes the lovemaking between Olanna and Odenigbo in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Sexuality is regarded as a natural part of Olanna's life, it is not a taboo topic. The fact that Adichie narrates so openly and frankly about sexuality signifies that she wants to highlight the humanity of her characters, especially female protagonists. Sexuality is not often attributed to women. It

is more frequently connected with men, as if it were their “domain”. Adichie tries to disprove stereotypes about women again, she portrays emancipated and independent women, who enjoy their sexuality. Besides, sex helps Olanna to liberate herself from Odenigbo, to become empowered after he cheats on her with Amala.

Kainene is viewed as a sexual object too but in a different way. Richard regarded Kainene as a mistress when he first saw her because she lacked “cultivated demureness” (HYS 57) and she was smoking. The fact that men immediately consider confident and strong women to be prostitutes is connected with the still present sense of women being inferior in the Nigerian business environment. This tough environment has been governed by men for a very long time. Concerning Kainene’s sexual life with Richard, the readers learn about Richard’s initial inadequacy to sexually satisfy Kainene, which is again not a stereotypical representation of a typical Nigerian relationship - when the man loses his “masculinity” and the woman is the leading figure – not only during their sexual intercourse but also in their relationship in general.

Concerning female sexual roles in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili with her budding sexuality experiences a sexual awakening, which leads her to self-actualization. Through her platonic love to Father Amadi she begins to realize her own body and feminine sexuality. To become aware of the fact that she is a human with sexual needs and desires is a necessary part not only of her physical but also mental development.

Sexuality under the direction of women is considered positively and something that the woman needs for her self-development and to satisfy herself. Nevertheless, sexuality is also misused by men and the women’s body is sometimes viewed only as the object of men’s pleasure.

5.2.6 The Strong and Emancipated Woman

Adichie depicts also women who are very strong and emancipated. The author pays great attention to women who are on no account submissive or male dependent – these females are strong-minded and have the courage to stand up for themselves under any circumstances. From a historical point of view, Nigerian women have always struggled for equality and they have used various strategies to achieve their goals. They have clamoured against injustice and oppression and risen for their causes whenever necessary. They have never given up and always fought for their rights. They have taken part in

politics, economic and social spheres and they have used literature as a powerful weapon for their empowerment.⁴⁸ Independent and courageous women prevail in Adichie's fiction. Adichie disproves stereotypes and prejudices about Nigerian women held by the Western world and empowers her female characters but at the same time she continues the long literary and societal traditions of Nigeria.

Aunty Ifeoma's family represents the very opposite of Eugene's family. Unlike the very strict, authoritarian parenting in Achike's family, Ifeoma keeps a very liberal house. Ifeoma is an open-minded, educated, politically engaged and independent woman. She is also an important role model for her daughter Amaka and later for Kambili as well. Her household is full of laughter and she raises her children to become strong, confident and independent human beings. She gives them enough space to express themselves and develop their intellectual curiosity. Each child in Ifeoma's family is a unique individual but Ifeoma tries to build a sense of unity as well in her household. The fact that Ifeoma is an educated and emancipated lone parent, who supports her children's individualities, marks already a strong influence of modernity. However, she does not suppress their traditional values and continues being part of their village community (umunna). Ifeoma serves as the best example of the successful combination of tradition and modernity in *Purple Hibiscus*.

In contrast to Eugene, Ifeoma embraces religion with a "human face". Her interpretation of Catholicism differs to a great degree. Although she is also a devout Catholic, she does not dismiss her traditionalist roots and lets her daughter Amaka be culturally conscious of her African identity. Thus Amaka is allowed to build a very strong bond with her grandfather, who still practices traditional beliefs.

Ifeoma is a truly emancipated woman. In spite of living in relative poverty, she rejects financial support from her brother. Because of the fact that the Nigerian government devalues education, Ifeoma hardly ever gets paid for her job as a university lecturer. Her brother uses his money to manipulate and control people. Paradoxically, Eugene's title is "omelora"⁴⁹ and he was awarded a human rights award by Amnesty World. Nonetheless, he anonymously donates to the children's hospitals and disabled veterans from the civil

⁴⁸ To read more about the position of Nigerian women throughout Nigerian history, see the theoretical part of the thesis.

⁴⁹ "Omelora" – the term meaning The One Who Does for the Community.

war. Eugene usually helps the poor, he sponsors the whole village at Christmas: “We were always prepared to feed the whole village at Christmas, always prepared so that none of the people who came in would leave without eating and drinking to what Papa called a reasonable level of satisfaction” (*PH* 56). Although Eugene really takes advantage of his high position, he also tries to help whenever necessary. But Ifeoma strictly refuses help from her wealthy brother – not only because she is independent, but also because of Eugene’s arrogant behaviour towards their father.

Ifeoma is the only person in the family who is able to face Eugene. She is fearless. She does not even hesitate to raise her voice if necessary. Ifeoma is also the one who tries to persuade Beatrice to confront her husband: ““Stop it, stop being grateful. If Eugene had done that, he would have been the loser, not you.” “So you say. A woman with children and no husband, what is that?” “Me.” “How can a woman live like that?” “Nwunyem, sometimes life begins when marriage ends.” “You and your university talk. Is this what you tell your students?”” (*PH* 75). The different views held by Beatrice and Ifeoma is illustrated in the previous dialogue when Ifeoma wants to express her opinion that a woman does not need a man to fully live her life. But Beatrice is convinced that to have a husband, who takes care of his wife, both emotionally and financially, is necessary. She argues that a “husband crowns a woman’s life” (*PH* 75). Besides, Beatrice attributes Ifeoma’s attitude to marriage to the fact that Ifeoma is an educated woman. Odenigbo’s mother has a similar view about women’s education to Beatrice: “Too much schooling ruins a woman, everyone knows that. It gives a woman a big head and she will start to insult her husband. What kind of wife will that be? These girls that go to university follow men around until their bodies are useless. Nobody knows if she can have children” (*HYS* 124). The traditional concept of women staying at home and delivering children still prevails in (predominantly) rural parts of Nigeria.⁵⁰ Education is regarded as something useless and superfluous by some (mainly) village women.

Ifeoma’s strong, courageous and honest personality is apparent also in the university environment. She is forbidden to speak up against the university administration but she refuses to keep quiet. As a result, she loses her job and is forced to move to the United States. Despite the fact that Ifeoma is a very determined and confident woman, her

⁵⁰ To read more about this topic, see the chapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family*.

position of a widow has not always been easy. A widowed woman in Nigerian society must face many difficulties. Women who live on their own, without male counterparts are threaten with disinheritance.⁵¹ Ifeoma was even accused of killing her husband and stealing his money.

‘The people in his Umunna said he left money somewhere and I have been hiding it. Last Christmas, one of the women from their compound even told me I had killed him. I wanted to stuff sand in her mouth. Then I thought that I should sit her down, eh, and explain that you do not orchestrate a car accident in which a trailer rams into your husband’s car, but again, why waste my time? They all have brains of guinea fowls.’ (PH 74)

Ifeoma’s resilience and confidence help her to overcome the accusations and the maltreatment of the members of her “umunna”.⁵²

Nwamgba from *The Headstrong Historian* is like Ifeoma, a very sharp-tongued and a head-strong woman “who had once wrestled her brother to the ground” (TN 199). Similarly to Ifeoma, Nwamgba must overcome many obstacles connected with her new position of widow. The cousins of Nwamgba’s dead husband have the right to inherit his property but Nwamgba does not give up and fights to get what she is convinced belongs to her and her son. Nwamgba’s granddaughter Grace seems to be very close to her grandmother. Like Nwamgba, she is very ambitious and determined to attain her desired goals. Although her father is a very strict Catholic, she does not let him control and manipulate her like Kambili from *Purple Hibiscus*. She does not identify with the Catholic religion and she decides to follow her grandmother’s traditionalist beliefs. As a result, she starts fighting for recognizing African Igbo heritage, even though it is suppressed by her Catholic teachers at schools. Later she contributes to the development of African Studies as a field of study at Nigerian universities, which is crucial for reviving the African identity, for Nigerians themselves.

Regarding *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Kainene is a very emancipated woman. Her independence is shown through Richard’s perspective: “Richard was bewildered by

⁵¹ To get more information about the difficult position of widows in Nigeria, see the theoretical part, chapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family*.

⁵² Umunna” – an Igbo word meaning “my siblings” (brothers/sisters).

Kainene's busy life. Seeing her in Lagos, in brief meetings at the hotel, he had not realized that hers was a life that ran fully and would run fully even if he was not in it. Her work came first; she was determined to make her father's factories grow, to do better than he had done" (*HYS* 77). Her ambition and determination make Kainene unapproachable. Richard does not feel that he is part of her life, he has always felt that he is standing "in front of Kainene's door and waiting to be let in". Besides, as was said in the previous chapters, Kaneine is regarded as a son to her father. She is strong, confident, uncompromising and she has excellent business skills.

Aunty Ifeka is the closest person to Olanna. After Olanna finds out about Odenigbo's cheating, she goes directly to Kano to get advice from her emancipated aunt:

'Odenigbo has done what all men do and has inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away. Does that mean somebody died? When your uncle first married me, I worried because I thought those women outside would come and displace me from my home. I know that nothing he does will make my life change. My life will change only if I want it to change. He is very careful now, since he realized that I am no longer afraid. I have told him that if he brings disgrace to me in any way, I will cut off that snake between his legs. You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Do you hear me?'" Aunty Ifeka said. "'Your life belongs to you and you alone, soo gi.'" (*HYS* 226)

The previous extract shows that although aunty Ifeka is a village woman, she is much more self-sufficient than Olanna's modern mother living in Lagos, whose life depends entirely on her husband and in fact belongs to him. Ifeka supports Olanna to emancipate and helps her to become empowered, which is further developed in the subsequent chapter.

5.3 Female Empowerment – The Connection of Tradition with Modernity

Regarding *Purple Hibiscus*, things start to change after Kambili spends some time at Ifeoma's house in Nsukka. Kambili comes out of hiding, leaves her strictly guarded compound and begins to realize that one need not live in silence but could experience moments full of laughter, happiness and joy. Furthermore, she becomes aware of the fact

that unlike her dysfunctional family, her aunt's household is harmonious, despite living in poverty.

After becoming acquainted with Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka, whose courage, strong will and independence Kambili admires, the journey to her self-realization begins. As a result, Kambili cannot be intimidated and controlled by her father anymore. The fact that Kambili decides to retain ownership of Papa-Nnukwu's painting denotes a significant change of Kambili's process of "self-actualization".⁵³ Nonetheless, it is not until the moment Eugene catches her daughter with that "heathen" painting, that the turning point of Kambili's "final womanist metamorphosis after a traumatic event" (Ogunyemi 72) is marked. To exemplify this, after Eugene forces Kambili to torture herself (by pouring hot water on her feet), he leaves her room. But, instead of reflecting on what her father has just said, "[she] [thinks] about the painting of Papa-Nnukwu in [her] bag" (*PH* 196-197). Despite the fact that Kambili remains emotionally attached to her father, she decides to embrace the same freedom as she sees in Auntie Ifeoma's family and takes power into her own hands. Slow but surely, she becomes a happier person than ever before: "I laughed. It seemed so easy now, laughter. So many things seemed easy now" (*PH* 284).

Kambili's process of self-awareness also includes gaining confidence in herself: She is becoming courageous and is no longer afraid of disappointment:

'I no longer wonder if I have a right to love Father Amadi; I simply go ahead and love him. I no longer wonder if the checks I have been writing to the Missionary Father of the Blessed Way are bribes to God; I just go ahead and write them. I no longer wonder if I chose St. Andrew's church in Enugu as my new church because the priest there is a Blessed Way Missionary Father as Father Amadi is; I just go'. (*PH* 303)

In addition, another part of Kambili's process of self-realization is the discovery of her female sexuality, which is displayed by her affection and love for Father Amadi. Paradoxically, "Kambili's undue admiration for her father is transferred to Father Amadi, a Catholic priest, who embodies all of her father's values" (Nadaswaran, *Out of the*

⁵³ "Self-actualization" expresses "the achievement of one's full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world". (Dictionary.com)

Silence, 115). As a result, the separation from Eugene seems to be less complicated for her.

The father-son relationship also plays an important role regarding female position in the family. Owing to the fact that family cohesion is exclusively the man's responsibility, Jaja finds himself in a difficult position when Eugene dies. He takes immediately the blame for the murder of his father: "Jaja did not wait for their [policemen's] questions; he told them he had used rat poison, that he put it in Papa's tea" (*PH* 291). In fact, the responsibility to protect the women of his family is a principled act for Jaja. His sacrifice does not only save his mother's life but also helps to liberate Kambili from the strong dependence on her father (Andrade 98). Jaja's imprisonment for his mother's felony signifies "that the price of patriarchal power politics is being paid by the next generation" (Bryce 58).

Referring to Beatrice, her process of liberation definitely begins when she decides to poison her husband but is completed only when Jaja is released from prison. Jaja's imprisonment slows down Beatrice's journey to independence and freedom because of her strong sense of guilt and twinges of conscience. But immediately after his release, Beatrice is finally able to breathe and smile again.

Amaka does not have to go through the process of self-realization, however, she has learned various things because of Kambili. At the beginning, she refused to accept Kambili as her cousin. She considered her abnormal and emotionally unstable. Nonetheless, throughout the course of the novel she begins to realize that she was not fair to her before and eventually develops a strong bond with her. It seems that it is not merely Kambili who owes Amaka for her positive change but also vice versa – Amaka realizes her childish behaviour and, thanks to Kambili, attains maturity.

Regarding the title of *Purple Hibiscus*, this flower is connected with aunty Ifeoma's garden. Jaja secretly takes one of these flowers to his family's house and pots the plant. This plant thus becomes the symbol of positive change in Kambili's and her brother's lives, of positive developments like Kambili's empowerment, which was mentioned before.

Half of a Yellow Sun is divided into two parts, the early sixties – the time before the war and the late sixties, after the Biafran War. With regards to Olanna and Odenigbo, the setting and the development of their relationship are tightly connected. Olanna changes

from a passive person before the war to a person who is strong and dominant during the war. Thus there is a shift of power between Olanna and Onedigbo, linked to the current events they experience. Firstly, Olanna becomes empowered and liberated thanks to her aunty Ifeka. As was said before, Ifeka helps her niece to become independent from men. She explains that the man loses certainty and security in his wife when he realizes that the woman is confident enough to be on her own, to stand on her own feet. Olanna has always felt insecure with Odenigbo and the fact that she needed him, scared her: “Need gave him power without his trying, need was the choicelessness she often felt around him” (HYS). Secondly, Odenigbo’s infidelity functions as a negative means to achieve Olanna’s liberation. After Odenigbo cheats on her, Olanna realizes that she has always been dependent on him. But after an incident on the plane, her perception of their relationship changes drastically:

Suddenly she wished she could be attracted to him, that something mad and magical would happen to them both and, when the plane landed, she would walk away with her hand in his, into a new bright life. She did not have to be the wounded woman whose man had slept with a village girl. She could be a Fulani woman on a plane deriding Igbo people with a good-looking stranger. She could be a woman taking charge of her own life. She could be anything. (HYS 227)

Olanna meets a young man on the plane who mistakes her for a Fulani woman. In that moment Olanna becomes conscious of her freedom of choice. Since that time she started to direct her own life. She takes revenge on Odenigbo by having sex with Richard, Kainene’s boyfriend. She feels remorse about hurting her sister and Odenigbo, but she does not regret the act itself: “She should have said that it was not a crude revenge, or a score keeping, but took on a redemptive significance for her. She should have said the selfishness had liberated her” (HYS 244). Olanna wanted to find her lost femininity, which Onedigbo took from her when he had sex with Amala. Apart from that, she needed to do it because she felt that she was useless (despite the expectations in society)⁵⁴ since she is not able to conceive a child: “The pain reminded her of how useless she was, reminded her that a child nestled now in a stranger’s body instead of in hers” (HYS 231). She

⁵⁴ To read more about the topic, see the chapter *Gender Factor in Modern Family* in the theoretical part.

considers herself inferior to Amala, who is pregnant after only one instance of sexual intercourse with Odenigbo. Finally, Olanna decides to adopt Odenigbo's baby and feels morally superior to Odenigbo.

In spite of Odenigbo being the leading figure in their relationship, he gradually loses both his dominance as well as his beloved Biafran Republic throughout the course of the novel. In fact, he has always been a coward. He was not able to stand up for Olanna and constantly apologized for his mother as if her behaviour was actually justifiable on the basis that she is a village woman. Furthermore, he has never fully admitted his mistake concerning his cheating. Before the end of the war, he looks at Olanna and admits his error by saying: "'You're so strong, nkem.' Those were words she had never heard from him. He looked old, there was a wetness in his eyes, a crumpled defeat in his face that made him look older. She wanted to ask him why he had said that, what he meant, but she didn't and she was not sure who fell asleep first. Feeling a sad and unsettling peace" (HYS 391).

In *The Thing around Your Neck*, there are several female characters who become empowered as well. Chinaza's (*The Arrangers of Marriage*) process of self-actualization and her journey to liberation begins with thinking about finding a job: "Something leaped inside me at the thought, the sudden and new thought, of earning what would be mine" (TN 181). This is the first time she considers the idea of not being financially dependent on her husband, thanks to her female friend who she inspired with the idea of being emancipated.

Nkem from *Imitation* is another example of a female character who becomes liberated:

She had not planned to say it, but it seems right, it is what she has always wanted to say. We are moving back. She speaks slowly, to convince him, to convince herself as well. Obiora continues to stare at her and she knows that he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand. She wonders vaguely if that is what attracted him to her in the first place, that she deferred to him, that she let him speak for both of them. We can spend holidays here, together, she stresses we. (TN 41)

Nkem's empowerment lies in the refusal to tolerate her husband's mistress. Her voice becomes louder and her husband is so surprised by hearing Nkem speaking up that he accepts her decision and follows her.

Finally, the girl from *Tomorrow Is Too Far* experiences a completely different kind of self-awareness: "That summer, was the summer of your first self-realization. You knew something had to happen to Nonso, so that you could survive" (TN 195) Killing her brother is the girl's only choice to break free from the shadow of her brother. The preference of Nonso in her family has always been depressing and offensive for the girl. She has always had excellent skills she could never be praised for because as a girl and later a woman she is supposed to serve her husband only: "You wanted to mar the perfection of his lithe body, to make him less lovable, less able to do all that he did. Less able to take up your space. You were better at the things that did not need to be taught, the things that Gran could not teach him. Gran: 'It's good you're learning, this is now you will take care of your husband one day'" (TN 195). The traditional concept of viewing the woman in her limited role as a housewife becomes a mental strain for the young girl.

Despite the fact that tradition and modernity stand in binary opposition, these terms function as tools for women's empowerment. The female characters of *Purple Hibiscus* take advantage of traditional Igbo heritage and combine it with colonial tools such as Western education. The connection of traditional institutions and modern conveniences becomes the instrument for their liberation. Women in *Half of a Yellow Sun* take the initiative and guide the men and dictate directions during the war. They need to overcome their fears and give up their passive attitudes in order to be liberated and empower themselves. Females in *The Thing around Your Neck* have to confront patriarchal dominance to free themselves. Because of their strength and determination to fight for justice and gender equality, women in *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck* achieve their goals, gain control over their lives and liberate themselves from patriarchal dominance. However, the fact that women become free does not mean necessarily that they do not need men at all. They consider men as partners in their friendships, relationships and marriages.

Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to portray women in Nigerian family in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and in five selected short stories from the short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck*. The author of the thesis examined the question to what extent Nigerian women are emancipated and/or to what degree they are subjugated. The thesis further sought to answer whether the term "patriarchal society" means the absence of women's rights and to what degree traditionalism on the one hand and the advent of modernity on the other hand impacts the position of Nigerian women today.

Nigerian women have experienced various changes throughout history - from pre-colonial traditional Nigeria, through the British colonial rule and back to the independence. Women have participated in politics and always tried to participate in economic, as well as social, spheres of Nigerian society whenever they had a chance to do so. Pre-colonial traditional societies usually favoured men, nonetheless it was believed that women and men complemented each other. Although men dominated in terms of their authority and inheritance, age, not gender was the decisive factor in determining power. Women had the possibility to contribute to the development of society, mainly on the basis of their family and kinship as well as through various female organizations. The latest research has shown that the British colonial rule greatly changed the role of women. Women's power was shifted to the private sphere, to the family. Their public involvement was restricted. Women were supposed to stay at home and look after their children. Regarding the time after independence, women still faced the consequences of the colonial rule regarding the role of women. However, women's position is gradually changing towards modernity. They actively participate in politics, they campaign for gender equality and increased involvement of women in politics and have founded various programs which protect women's rights. The most crucial change concerning the reinforcement of Nigerian women's autonomy was the implementation of a formal education system.

Apart from women's engagement in political, economic and social spheres, Nigerian women have also found another tool for fighting for their cause – literature. Nigerian feminist literature has been created to destroy the image of a silenced Nigerian woman

portrayed in male authored works. Literature has empowered female characters whose voices had been muted for a long time.

Female characters from *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck* are affected by pre-colonial traditionalism as well as by modern influences, and in fact they gain power from combining both of them. Despite the fact that tradition and modernity stand in binary opposition, Nigerian women need to become aware of their African identity and heritage. They draw strength from their ancestors and are in close relation to them. However, without the most powerful tool of modern civilization, education, they would not be able to become independent. Only educated women, who also respect their own origin, have the chance to liberate themselves and create an equal partnership with men.

Female characters in Adichie's fiction are sometimes forced to challenge patriarchal dominance, while at the same time they are subjected to physical and emotional abuse. To protect themselves from male oppression they use various tools – they run away to their imaginary worlds, they are silent because they want to hide their fears and emotions. Nevertheless, they also sometimes manage to use silence as a way of communication. But most importantly, forced silence is used by men as a tool to control their immediate family members and by the Nigerian government to manipulate its citizens. There is a parallel between women's oppression and that of Nigerian citizens', who are both forced to mute their voices and blindly follow what they are told.

Adichie tries to present a diverse image of Nigerian society, typically considered patriarchal. She contrasts the female characters in her works with complementary characters – emancipated women are shown alongside submissive women, financially dependent women with those who are self-sufficient, and women who are victims of sexual oppression with the women who take pleasure in sexual activity. Adichie also contrasts family systems, which women are part of as daughters, wives and mothers – she portrays lower-class families alongside upper-class ones, rural versus urban family structures as well as authoritarian and liberal types of family. The writer's aim is not to victimize Nigerian women, her goal is to show the whole image of the Nigerian society today. Adichie's portrayal of a number of emancipated and strong-willed women destroys the usual representation of Nigerian women who are under male domination. Adichie's

protagonists are educated, strong and emancipated women who are self-sufficient and do not need men to fully live their lives.

Nigerian women believe that man and women complement each other and should live in harmony. Their goal is to achieve self-awareness and be liberated from men but they still consider men as partners. Women in Adichie's fiction are invincible and stronger than their male counterparts. Although they have to struggle for their rights, they never give up, just like women throughout Nigerian history.

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