

The word silence, its verb, adjective, and adverb forms appear forty seven times in the novel. The book begins with silence and ends in silence. Clearly, Adichie is using silence as a motif and wants her readers to see its significance. For each character, find examples of their silence (or voice) and record at least three for each character. Look, among other places, on these pages: 7, 16, 22, 30, 31, 51, 57, 89, 252, 257, 259, 260, 262, 273, 292, 299, 301, 305.

**Kambili**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Amaka**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Jaja**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Mama**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Eugene**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The entire narrative is relayed through Kambili's eyes. Though a novel about coming-of-age, it also glaringly captures the socio-political evolution of Nigeria. The novel tells numerous stories that run simultaneously. Focus here will be on the developmental process of Kambili, physically and psychologically vis-à-vis the Nigerian nation. Kambili's father owns a conglomerate of which one is a publishing house reputed for its astuteness and unbiased reportage of the Nigerian political situation and above all its antipathetic posture or stance towards the virulent political temperament of the military regime in Nigeria. He urges his editor, Ade Coker to ensure that the Standard speaks out, yet he continues to muzzle his wife and children. Silence in Eugene's home is so magnified to the extent that it could be heard. The function of Kambili's tongue is so constricted so that her struggle to express herself usually terminates with a stutter, making her classmates observe her with familiarity laced with contempt. Because of her inability to make her tongue function in school she is labeled a "backyard snob" (53).

As the narrative develops, one notices varied forms of silence. Kambili, Jaja and their mother speak with their spirit. Sometimes they converse with their eyes. Kambili's mother hardly talks and when she does, it is in monosyllables. Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure. In Purple Hibiscus silencing is not only a mechanism or weapon of patriarchal control but of domestic servitude. Kambili, Jaja and their mother device ways of survival within the utilitarian calculus Eugene has created for their minds. One of the strategies is the domineering silence with which they observe situations and the other is a filial bonding.

Amaka is a strong voice. Amaka refuses to take an English name for her confirmation because she sees no need for such 'colonial' necessity. She was never forced to accept this 'necessity'. Not even from Father Amadi whose closeness to the family ought to have given the necessary touch for Amaka to choose an English name:

"I told you I am not taking an English name, father," she said "And have I asked you why?" "Why do I have to?" "Because it is the way it's done. Let's forget if it's right or wrong for now," father Amadi said, and I noticed the shadows under his eyes. "When the missionaries first came, they didn't think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized. Shouldn't we moving ahead?" (271-272)

Amaka represents the new hope for the coming generation of African women. Amaka seems to be the most vocal of these characters: young, resilient, outspoken and unbending in the things that touch her African pride. Kambili describes her thus: "She walked and talked even faster and with more purpose than Aunty Ifeoma did" (78). She is a rare breed of the new generation of youths. She is creative, accommodating, honest, outspoken and a dogged fighter. Kambili's silence represents the restless silence of the African people in their inability at challenging those things that trample on the personality of African peoples. Even when Amaka left the country with her mother, she never stops her protests against those things she finds unpalatable in the Nigerian society. Kambili tells us that:

Amaka used to write to the office of the head of state, even the Nigerian Ambassador in America, to complain about the poor state of Nigeria's justice system. She said nobody acknowledged the letters but still it was important to her that she do something. (300)

By poisoning her husband, Kambili's mother realizes her voice through a new kind of silence. Kambili's metamorphosis becomes complete before Ifeoma travels out of the country. She finally falls in love. Her ability to express this emotion justifies the liberational quality of her voicing, which is self-defining and cathartic. It becomes glaring that Kambili has become mature and she is capable of independent thought and action.

However, the silence at the concluding phase of the book, which also marks the wholeness of Kambili's metamorphosis, is distinct. At the beginning of the book, the children and their mother rely heavily on silence and live on assumptions. This silence is dopey and empty. At Nsukka, a different kind of silence descends upon Kambili - this silence is dialectical. The two types of silence are different from the one she experiences at school. With Jaja's confinement, another form of silence eclipses them but this one is only fleeting. After the death of her husband and the incarceration of Jaja, Kambili's mother cracks and retreats into silence. Jaja while in prison cloaks his worries and pains behind an air of insouciance and silently observes his mother and sister. Kambili on the other hand retires into silence in order to liberate herself from the realities of the predicaments that have stormed her family. The death of Eugene no doubt, further irrigates the silence. On the whole the last shade of silence that beclouds their sense of imagination could be said to be furtive, because it is a silence characterized by hope and dreams.

**Your turn. Finish this sentence: Adichie uses the motif of silence (or lack therof) to show that . . .**