

# CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE: A RESEARCH GUIDE



*staff*

Saint Mary's College

# Chimamanda Adichie: A Research Guide

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This text was compiled on 10/21/2026

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# Contributors

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# 1: Introduction

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## Introduction to Chimamanda Adichie: A Research Guide

This research guide is meant for early career researchers interested in the life and work of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It was written by fifteen undergraduate students — almost exclusively English Literature, Creative Writing, Global Studies, and Gender and Women's Studies majors — at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. These students were enrolled in my upper-level English Literature seminar called Contemporary Voices: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and throughout the semester, while they read, discussed, and wrote about Adichie's fiction and nonfiction writing, they collaboratively created this text.

The guide is organized into four major sections: Part 1: Biographical and Background Information; Part 2: Terms and Themes; Part 3: Bibliography; and Part 4: Critical Analyses. The purpose of these sections is to provide pertinent contextual information for readers and scholars of Adichie's work, point readers and researchers of Adichie's work toward useful primary and secondary sources, and engage readers and researchers with critical analyses that engage with a broad range of issues across Adichie's body of work. Part 1 addresses pertinent information about Adichie's life and also about Nigerian culture and history, which inform much of her writing. Part 2 provides a glossary of relevant terms and brief descriptions of some of the most prevalent themes that emerge in Adichie's fiction and nonfiction writing. The "Suggested Reading" section in Part 3 lists all of Adichie's major publications and a carefully curated collection of other writing about Adichie, including peer-reviewed literary criticism. In addition, it includes the works that are cited in Parts 1 and 2 of this text. Finally, Part 4 contains five essays about Adichie's work written by undergraduate scholars from my seminar.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has changed the landscape of Anglophone literature, and she continues to influence her readers both through her published writing and as an active public intellectual with a compelling social media presence. Like most influential people, she has faced public scrutiny, most recently over her problematic position on transgender identity. However, the value of her work is far reaching, and engagement with all of her ideas encourages us to think more deeply about our own — an important intellectual exercise. Readers and researchers of her work should approach it in the same way they would the texts of any great literary figure: with curiosity and a critical eye. We hope this text serves those of you undertaking that work.

Ann Marie A. Short

Notre Dame, IN

July 2021

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# 1: BIOGRAPHICAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Please click the categories listed under this section to access relevant information on Chimamanda Adichie's biography.

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# 1.1: Personal Information

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## Early Life

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian American writer, activist, and feminist. She was born September 15, 1977 in [Enugu](#), Nigeria (Luebering). Adichie is the fifth of six children born to a middle-class Igbo family (Tuncan). Adichie's parents, James Nwoye Adichie and Grace Ifeoma, both made strides working in higher education. Adichie's father was a professor turned Deputy Vice Chancellor, and her mother was a registrar, both at the University of Nigeria. Adichie's ancestors hail from [Abba](#) in Anambra State. Adichie grew up in [Nsukka](#), in the house formerly belonging to the renowned Nigerian author, [Chinua Achebe](#). The Adichie family lived there comfortably, hiring domestic workers to keep their home in good condition. Adichie's mother would send food and clothes to their young house worker's family because his family was not as fortunate as Adichie's (Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"). Although Adichie grew up in flourishing conditions, her family history was detrimentally impacted by the Nigerian civil war, also known as the Biafran war of 1966-1970 (Rushton). Born seven years later, Adichie lived in the "shadow" of the conflict. Adichie's immediate family suffered as a result of the war, with both her grandfathers perishing in refugee camps as Igbo Nigerians. This facet of Adichie's heritage would later influence her writings.

Growing up, Adichie avidly enjoyed reading. Her mother claimed Adichie began reading at the early age of two years old, but Adichie believes it was probably closer to four years old (Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"). Adichie began writing at the age of seven. In her adulthood, she realized that her characters did not actually reflect her own identity or cultural experiences. This disconnect stemmed from British and American writings shaping her literary worldview. In her TED Talk, "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)," Adichie reflected on how her "characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples...[and her] characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books [she] read drank ginger beer. Never mind that [she] had no idea what ginger beer was." Adichie was finally able to see herself in literature when she discovered African writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye. This familiarity helped Adichie form her own craft in writing.

## Present Day

Today, Adichie splits her time between living in Nigeria and the United States. Her Lagos based writing workshop is named after her first novel: Purple Hibiscus Creative Writing Workshop (Tuncan). She is married to Ivara Esege, whom she wed in 2009. Esege is a family medicine and immediate care physician, as well as an assistant professor of Family Medicine at the University of Maryland (*Dr. Ivara A. Esege, MD*). Much like his wife, Esege was born and raised in Nigeria. Adichie and Esege have one daughter, who was born in 2016. Esege and Adichie kept her pregnancy out of the public eye and off social media to avoid having to publicly "perform pregnancy" (Van Amburg). Further information about Adichie and her nuclear family is limited, as she values and strives to maintain their privacy.

Adichie's family has received more attention due to her fame and influence. In 2015, her father, James Nwoye Adichie, was kidnapped as part of a ransom plot (MacFarquhar). Mr. Adichie's driver helped stage the kidnapping. Of the group of kidnappers, only the driver was later caught and charged with the crime. The assailants left Mr. Adichie in a forest for three days. The Adichie family paid the ransom in order to have James returned to them. After the kidnapping, Mr. Adichie moved to his hometown of Abba.

James Nwoye Adichie passed away suddenly from kidney failure at the age of 88 in June of 2020 (Corrigan). Adichie writes about his passing in her 2020 essay, "[Notes on Grief](#)." This poetic essay highlights her father's life. Additionally, Adichie details the heart wrenching experience of losing a loved one during the Covid-19 lockdown with family members scattered across the globe. Less than a year after her father's passing, Adichie received news of her mother, Grace Ifeoma's unexpected death. This news arrived in March 2021, while the expanded version of "Notes On Grief" was in the press for a May 11, 2021 release date. "How does a heart break twice?" Adichie rhetorically questioned in an online post regarding her mother's death (qtd. in Corrigan).

## Faith and Feminism

In 2017, Adichie reflected on her religious upbringing and her current religious beliefs at a Faith and Culture Lecture Series at Georgetown University. Although raised in the Catholic faith, Adichie decided to leave the Catholic Church before Pope Benedict XVI was inaugurated in 2005. Her decision to leave the Catholic Church is connected to her feminist views. "For me, and not just Catholicism, I think religion ... is not a women-friendly institution," she said. "Religion has been used to justify oppressions

that are based on the idea that women are not equal human beings.” However, Adichie has been drawn back to the Catholic Church, especially through Pope Francis’ teachings. Adichie baptized her daughter as a Catholic and has indicated that through her daughter’s birth she reconnected to her childhood faith. “The presence of God is greatest in love,” she said, referring to the feeling she gets when holding her daughter. “Even when she was born, there’s just something deeply magical and something that makes me think there has to be something more” (Georgetown University).

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## 1.2: Education and Career

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### Educational History

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has received numerous prestigious degrees, fellowships, and honorary degrees over the course of her career. She began her education at the University of Nigeria, where she studied medicine and pharmacy (Tunca). While she was a student there, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the University's Catholic medical students. At age 19 she attended Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to study communication. Adichie then went on to study communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University. During her time at Eastern Connecticut, she wrote for the campus journal. She graduated from Eastern Connecticut in 2001, earning her bachelor's with *summa cum laude* honors. After receiving her bachelor's, Adichie went on to receive her master's in creative writing from John Hopkins University in 2003. From 2005-2006, Adichie was a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University. The fellowship is awarded to artists, humanists, and writers "of exceptional promise to pursue independent projects during the academic year" (Princeton). In 2008, she received her Master of Arts in African Studies from Yale University (Tunca). Additionally, in 2008 she was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship. This prestigious fellowship awards the recipient with \$625,000 to pursue their "creative inclinations" (MacArthur Foundation). She was also awarded the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Fellowship from Harvard University in 2011, a fellowship that provides the recipient the opportunity to work on an individual project, such as a novel, while "mining and deepening the knowledge, ingenuity, and talent of the Harvard University Community" (Radcliffe Harvard). This fellowship allowed her to research for and work on her third novel, *Americanah*.

Adichie has received an extensive list of honorary degrees and doctorates from colleges and universities all over the world. In 2015 she received an honorary doctorate from Eastern Connecticut State University. In 2016, she was honored with the Barnard Medal of Distinction. Also in 2016, she received an honorary doctorate from Johns Hopkins University. In 2017 she was elected as a Foreign Honorary Member into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as a recipient of an honorary degree from Haverford College and an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. In 2018, Adichie was the recipient of many honorary degrees, including an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Duke University, an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Amherst College, an Honorary Doctor of Letters from Bowdoin College, and an Honorary Doctor of Literature degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. In 2019, Adichie received honorary degrees from American University in Washington DC, Georgetown University, the Rhode Island School of Design, Yale University, and Northwestern University. The most recent honorary degree she was awarded was from the University of Pennsylvania in May of 2020.

### Publication History

Adichie's first published work was a collection of poetry titled *Decisions*, which was published in 1997 when she was just 21 and still an undergraduate student. The following year she published a play, *For the Love of Biafra*, exploring the life of an Igbo woman during the Nigerian Civil War when the region of eastern Nigeria attempted to gain independence as the nation of Biafran. In 2002, Adichie started gaining the reading public's attention with her short stories "You in America" and "Harmattan Morning," the latter of which won the BBC short story award. Adichie published her critically acclaimed first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, which explored the political turmoil of Nigeria in the late 1990s through the eyes of 15-year-old Kambili Achike, in 2003. Three years later, in 2006, Adichie published her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which upon release once again gained critical and literary acclaim. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie returned to writing about the Nigerian Civil War and Biafra, this time using the perspectives of three different characters to tell the story of life both before and during the war.

In 2009, Adichie published *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a collection of short stories which features a mix of new and previously published works. Most of this collection is set either in Nigeria or the United States, and most of the stories feature female protagonists navigating issues related to gender, cultural displacement, or familial trauma. This same year Adichie gave her first TED Talk, "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)," which allowed both Adichie and her work to reach a wider audience. In 2011 Adichie published the short story "Ceiling," and the following year she gave her second TED Talk, "[We Should All Be Feminists](#)," which she adapted for publication in 2014. In 2013 she published her highly anticipated third novel, *Americanah*, which follows the character Ifemelu as she navigates returning to Nigeria after spending thirteen years in the United States. In 2017 Adichie published *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, which offers readers a collection of guidelines for raising children in a feminist manner. In 2020, Adichie published the short story "Zikora," in which the protagonist unexpectedly finds herself a single mother, and a *New Yorker* essay, "[Notes on Grief](#)," in which Adichie writes about losing her father in the summer of 2020, in the

middle of the COVID19 pandemic. On May 11, 2021, “Notes on Grief” was published and expanded into a book format similar to that of *We Should All be Feminists* and *Dear Ijeawele*.

## Award History

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been both nominated and won many awards throughout her career. Her first award was the BBC Measuring Competition for her work “The Harmattan Morning,” which she won in 2002. She was also awarded the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize (PEN American Center Award) for her short story titled, “Half of a Yellow Sun.” Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, won the Commonwealth Writers prize for first best book (Africa and Overall). She also won the Hurston Wright Legacy award. Her first novel was shortlisted for The Orange Prize, the John Llewellyn prize, and the Booker prize. Her second novel, also titled *Half of a Yellow Sun*, won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award: Fiction Category, the PEW Beyond Margins award, and the Orange Broadband prize: Fiction Category in 2007.

In 2008 she won the Reader's Digest Author of the Year award, as well as the Future Award, Nigeria: Young Person of the year award. For her novel *Americanah*, released in 2013 she won the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize: Fiction Category as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award: Fiction Category. She won the “Best of the Best” of the second decade of the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction (formerly the Orange Prize for Fiction) in 2015 for *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Also in 2015, the French translation of *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (*Chère Ijeawele, ou un manifeste pour une éducation féministe*) won 'Le Grand Prix de l'héroïne Madame Figaro' 2017. In 2018 she won the Barnes and Noble Writers for Writer award, and the PEN Pinter Prize. Global Hope Coalition's Thought Leadership Award was given to her in 2018 as well. In 2020, she won the Women's Prize for Fiction “Winner of Winners” (25 years) for “Half of a Yellow Sun” and Woman of the Decade by This Day Nigeria. She was also awarded the Africa Freedom Prize 2020 by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom on December 14, 2020.

Among her numerous accomplishments and awards, she has earned a list of other distinctions. She was listed in *The New Yorker's* “20 Under 40” in 2010, at the beginning of her career. She was also among the “100 Most Influential Africans 2013” in *New African*, the “Leading Women of 2014” by CNN, and the “100 Most Influential People 2015” in *Time Magazine*. She was included in *Vanity Fair's* “International Best Dressed” in 2016. Adichie was featured on PBS's “The Great American Read” and in Barack Obama's 2018 recommended summer reading list for *Americanah* in 2018. In 2018 *Americanah* was also listed among the “15 remarkable books by women that are shaping the way we read and write fiction in the 21st century” in *The New York Times*. Adichie was included in the “100 Novels That Shaped Our World” by the BBC, for *Half of a Yellow Sun* in 2019, as well as listed as one of the “World's Most Inspiring People” by *OONOM Magazine*. Notably, she was recognized as among the “20 Women Who Will Shape Events in Nigeria in 2020” by *ThisDay* in 2020.

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## 1.3: Adichie as Public Intellectual

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### TED Talks

Beyond her written work, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie achieved global recognition as a public intellectual through her TED Talks and other live appearances. Popular places to view her lectures include YouTube, [Instagram](#) Stories, [Twitter](#), her [official blog](#), and [Vimeo](#) (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). On YouTube, her TED Talks “[The Danger of a Single Story](#)” and “[We Should all be Feminists](#)” have been viewed a combined 14.7 million times. Her most famous lecture is her TED Talk, “The Dangers of a Single Story,” given in July of 2009. This talk has been prominently featured on YouTube, Vimeo and other popular worldwide platforms. On TED Talk’s official website, the video has received over 29 million views from all around the globe. It has also been translated into over 40 different languages. Another famous lecture, also given on the TED Talk platform, was “We Should All Be Feminists,” which has been translated into 28 languages and viewed over 4.5 million times.

“The Danger of a Single Story” was initially delivered in a TED Talk in July 2009 ([ted.com](#)). This talk was later published on YouTube on October 19, 2009. The TED website describes “The Danger of a Single Story” thusly: “Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice — and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding” ([ted.com](#)). These themes are common in Adichie’s works, as she relays her personal life experiences to bring awareness to voices that have been decentralized from canonical storytelling.

Adichie’s second impactful TED Talk, “We Should All be Feminists,” was live streamed in October 2013. This lecture aims to elucidate the stigmas surrounding feminism: “Adichie asks that we begin to dream about and plan for a different, fairer world — of happier men and women who are truer to themselves.” ([ted.com](#)). Her lectures transcend their original form, also making breaks in pop culture. Adichie expanded this TED Talk and adapted it into an essay titled under the same name, published on July 29, 2014 by Fourth Estate Publishing. Parts of Adichie’s “We Should All Be Feminists” were also featured in Beyoncé’s song “[Flawless](#)” (2013).

In addition to TED Talks, Adichie has appeared in numerous videos discussing her literature. She has also been featured on talk shows like “The Daily Show with Trevor Noah,” where she talked about raising her child as a feminist. She also highlighted the importance of African people partnering together to make a social change in the world and thanked Trevor Noah for doing his part.

### Social Media Presence

Adichie’s lectures are distributed widely across her various social media platforms, reaching an expansive audience. Through social media, Adichie not only promotes her own literary work, but she promotes the works of writers who reflect her passion for knowledge and the pursuit of truth. Most of her posts involve topics such as feminism, women’s empowerment, feminist literature, and other forms of activism. Adichie uses social media to promote excellence in all of these areas.

Adichie has a vast and active following on social media. She uses social media accounts on all major platforms, including [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and an official author’s website. She established her Facebook presence on September 28, 2008 and then created her Instagram account nine years later. She also has an official Twitter account that has remained inactive. Adichie is most active on Instagram where she posts two to three times a week. Her Instagram account has a cohort of nearly a million followers. As of June 2021, her following stands at 863k followers. Scrolling through Adichie’s Instagram account, there are 15 videos of her doing readings of her novels, and 362 posts of images.

In regards to promoting literature, Adichie uses her various social media platforms to promote her own works as well as uplift the works of others. On Instagram Adichie has said reading is knowledge and knowledge is power. In addition to posting photos of herself at events, with famous friends such as Lupita Nyong’o, and her everyday life, she actively creates posts pertaining to her works of literature. Not only does she post links to literary reads, but she also conducts live and recorded readings of her work to interact with her community of readers. Through this modality, she is again seeking to engage her cohort and enable them to fall in love with purposeful and meaningful literature. Her livestreams allow readers to ask her questions and actively communicate with her. This fosters a relationship between readers and the author as well as an expansive platform to reach international audiences.

Adichie also uses her Instagram platform to promote works of other present-day writers such as Carol Anderson's *White Rage*, Margo Jefferson's *Negroland*, and Ann Petry's *The Street*. The majority of these works analyze or present a narrative based in the mid-20th century with the collective goal to unite "truth seekers and truth speakers" (Liang). Additionally, Adichie engages her social media followers through reading contests. She often posts links to short stories and offers cash prizes to her followers for reading and responding in the comments. For example, on February 10th 2021, she held a giveaway for her short story 'Apollo,' by using the hashtags: #StartReadingbyReading, #StartReadingbyReadingWithCNA and #ReadWithChimamanda. This form of outreach aims to promote an interest in literature, especially Nigerian literature and culture. In this vein, Adichie is promoting her own work while also creating an informed community of followers and cultivating within them a desire to read.

In addition to promoting literature, Adichie mobilizes her Instagram platform to support Nigerian fashion with #wearnigerian and #madeinnigeria tagged in most of her fashion-related posts. This use of her platform has cultivated conversation among her followers and encouraged them to likewise take pride in Nigerian and Kenyan-made fashion. Adichie has been able to create a space for all fans of her work to engage in conversation, keep up with her life, and form a community in an online public sphere. Through social media, Adichie's overarching goal is to promote a love for literature and a love for Nigeria.

Overall, Adichie's Instagram posts blend personal tidbits with global social justice activism. Images on her page include depictions of her speaking at events, graduations, and traveling back home to Nigeria. Followers are awarded a glimpse into her family life as she posts a couple of images of her daughter, as well as her father and mother after their deaths. Adichie's social media is up to date with global issues like refugee limits in America, and how other countries are combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Oftentimes she publicly criticizes the leaders of countries she believes are poorly resolving social issues. As a result, Adichie's followers spark conversations about race, politics, and gender. Because of the controversy Adichie receives, she often limits the comments on her post. There have been many impersonators of Adichie which has prompted Adichie to make official statements on verified social media accounts. Adichie uses her social media to promote her work and directly address social issues surrounding women's empowerment, gender inequality, European beauty standards, misrepresentation of Africa, and other racial issues arising in the world.

- [1.3: Adichie as Public Intellectual](#) has no license indicated.

## 1.4: Feminism and Activism

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### Adichie's Feminism

Adichie is an outspoken activist who focuses on race, feminism and politics. She defines feminism as believing in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. Adichie sees gender as a social construct. She also notes that it's important not to mistake women's rights for "human rights" because to do so would mean ignoring the systematic oppression women have faced. Feminism focuses on women because women are often mistreated by society. When Adichie accepted the PEN Pinter prize in 2018 she stated the following:

[M]y writing gave me a platform to speak about issues that I have always cared about. I do not want to use my art as an armour of neutrality behind which to hide. I am a writer and I am a citizen, and I see my speaking out on social issues as a responsibility of citizenship. I am struck by how often this speaking out is met, in Nigeria, not with genuine engagement, whether to agree or disagree, but with a desire to silence me. A journalist once helpfully summed it up for me: people don't like it when you talk about feminism, they just want you to shut up and write.

Adichie is not afraid to use her influential position to promote change in the world, focusing her attention particularly on women's issues in both Nigeria and the United States (YaleNews).

### Public Stance on Feminism

Adichie uses her works of fiction and nonfiction literature to portray and represent women in both Nigeria and the United States. Adichie uses her work to challenge the stereotypes people have of feminists. She uses her power as a writer to educate people on what it means to be a feminist. In an interview with Trevor Noah in 2018, Adichie states, "People think a feminist is a crazy woman, who hates men and doesn't shave" (Trevor Noah Show). Adichie aims to educate the world on feminism and clear the taboo of being a feminist. Adichie stresses the importance of, "teaching boys and young men to feel comfortable around women who are powerful, who make more money, are more talented or even more vocal" (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Feminist Activism). In a sense, Adichie is expressing that feminism goes both ways. Girls should be raised to be empowered while boys should be raised to support women who are more powerful than them. Adichie uses her platform to also speak about the perspective of feminism from different cultures and how Western feminism does not resonate with everyone; in this way, she brings awareness to the intersections of culture and feminism.

### "Flawless" song

In Beyonce's 2013 hit song "[Flawless](#)" she sampled a part of Adichie's acclaimed TEDx talk; [We Should All Be Feminists](#), later published as a standalone short essay in 2014. In an interview with the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, Adichie notes that she gladly gave Beyoncé permission to use excerpts from her speech, but that the onslaught of calls she received for interviews after the single's release were shocking and made her think, "are books really that unimportant to you?" (Kiene). Adichie goes on to clarify that she and Beyonce have different 'styles' of feminism, saying that the singer's version: 'gives quite a lot of space to the necessity of men. I think men are lovely, but I don't think that women should relate everything they do to men' (Danielle). In her song Beyonce defines "feminist" in the following lyrics:

*Feminst: the person who believes in the social*

*Political, and economic equality of the sexes*

The song continues, "My Daddy taught me how to love my haters" and "My man made me feel so God damn fine," ultimately pairing her feminism with the aid and approval of the men in her life. Despite this, Adichie stands by Beyonce's feminism when it comes to critics claiming the singer's overt sexuality negates feminism. Adichie says, "Whoever says they're feminist is bloody feminist," and that policing feminism like this is unnecessary (Kiene).

## Strictly Binary Approach

In 2017, controversy surrounded Adichie's stance on transgender women and feminism expressed in an interview on Britain's Channel 4 News. Adichie stated, "When people talk about, 'Are trans women women?' my feeling is trans women are trans women" (vox.com). Many LGBTQ+ advocates were upset by these remarks, particularly because Adichie identifies as an LGBTQ+ rights advocate in Nigeria. Adichie later apologized and clarified her response stating that transgender and cisgender women are different because they face different experiences, and that one set of experiences should not be valued over the other. Adichie had also suggested that because trans women at one point experienced the world as male, they were once treated with male privilege, leaving them to have different experiences compared to cis-women (blavity.com). Although Adichie apologized for the misinterpretation of her comment, the controversy did not end there.

Adichie found herself at the center of criticism once again when she responded to an essay written by J.K. Rowling saying women's issues were separate from transgender issues by saying that it was a "reasonable" piece. Rowling herself faced intense criticism from the LGBTQ+ community for this piece, and by aligning herself with Rowling, Adichie called further attention to her own position on trans rights. Not only does Adichie fail to acknowledge the trans movement in any of her work, which can be seen as blatant erasure, she also says that the trans movement "wishes an erosion of women as a political and biological class." She also notes that trans activism has been a cover for predatory activities as well as using trans advocacy as an excuse to take away freedom of speech of people who may not agree with them. Many critics have come to label her as transphobic and raise the question, "can Adichie be a true feminist if she cannot merge the rights of trans women with the rights of cis women?" Intersectional feminists are clear on this position: trans women are women. Therefore, for Adichie to compartmentalize trans women is to erase their identity.

More recently, Adichie criticized "cancel culture" and the response to her comments about trans women by saying, "There's a sense in which you aren't allowed to learn and grow. Also forgiveness is out of the question. I find it so lacking in compassion" (theguardian.com). Although Adichie did not make a direct apology for her comments or the position she has taken, she makes an important point of criticizing cancel culture. She believes a person can grow instead of not being given space to improve themselves and learn. Adichie stood by her comment not equating transwomen to cis-women, doubling down on her views instead of offering a sincere apology about her comments about the differences between cisgender and transgender women. Though cancel culture can often misconstrue a person's positions rather than seeking to understand their point of view, in this case, Adichie elaborated on her opinions rather than staying silent or apologizing.

As of June 2021, Adichie's comments on trans women and LGBTQ+ rights have been disseminated widely. Her former student, writer Akwaeke Emezi, has recently taken to Instagram to continue this longstanding feud with their teacher over Adichie's comments. The two authors began their argument in 2017 after Adichie's previously mentioned comments about trans women and J.K. Rowling's essay. Emezi then took to Twitter to call out their previous teacher for her apathy towards the trans community. On June 15th, 2021, Adichie published an [article](#) on her personal addressing issues she has with Emezi. Emezi posted on [Instagram](#) the next day to state their belief that Adichie was specifically attempting to violently target and silence queer and trans authors.

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## 1.5: Nigerian Culture and History

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### Nigerian Culture

Nigeria, located on the western coast of Africa, is home to over 123 million people, including 250 ethnic tribes (*Countries and Their Cultures*). This country holds a diverse geography, but the most diversified element to Nigeria is its people. The three largest ethnic groups consist of the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo peoples: “With regard to ethnic breakdown, the Hausa-Fulani make up 29 percent of the population, followed by the Yoruba with 21 percent, the Igbo with 18 percent” (*Countries and Their Cultures*). Prior to British colonization, the ethnic groups were separate and independent, but after independence they became a whole known as Nigeria. The official language of Nigeria is English, mainly due to the impact of European colonization. However, due to all the ethno-linguistic groups, there are many different languages that are used. For example, “The country’s second language is Hausa. In northern Nigeria many people who are not ethnic Hausas speak both Hausa and their own tribal language. Hausa is the oldest known written language in [West Africa](#), dating back to before 1000 C.E.” (*Countries and Their Cultures*). Because English is the most commonly used language, those who are not ethnic Yorubas or Igbos rarely speak their language (*Countries and Their Cultures*). Nigerians found a linguistic middle ground that combined both English and a mix of African languages called Pidgin that is common throughout southern Nigeria. Pidgin “uses English words mixed with Yoruban or Igbo grammar structures” (*Countries and Their Cultures*).

Each ethnic group in Nigeria “inhabits a territory that it considers to be its own by right of first occupancy and inheritance” (Britannica). Hausa, a northern group, combined itself with the smaller Fulanis, whose members conquered Hausaland in the early 19th century (Britannica). The majority of these two groups are Muslim, and “Islam is a key component of their ethnic identity and continues to inform their role in modern Nigerian society and politics. Their culture is deeply patriarchal and patrilineal” (PBS). Hausa and Fulani “have been politically dominant since Nigeria’s independence from Britain in 1960” (PBS). Another politically dominant group is Yoruba, in southwestern Nigeria: “Most Yoruba are farmers but live in urban areas away from their rural farmland. Each Yoruba subgroup is ruled by a paramount chief, or *oba*, who is usually supported by a council of chiefs.” (Britannica). Yoruba is one of Nigeria’s most urban ethnic groups, and they form the majority in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria and the second most populous city in Africa (PBS).

The last major ethno-linguistic group are the Igbo, whose ancestral lands are located in southeastern Nigeria. In Igbo culture, “The largest political unit is the village, which is ruled by a council of elders (chosen by merit, not heredity) rather than by a chief” (Britannica). As the Igbo are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, “Under British colonial rule, many Igbo served in government and military roles and were later key players in Nigerian independence. [However,] over the last few decades the group has become less politically dominant” (PBS). Although these groups take up the majority of ethnic culture in Nigeria, there is a lot of tension between them. The ethnic clashes that happen in Nigeria cause many riots and attacks, and with these dangers, the major ethnic groups have formed militias to “protect their own interests and perpetrate violence on other groups” (PBS).

### Colonial History and Civil War

Although the transatlantic slave trade brought Europeans to West Africa as early as the 1600s, Britain became interested ruling the the area that is now Nigeria in the early 1800s, after the slave trade was abolished. Gradually, interest and control over the area grew. In 1861, Britain annexed the island of Lagos, and soon afterwards the British started extending their influence to the adjacent mainland of Yorubaland (“Nigeria”). In 1887, British control over the eastern coast, which had been promoted since 1849 by consular agents, was regularized by the establishment of the Oil Rivers Protectorate. This too was gradually extended inland and became the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1894. Gradual growth over northern Nigeria, consolidated by a series of punitive expeditions culminating in the establishment of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1900 (“Nigeria”). The three separate administrative units were finally amalgamated in 1914 into the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, and the administrative individuality of the three separate regions—North, East, and West—was maintained. The chief characteristic of British rule in Nigeria was its system of local administration, known as indirect rule. Indirect rule depended on a system of centralized political units with local/native chiefs at the lowest rungs of the hierarchy. It functioned well in the North, with variable success in the West, and poorly in the East (“Nigeria”). Vast distances, differences of history and traditions, and ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social, and religious barriers all hampered the creation of a unified state (“Biafra/Nigeria”).

After World War II, increasing pressures for self-government resulted in a succession of short-lived constitutions. The constitution of 1954 established a federal form of government, greatly extending the functions of the regional governments. A constitutional

conference in May and June of 1957 decided upon immediate self-government for the Eastern and Western regions, the Northern to follow in 1959. The progression from self-government to independence moved quickly: on October 1, 1960, Nigeria became a fully independent member, and federation of three regions based on ethnic groupings, of the British Commonwealth; and on 1 October 1963, it became a republic ("Nigeria").

Pressure for Igbo secession boiled over to resentment over the domination of the federal government by Northern elements and culminated in a military coup on January 15, 1966. On 29 July 1966, mutinous elements in the army, largely Northern army officers, staged a countercoup, killed Gen. Johnson Umunakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi, and replaced him with Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon as head of the military government. The July coup led to the massacre of thousands of Easterners residing in the Northern Region and to the exodus of more than one million persons (mostly Igbos) to the Eastern Region. On May 28, 1967, Col. Gowon assumed emergency powers as head of the Federal Military Government and announced the division of the country into 12 states. The Northern Region was split into 6 states; the Midwest, Western, and Lagos areas each became separate states; and 3 states were formed from the Eastern Region. Rejecting the realignment, Eastern Region leaders announced the independent Republic of Biafra, with Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu as head of state, on May 30, 1967 ("Biafra/Nigeria").

The Nigerian Civil War, spanning a thirty-month period, from May 30, 1967, to January 12, 1970, was precipitated by a combination of factors. Among the many reasons included the growing interethnic rivalry and suspicion between the three major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbo in the south); agitations over alleged domination by one ethnic group to the exclusion of the others; a controversial 1963 federal census; and disputed post-independence elections in 1964 and volatile western regional elections in 1965, which resulted in prolonged political crisis, anarchy, and uncertainty ("Biafra/Nigeria"). These events triggered the first military coup on January 15, 1966, by predominantly young Igbo army officers led by Major Chukwuma "Kaduna" Nzeogwu, himself an Igbo from the eastern region. Although prominent northern politicians were killed in the process, there were no casualties in the East, reinforcing the belief in many quarters, especially in the northern region, that the coup was ethnically motivated to achieve domination by the Igbo over other ethnic groups ("Biafra/Nigeria"). Nzeogwu's coup failed, but a countercoup, led by another Igbo, Major General Ironsi, abolished the federal structure and introduced in its stead a unitary system of government. Consequently, on July 29, 1966, a "revenge coup" by largely northern officers led to the killing of the Nigerian head of state, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi at Ibadan, while he was making an official visit to the western region ("Biafra/Nigeria").

During this same period several Igbo officers and civilians were also killed in the north, and their properties looted or destroyed. By October 1966, over fifty thousand Igbos had lost their lives, several thousands more were maimed, and an estimated two million Igbos fled from other parts of Nigeria back to the east ("Biafra/Nigeria"). To reduce the political tensions that had engulfed the country, representatives of all concerned parties attended a summit of military leaders at Aburi, Ghana, beginning January 4, 1967 and agreed to a confederal system of government, but the agreement was never implemented. After several unsuccessful efforts to negotiate peace, Ojukwu unilaterally declared Biafra's independence from Nigeria on May 30, 1967, citing the Nigerian government's inability to protect the lives of Easterners and suggesting its culpability in genocide. Biafra derived its name from the Bight of Biafra and comprised the East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers states of Nigeria. The federal government of Nigeria responded to Biafra's declaration of independence with its own declaration of war ("Nigeria/Biafra").

The Nigerian Civil War, fought almost entirely in the southeastern portion of that country, resulted in the death of millions of unarmed civilians and massive destruction of property. As the conflict progressed, the living conditions in Biafra deteriorated. The Biafrans, fighting against a numerically and materially superior force, were virtually encircled and isolated ("Nigeria/Biafra"). The Biafran armed forces made sporadic strategic incursions into federal territories, but limited means of support frequently forced a retreat. A combination of military operations—by land, air, and sea—and an economic blockade against Biafra and the destruction of its agricultural life by the Nigerian federal government led to the starvation, mass death, and displacement of Igbos. The Nigerian government blockaded the region from the sea, thus preventing the shipment of critical items and services to the east ("Nigeria/Biafra"). Furthermore, the government recaptured the Rivers state, cutting off the oil revenue with which Biafra had expected to finance the war; suspended telephone, telegraph, and postal services; and cancelled all air flights to the region, except those cleared by Lagos ("Nigeria/Biafra"). The enforcement of a comprehensive blockade led to severe shortages of food, medicine, clothing, and housing, precipitating heavy casualties among Biafran civilians. About three million Biafrans are believed to have lost their lives, an estimated one million of them as a result of severe malnutrition. More than three million Igbos became internally displaced persons or refugees. For a variety of reasons, including the national interests of most of its member states, the international community, except for limited humanitarian relief, left Biafrans to their fate ("Nigeria/Biafra").

Biafra alleged genocide, fueling international sympathy. Although a team of observers found considerable evidence of famine and death as a result of the war, it uncovered no proof of genocide or the systematic destruction of property. Furthermore, although claims of starvation and genocide secured military and political support from some members of the international community and international organizations, they also helped to lengthen the war, thereby furthering the suffering in Biafra ("Nigeria/Biafra"). In December 1968 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimated that fourteen thousand people were dying

each day in Biafra. Many civilians who had already survived the war reportedly died of starvation because the federal government obstructed direct access to relief agencies and ignored international pressure to allow mass relief operations entry into Biafra. The Biafran government's rationale for prohibiting entry were a result of their accusations that relief agencies were concealing arms shipments with supplies from their humanitarian flights. The fall of Owerri, one of Biafra's strongholds on January 6, 1970, signaled the collapse of the resistance, leading to the flight of its leader, Ojukwu, to the Ivory Coast. On January 12, 1970, the Biafran chief of army staff, Major General Phillip Effiong, surrendered to the federal government ("Nigeria/Biafra"). The Nigerian head of state, Colonel Yakubu Gowon, accepted Biafra's unconditional surrender, declaring that there would be no victor and no vanquished.

After the war, the government developed a Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation program to resettle those who had been displaced from their homes and places of permanent residence; rehabilitate both troops and civilians alike; reconstruct damaged infrastructure and public institutions; and correct economic and social problems ("Nigeria/Biafra"). Furthermore, the federal government promised to provide food, shelter, and medicines for the affected population; hand over power to a civilian government on October 1, 1975; reorganize the armed forces; complete the establishment of the twelve states announced in 1967; conduct a national census; draft a new constitution; and hold elections ("Nigeria/Biafra"). Although some of these commitments were fulfilled—new states were created, a new constitution was implemented, the armed forces were scaled down in size, and power was handed over to a civilian government—other promises were left unfulfilled ("Nigeria/Biafra").

## Recent History and Contemporary Nigeria

After the Civil War, Nigeria went through a series of multiple national leaders, military coups, and changes to the constitution from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. In mid-November 1993, General Sani Abacha installed himself as the head of state. On November 18, 1993, he abolished all state and local governments and the national legislature. Abacha replaced many civilian officials with military commanders and banned political parties and all political activity. Abiola, the rightful president-elect of the 1993 elections proclaimed himself president on June 11, 1994 and went into hiding ("Nigeria"). Abacha arrested him later that month, citing massive protests from the Nigerian people, but the military violently repressed the demonstrators. Abiola pleaded not guilty to three counts of treason; the following day laborers went on strike to protest the Abacha regime. In the following months, millions of Nigerian workers walked out in support of Abiola and refused to attend scheduled government talks. Strikes and protests continued in support of the sanctity of the vote, and of Abiola's mandate ("Nigeria"). In August 1994, he banned several newspapers, declaring that his government had absolute power and would not give in to pro democracy demonstrators, one of the many processes Abacha took to control the government and Nigerian society. In April 1998, four of Nigeria's five major political parties nominated Abacha as their presidential candidate. Amid opposition accusations that the transition plan was designed to prolong Abacha's rule, legislative elections held on April 25 were heavily boycotted. Nigeria's political fortunes changed suddenly when Abacha died of an apparent heart attack. General Abdoulsalami Abubakar took charge and promised to continue Abacha's transition ("Nigeria"). On July 20, 1998, General Abubakar announced a new plan for return to civilian rule, as Abacha had gotten rid of civilian participation in many forms of the government, culminating in a transfer of power in May 1999.

Since the Abacha regime, Nigeria has since tried to return a more democratic government, working on restoring law and order, fighting corruption, and unifying the ethnically and religiously diverse people of Nigeria ("Nigeria"). Though those efforts have been hard to come by, as many violent ethnic and religious clashes occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Nigeria has continued to face governmental, ethnic, religious, health related, educational, economic, and other issues ("Nigeria").

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## 2: Terms and Themes

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### Key Terms

The terms below constitute a glossary of specialized vocabulary that may be useful for understanding Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works.

### Cultural Terms

**American Tribalism:** A type of modern tribalism which organizes individuals in the United States into organizational categories based on their different cultural or physical traits. Americans might categorize themselves by race, religion, country of origin, financial status, or education level. This manifests itself in like socializing and congregating with like.

**Apartheid:** An Afrikaans word translated as “separateness.” Apartheid is a system of segregating society based on race in South Africa.

**Colonialism:** The process of setting up colonies outside of Europe so as to maintain imperial power and control. It is the domination of one people by another — in most cases the domination of Europe over the non-European other.

**Critical Race Theory:** A theoretical framework which asserts whiteness is a construct that requires otherness to exist. Its basic tenets are: (1) Race is a social construct, not a biological science. (2) Racism in the United States is an everyday experience for people of color (3) Advances and setbacks for people of color typically originate to benefit white groups. (4) Negative stereotyping of minorities serves to elevate white power (5) Individuals cannot be defined by their membership in a single group due to the complex nature of “intersectionalities.”

**Cross-Cultural Experience:** A phenomena characterized by meaningful firsthand conversation and dialogue with another culture. It entails deeper participation than a passive, tourist experience.

**Ethnicity and ethnic identity:** An identifier constructed from cultural aspects of one's country of origin: language, religion, appearance, regionality, as well as culture and ancestry. In the United States, ethnicity is viewed as biological; it is a question of where your ancestors came from. Ethnicity is largely defined by ethnic boundaries between countries, which can be ever changing, meaning ethnicity can quickly become self-prescribed and removable (Nagel).

**Eurocentrism:** A cultural worldview focused on Europe as the center of all aspects of history. The histories and cultures of other, non-White, non-European countries are therefore viewed through a European context, relating everything back to European events and history. European culture is the dominant, preeminent culture and way of life from a Eurocentric point of view.

**Fulani:** An ethnic group hailing mostly from northern Nigeria. The Fulani are a semi-nomadic pastoral people. Their religion is Islam, like the Hausa people. The Fulani combined forces with the Hausa in the 19th century. They primarily speak Hausa as well as their own language, Fulfulde.

**Hausa:** An autocratic patrilineal ethnic group primarily residing in northern Nigeria. The Hausa mainly practice Islam in addition to a traditional African religion, Maguzanci, in remote parts of Hausaland. They speak Hausa as well as French, English, and Arabic. When Nigeria gained independence from the British, the British gave most governmental control to the Hausa, spurring Hausa-led genocidal campaigns against the Igbo, as described in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

**Igbo (Ibo):** An ethnic group native to present-day southeastern and south-central Nigeria. The Igbo adopted Christianity from colonial missionaries, but they also incorporate indigenous belief systems. Their present-day languages include Igbo and English. The Igbo supported the founding of the secessionist state, Biafra, as described in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

**Imperialism:** The idea driving colonization. Overseas territorial expansion had been a part of European history since the 1400s but due to industrialization and growth in worldwide trade networks, the 19th century saw a renewed competition among European powers for empire building. This renewed sense of imperialism was often driven by the combined forces of nationalism, religious zealotry, and a desire for increased economic gains.

**Nationality:** A legal term which relates to your status as a citizen of a specific country. Nationality has no connection to genetics or ancestry, but instead is solely based on citizenship.

**Otherness:** A state of alienation resulting from a disconnect between the self and dominant social constructs. This term is grounded in the study of phenomenology: a philosophical branch concerned with consciousness and experience.

**Partition:** The process by which competing European forces divided Africa for the purpose of economic gain and power. The creation of these artificial borders led to civil war and violence between indigenous tribes.

**Postcolonial literature:** Literature written after a culture's period of colonization. These works comment on life before, during, or after colonization.

**Postcolonial Theory:** Postcolonialism, or postcolonial theory, is an intellectual modality concerned with tracing the impact of European colonization on culture, history, literature, politics, economics, and other facets of existence.

**Race:** An identifier that Merriam Webster Dictionary defines as “any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry.” However, race can also be thought of as a largely socially constructed idea, used in countries like the United States to create divisions between groups of people, often based on skin color.

**Racial stereotypes:** A stereotype is an overgeneralized and fixed idea of a person, group, or thing. A racial stereotype oversimplifies racial groups, and oftentimes cannot exist without the presence of whiteness. In the United States, racial stereotypes are intrinsically rooted in power and hierarchy (Landry). A racial stereotype of Black people is often seen as the opposite of white people in the United States, and white advantage cannot exist without the presence of black disadvantage.

**Social constructionism:** A theory used in multiple disciplines which examines how collective understandings of reality shape social interactions and institutions. Social constructionism asserts that all meaning, knowledge and language is socially created. This theory is often used in the humanities and social sciences as a way to understand how society has developed ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers (Mallon).

**Yoruba:** An ethnic group found in western Nigeria as well as Benin, Ghana, and Togo. Historically the Yoruba were organized as a feudal society. Their religious beliefs vary, including Christianity and Islam, as well as their traditional religion centered on mythology, cosmology, and divination.

## Feminist Terms

**Eurocentric/White Feminism:** A branch of feminism defined by Euro-American ideals such as freedom and empowerment.

**Feminism:** The advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.

**Feminism Lite:** A concept Adichie defines as: “the idea of conditional female equality” (Dear Ijeawele 20). Feminism Lite is a watered down version of feminism characterized by seeking permission from men. It often uses analogies such as, “He is the head and you are the neck” in describing gender roles within a heterosexual partnership.

**Feminist Theory:** An interdisciplinary conceptual framework concerned with studying the manifestations of gender inequality for the advancement of women's rights.

**Intersectionality:** The overlapping, interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, as they apply to a given individual or group. Intersectionalities converge to create interdependent systems of privileges or disadvantages.

**Intersectional Feminism:** A branch of feminism which advocates that female empowerment is experienced differently across varying cultures. Intersectional feminism asserts that feminism should take race, culture, gender, etc. into account because not all women have access to the same resources and worldviews.

**Misandry:** A dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men.

**Misogyny:** A dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudices against women.

**Rape:** Non-consensual sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will, or with a

person who is beneath a certain age, or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception.

**Sexual objectification:** The act of treating a person as an object to be used and identified only for sexual gratification or desire.

## Major Themes

### Colonization and Its Aftermath

Chimamanda Adichie is widely accepted among the literary world as a postcolonial writer. Combining various themes like culture, identity, imperialism, and gender, her works urge readers to consider the effect colonialism has on cultures across the world, including her native Nigeria. Adichie recognizes the importance of postcolonial literature as an art and a forum for African scholars. In a broad sense, all of Adichie's works can be examined through a postcolonial lens.

### Education

One key theme that Adichie works through in her novels is education and its importance. In her writing, Adichie delves into her own rationale behind why she believes education is vital for all people. She discusses why it is essential for women to receive an education in order for them to stand on equal footing with their male counterparts in society in *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. While writing *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie mentions how important it is for women to receive both a balanced formal and informal education. It is not enough to simply send young girls to school to learn, but they must also benefit from being socialized in a manner that is not wholly dependent on their status as women. While *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto* focuses heavily on informal education, Adichie does also approach the topic of traditional formal education in many of her other works. In her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie examines the effects of education on multiple characters and how it allows them a heightened level of upward social mobility. She primarily does this through Ugwu, a young boy, and Odenigbo, a professor. Both men have similar socioeconomic upbringing and are able to use education to propel themselves into an entirely new position in life. In Adichie's short story, "The Headstrong Historian," from her collection of short stories entitled *The Thing Around Your Neck*, she discusses how education can be used to both enforce colonial ideology and find value in cultural expression. Grace, the titular headstrong historian comes to understand that just because her formal education, at the hand of colonizers, does not find inherent value in the expression of her Igbo culture, does not mean that such a worldview is correct.

### Feminism

In much of Adichie's writing, the main focus is feminism. This can be seen in any place where she is advocating for the equality of men and women. Something she often touches on in her writing is that feminism is contextual, as she says in *Dear Ijeawele or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen suggestions*. Feminism crosses all cultures and stories because all women have their own experiences with feminism, and all of them can be different.

Adichie has also touched on the idea that feminism and femininity are not mutually exclusive in her writing. Being a feminist does not mean you must reject femininity as she believes that it is misogynistic to suggest that women should abandon their femininity to be feminist. Women shouldn't be ashamed to be "feminine," just as men aren't ashamed of "masculine." In *Why Can't a Smart Woman Love Fashion* and in *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie confronts the topic of how women must dress a certain way so they are not perceived as frivolous. This is in line with the assumption that appearance and clothing for women can determine intelligence, seriousness, and ability.

Adichie believes that gender roles are "absolute nonsense." Nothing should be assigned to a person because of their gender. This is including and not limited to cooking, cleaning, household maintenance, and child rearing. These are all learned skills that every person should know and should not be left to one person in a household. In Adichie's literature, you can see the protagonists fighting against gender norms.

### Motherhood

Adichie uses motherhood in tandem with feminism in her writings. In her work she considers the worries and anxieties of soon-to-be mothers, their perceived responsibilities, and what it means to be both a feminist, a career driven woman, and a mother all at once. Adichie writes about both negative and positive outcomes and interactions surrounding different kinds of mothers and

their children and spouses.

In *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie is careful to give advice to her friend, but still leaves room for her to omit what doesn't work for her and encourages her to ask for help, and allow herself to be helped; showing motherhood does not have to be done alone. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, one protagonist, Olanna, is torn between her family's view of her as just a pretty face and "ruined by education" to others when she realizes that she wants to have a baby with Odenigbo. She recognizes that she has to allow herself to want to be a mother and still be the strong-willed professor she was when she met Odenigbo.

## Marriage

A common theme found among the works of Adichie is gender oppression in marriage. She explores through writing the ways in which women are pressured to sacrifice their own identities and passions for the sake of preserving a relationship in which the men do not face the same pressures. Adichie's fiction shows that society expects women to marry, and women internalize that it can be difficult to survive without a husband. Because of these pre-existing circumstances, many women are put in the position where they must fill the role of wife even though it strips them of many freedoms. In Adichie's nonfiction works, *Dear Ijeawele* and *We Should All Be Feminists*, she argues that women should try to combat the ways in which they are pressured into unfair marriages that ultimately exploit and abuse them. Even though Adichie critiques marriage inequality in her nonfiction pieces, she continues to push back against the idea of exploitative and unfair marriages in her fiction as well. Through her fiction, she works to demonstrate just how challenging married life can be for women and how marriage has the potential to hinder a woman's advancement.

## Language

In *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie discusses how language used towards girls is different from how boys are spoken to and described. In *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie stresses how girls are described as "princesses" and boys are socialized to be chivalrous towards women, meaning that women are treated like they need to be saved. This language implies that women are supposed to be delicate, beautiful, and protected by a man. She also speaks about how she has heard American politicians state how women should be "revered" or "championed." Adichie argues that women should not be "revered" or "championed;" rather, they should be treated as equal human beings. She suggests that there is a patronizing undertone when women are "championed" or "revered." This type of language reminds Adichie of chivalry, and she believes the premise of chivalry is female weakness. Adichie also discusses the problem with the word "allowed". She attaches a term she calls "feminism lite" in relation to the term "allowed," using the following example: "Philip May is known in politics as a man who has taken a back seat and allowed his wife, Theresa, to shine" (Adichie 21). The word "allowed" is demeaning to women because he should not have to "allow" his wife to be a part of politics. Women should not have to be given permission to have power, that should be a fundamental right. Throughout *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie points out the problems with the ways language reinforces patriarchal values.

## Power Dynamics

Many of Adichie's works of fiction and nonfiction represent the various ways in which uneven power structures affect societies and individuals. By focusing on gender inequality, colonization, racism, class inequity, and related topics, she navigates the implications of what it means to have or not have power.

## Sex and Sexuality

Both Adichie's fiction and nonfiction is generally sex-positive, even if it is heteronormative. The sexual empowerment of women, her work suggests, is a feminist issue. Her work also often suggests that sex is most satisfying if the parties involved are emotionally intimate. Adichie also writes about sexual violence in various works of fiction, emphasizing the role of toxic masculinity in perpetuation violence against women.

## The American Dream

Adichie explores the theme of the American Dream in several of her short stories featuring immigrant characters and also in the novel *Americanah*. These texts suggest that the American Dream is something of a mirage, offering false hope to those who move to the United States in pursuit of upward mobility. Most of the characters in Adichie's works that have this

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## 3: Bibliography

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### Suggested Readings: Primary Sources

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## 4: CRITICAL ANALYSES

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## 4.1: "A Feminist Approach to Reclaiming Sex, Sexuality, and Sensuality" By Brittany Blagburn

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A Feminist Approach to Reclaiming Sex, Sexuality, and Sensuality

By Brittany Blagburn

As a public figure and well-recognized feminist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's writing during the course of her career has addressed feminist issues, if not always directly or explicitly, in both Euro-American and Nigerian societies. She touches on topics such as employment, education, and family structures. One theme that is present throughout Adichie's body of work is sex. Her stories and novels feature characters, both male and female, interacting sexually. In her civil war novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, set during the Biafran revolution, Adichie manages to reclaim sex, sexuality, and sensuality for her female characters by destigmatizing their enjoyment of those kinds of experiences. Moreover, her feminist rhetoric, articulated in her nonfiction manifestos, *Dear Ijeawele, or, A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* and *We Should All Be Feminists*, solidifies her reclaiming of sex, sexuality, and sensuality for real women as well.

Sex is a natural and biological human action. As such, the inclusion of sex in Adichie's writing is also a natural action. Adichie works to create authenticity in her books through her portrayal of realistic characters acting in ordinary and everyday ways: "I was determined to make my novel[s] about what I like to think of as the *grittiness* of being human—[...] book[s] about relationships, about people who have sex and eat food and laugh, about people who are fierce consumers of life" ("African" 50-1). At its very core, Adichie's writing is about the human experience — of which sex is one primary, and ever-present factor. She does not stray from portraying all aspects of human life, even those that may be deemed indecent by certain audiences. By fully understanding and addressing sex and sexuality as being inherent parts of humanity, Adichie begins to break down the shame and stigma that surround these topics for cisgender and heterosexual women. One way that Adichie challenges these stigmas is through her feminist linguistics and rhetoric.

In order to create an environment free of the traditional shame and stigma attached to women's sexuality, all parties involved must reevaluate the language used to address these topics. Adichie recognizes that she must be very intentional in the language she elects to use in her writing due to the way that language is foundational to shaping how people think about particular topics. She must actively make the decision to carefully curate the rhetoric she uses in her writing. Adichie notes that: "Language is the repository of our prejudices, our beliefs, our assumptions" (*Dear Ijeawele* 26). Language is essential in breaking down barriers related to sexual stigmas and creating a space for Adichie to elaborate on the ways in which sex and sexuality are interconnected with feminism. It is a key component in shaping minds and opinions. As such, Adichie intentionally works to choose language in her writing that will push back against antifeminist "prejudices," "beliefs," and "assumptions." Many of the antifeminist "prejudices," "belief," and "assumptions" that Adichie challenges through her writing have to do with what society teaches young children about sexuality.

Society establishes stark differences in the way it expects children to learn how to view sex and their own sexuality in relation to their gender. Girls are taught modesty and restraint while their male counterparts are not. Their sexual education is not equal, which creates a collection of differences of how they are expected to conduct themselves as potentially sexually active adults. These differences result in young women having a vastly different understanding of their sexuality and how it is meant to play out in the wider world: "We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the ways boys are" (*We Should All Be Feminists* 32). Adichie brings attention to the way that children are educated differently about sex and sexuality in order to point out the flaws in doing so. By teaching girls differently than young boys, they are forced into societal conventions that center on them being pure and virtuous. Pushing young women into this thought process about themselves and their bodies results in the internalization of sexual shame and stigma instead of sexual empowerment and autonomy. Young women must actively seek to challenge the sexual expectations placed upon them by society in order to take charge of their own sexuality.

To challenge the idea that men and women are meant to experience their sexuality in two separate ways, Adichie introduces her readers to the twins Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. They are both full owners of their sexuality from the first moment that they are introduced to readers. For the sisters, sex is much more than a procreative expectation. Even when Olanna and Odenigbo, her eventual husband, make the decision to attempt to conceive a child together, their sexuality is not pushed aside for the sole purpose of completing a task: "Afterward, she felt happy knowing that some of the sweat on her body was his and some of the sweat on his body was hers" (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 136). Olanna's pleasure is still paramount in the encounter because she chooses to actively prioritize it. She refuses to allow either herself or Odenigbo to trade sex for pleasure with sex for a biological

function. In having her do this, Adichie allows Olanna to claim full ownership of sex and make her an active participant in her own sexuality regardless of the fact that she is a woman who has been taught otherwise by the society in which she lives.

Much like her sister, Kainene also exerts her own sexuality without regard for societal conventions regarding women and sex. She views it as something intrinsic and as such sees no reason to find it shameful. The approach that Kainene takes to sex and sexuality, in which she views both as being completely normal and natural, challenges existing views on the same topics as a result of her status as a woman. As a woman, she is expected to conform to societal conventions that aim to take sexual autonomy away from women and limit their own sexuality. However, Kainene asserts the right to her own sexuality and fights against the notion that as a woman her sex life is the concern of anyone other than herself, especially a man: “My choice of lovers is none of your business, Udodi” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 101). She chooses to combat the idea that the sexuality of a woman must be expressed in a manner that is different from that of her male counterparts. Her belief is that both men and women are entitled to be as sexually active as they wish without any interference or judgment from uninvolved outside parties. By asserting this belief in a simple and utterly convincing manner, Adichie, through Kainene, stresses the importance of this idea as well as its unrevolutionary nature. She views this as something that should be a basic sexual right for all. Kainene refuses to allow her sexuality to be something that can be defined for her by accepting all parts of it.

In claiming all aspects of their sexuality, the twins also manage to claim all aspects of sex. For Olanna, it is more than just a biological function or a source of pleasure. She utilizes it as a way to understand her emotions as well. After the death of her extended family in Kano as a result of anti-Igbo violence, Olanna turns to sex with her husband in order to process the horrific things she has seen: “She caressed his neck, buried her fingers in his dense hair, and when he slid into her, she thought about Arize’s pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken, skin stretched that taut. She started to cry” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 201). Adichie’s sexual liberation of Olanna and other female characters offers them the chance to utilize sex in a variety of ways. By claiming sex and all its facets as a woman’s inherent right, Olanna is able to use it as a moment of catharsis while in emotional crisis. Olanna can claim sex as something that belongs entirely to herself regardless of her status as a woman because Adichie’s characterization of her female characters sees them as fully realized human beings who take charge of their sexuality despite the patriarchal society in which they live. The assertion of sex and sexuality as two multifaceted parts of the lives of Adichie’s female characters is dependent on the way they link them to other parts of their life and psyche.

As seen throughout Olanna’s relationship with Odenigbo, sex can be emotionally driven and almost therapeutic when the parties take a direct and intentional role in the experience. Olanna makes the decision to link her sexuality with her mental healing process while trying to return to her life after the violent death of her extended family. She claims her sexuality in all parts of her life and does not shy away from it in her more intensely emotional moments. In her article “Sex as Synecdoche: Intimate Languages of Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Aminatta Forna’s *The Memory of Love*,” Zoë Norridge argues that “sexuality and awareness of suffering are intricately interlinked” (Norridge 22) and that sex “opens up a language of intimacy, a language of the body, a way of speaking about close physical and emotional contact” (Norridge 30). The sexual experiences of both twins speak to sex being utilized as a language of intimacy even in the most painful instances. They actively choose to claim it as such in order to lay claim to what belongs to them alone, not the society in which they live. In doing so, they assert their right to their own sexuality, and sexual relationships, on their own terms. Adichie gives her female characters the opportunity to process both themselves and the world around them through sex even when the greater society in which they live would frown upon such actions as a result of their status as women.

The communicative nature of sex is also something that the twins claim as their own. At the beginning of Kainene’s relationship with Richard, their attempts at physical intimacy are plagued by difficulties. The couple, despite their cultural and racial differences, builds their relationship on a foundation of physical and sexual attraction. While Richard experiences erectile dysfunction in multiple instances and is anxious as a result, Kainene remains calm and collective: “The next afternoon, Richard sat up in bed naked, looking down at Kainene. He had just failed her again. [...] ‘We’ll give it time,’ she said. ‘And there are other ways’” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 85). Even though the couple’s inability to be sexually active could mark a level of nervousness or even disinterest, Kainene is comfortable enough in her sexuality and her own experiences that she simply accepts the situation that she is presented with, knowing that they will find a way to move forward together. Kainene views this sexual encounter as something that is meant to satisfy her physical needs and understands that there are other ways for Richard to please her. Her flexibility in the situation demonstrates her ability to lay claim to all her sexual experiences, even those that may stumble across problems on occasion. She realizes that in order to recognize her sexuality as something belonging to herself, she must recognize all facets of it.

Through Kainene and Richard’s sexual encounters, the two are able to combine the elements of verbal and bodily communication that are foundational in establishing sexual equality in the relationship. While being sexually active the two are able to communicate with each other without the need for words. They are able to use sex as a common language where words fail them. In her article “The Language of Bodies: Violence and the Refusal of Judgment in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*,” Susanne Hillman expands on the concept of sex as a language previously introduced by Norridge, adding

that it can be used as a primary form of communication between individual: “it enables [characters] to articulate feelings that must remain unspoken” (Hillman 100). In the case of Kainene and Richard, the couple’s multiple failed attempts at being sexually intimate are able to communicate information that both parties felt could not be uttered. For Kainene, this information is the fact that she is an active participant in her sexual experiences. She does not simply allow things to happen. Instead, she takes charge of the situation and lays out a foundation for how they will proceed in the future. Even though Kainene actively attempts to lay claim to both sex and her own sexuality as a woman, she does still face a series of challenges as a result of her status as a woman in a male-dominated society.

While Adichie highlights many positive aspects of reclaiming female sexuality, she does not fail to draw attention to elements that can be considered as highlighting the fact that sexual power is unevenly experienced within the greater patriarchal society. From the very beginning of the novel, Olanna and Kainene’s elevated socioeconomic status along with the power and privilege afforded to them as a result of it is ever-present. The two women are afforded opportunities that other women are not because of their societal influence. However, even their high standing in society cannot protect them from the expectations of the world in which they live as a result of their status as young, unmarried women: “The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 44). As women, Olanna and Kainene are meant to be utilized. Their sexuality becomes something that can potentially help their family advance its interests. Whether the twins wish it or not, their bodies are not their own so long as the implication of sex is a viable opportunity for any man around them. At times, the actions of the twins demonstrate their internalization of the societal belief that as women their relationships and interactions with men are centered on sex.

Of the twins, Olanna highlights the internalization of these societal beliefs related to a woman’s sexuality in her actions. After arguing intensely with Odenigbo about his infidelity, which resulted in the conception of a child, Olanna seeks out a sexual outlet to work through her emotions regarding the situation. In what Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba describes in his article “Genocide and Hubristic Masculinity in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*” as “an awkward act of retaliation” (Anyaduba 90), Olanna utilizes Richard to feel better about herself. When Kainene learns of the sexual interaction between her twin and her lover, she demands to know what made Olanna believe such an action would be viewed by anyone as okay: “‘Why did you do it?’ [...] ‘I don’t know Kainene, it wasn’t something I planned. I am so sorry. It was unforgivable’” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 319). As a result of the teachings she received from society about the sexuality of women, Olanna formed a belief that her value was intrinsically linked to her sexual appeal. As such, when her romantic relationship with Odenigbo was in a state of uncertainty, she turned to sex with another man she had a relationship with. Her views regarding the purpose of a woman’s sexuality are tainted by the sexual expectations that were placed on her by the patriarchal society that she grew up in and is still surrounded by. Through the trials that Olanna and Kainene experience at the hands of the expectations of society, Adichie encourages her readers to acknowledge the lack of firm embodiment and theft of sexuality for women of all social classes.

Olanna and Kainene are not the only examples of the lack of bodily autonomy and limited acceptable avenues to express sexuality for women that Adichie creates in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Several of Adichie’s other female characters suffer as women because of their sexuality. Even girls such as Eberechi are not free of the implications of sex and their sexuality. Eberechi is given to an army officer by her parents for sexual favors in order to secure the safety of their family (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 369). In Uwakwe Uchenna David’s article, “Satirized Feminism in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*,” he discusses how through tragic sexual events such as this as well as other instances of sexual and gendered inequality, “Adichie’s themes convey the deprecation of cultural ideals as well as the morality they emphasize” (David 355). Adichie’s highlighting of the struggles that women face as a result of their status as women emphasizes her authorial desire to challenge established societal and cultural values surrounding sex and sexuality for women. These struggles that women face are not centralized to one socioeconomic group. Instead, it affects all women regardless of their station in life. However, it should be noted that less privileged, more vulnerable women are disproportionately affected by this sexual and gendered inequality when compared with women like Olanna and Kainene, who come from a wealthy background. Adichie demonstrates this imbalance not only through named female characters in whom readers have developed understanding and emotional investment, but also in unnamed female characters whose stories remain unfinished.

Through an unnamed bargirl that Olanna and Odenigbo’s houseboy Ugwu sexually assaults, female sexual suffering and exploitation are examined by Adichie. The bargirl is offered no protection from the assertion of power by Ugwu and the other boys in his unit when they are in her bar. Her vulnerable state results in the boys raping the unnamed girl regardless of any factors such as her ethnicity or status as a non-combatant. She has nothing to prevent the violent violation, nor could she do anything other than be physically present: “On the floor, the girl was still. [...] She stared back at him with a calm hate” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 458).

The mere fact that the bargirl is a vulnerable female body in their presence is enough for these boys to steal her autonomy and force themselves on her. She is sexualized even though she does nothing to overtly express her sexuality other than simply existing as a woman. While Ugwu does not initiate the rape of the unnamed bargirl, Adichie’s decision to have him participate in the sexual assault demonstrates the bodily insecurity women are forced to as a result of their sexuality on a daily basis. While the

unnamed girl has a story entirely her own, the sexual assault that she experiences as a result of her sexuality is something that Adichie wants readers to understand that she shares with other women, particularly the countless other women who were sexually assaulted during the very war in which the novel is set, who do not have the protection and privilege awarded to members of higher socioeconomic statuses.

Ever present in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the underlying theme of the sexual suffering of women, specifically women with less socioeconomic privilege. Age, race, ethnicity, and social class provide a woman little to no protection from the actions of views of men. With no assurance of being able to avoid harassment as a result of their sexuality, women, especially poor and working class women, find themselves subjected to unwanted sexual objectification and exploitation. In Augustine H. Assah's article, "Images of Rape in African Fiction: Between the Assumed Fatality of Violence and the Cry for Justice" the reality of the suffering women face at the expense of their sexuality is explored: "Already agonized by generalized suffering and deprivation, female subjects systematically become objects of various forms of sexploitation" (Asaah 347). Women are forced to face a world where they are already disadvantaged in terms of general suffering, their suffering increases, even more, when their sexuality is added into the mix. They are trapped in male-dominated societies that will objectify and sexually exploit them whenever the opportunity arises. Adichie's inclusion of both ends of the sexual empowerment spectrum women experience, even troubling examples of objectification, suffering, exploitation, and violence, demonstrate just how essential it is for inclusive discussions about sex and sexuality to occur. She works to begin the process of opening a feminist dialogue related to sexuality in order to encourage change in both the real world and the fictional ones she crafts.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's commitment to feminism is perceptible both in her everyday life as well as in her fiction. In her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie attempts to reclaim sex, sexuality, and sensuality for her female characters. She does this through her use of destigmatization, feminist rhetoric, as well as her own published feminist beliefs. Adichie points her readers towards the intricately woven connections between sex, power, and privilege with her twin characters, Olanna and Kainene. In highlighting these points of connection, she also accounts for the disempowerment and sexual violence that women of limited power, privilege, and social status often face by way of Eberechi and the unnamed bargirl. Olanna and Kainene demonstrate Adichie's attempts to reclaim sex and sexuality. Both women are sexually liberated and claim all aspects of their sexuality. As Adichie is trying to establish through her reclaiming, sexuality is something that they alone control and have ownership over. However, while the twins may be a prime example of Adichie's attempts to reclaim sex and sexuality for women, as an author she would be remiss to end there. As such, Adichie is sure to also shine a light on the ways that sex can be weaponized against women, which is exactly what her reclaiming is meant to challenge.

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## 4.2: "The Intersection of Race and Romantic Relationships in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" By Isabella D'Aquila

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The Intersection of Race and Romantic Relationships in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

By Isabella D'Aquila

Race in the United States of America is convoluted and filled with nuance. Individuals often interact with their own race and the race of those around them based on the context in which they grew up. One defining difference is location — race in the United States is widely believed to be socially constructed, so those who grew up outside of the U.S. will interpret race relations differently. This theme is apparent throughout much of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, articles, writings, and speeches. She has attested multiple times to the fact that she did not consider herself "Black" until she came to the United States for college, having been born and raised in Nigeria. The protagonist in her novel, *Americanah*, which was loosely based on her own life experiences, has the same experience with her race and identity after coming to the United States.

In *Americanah*, Adichie explores race and its intersection with politics, education, and friendships. However, at its core, *Americanah* is a love story about protagonist Ifemelu and her high school sweetheart, Obinze. Some of the most critical intersections, however, happen in the relationships that lead her back to him after years of separation. Adichie explores the intersection of race and romantic relationships through two of Ifemelu's love interests — one with a white man, Curt, and one with an African American man, Blaine. After a tumultuous end to her relationship with Curt, Ifemelu enters into a relationship with Blaine, a professor, and quickly realizes that there are differences between the African immigrant experience in America and the African American experience. Through these relationships, Adichie demonstrates how multifaceted race in the United States is and shows that race goes far deeper than the color of your skin tone; Ifemelu's relationship quarrels based around race do not disappear when she goes from dating a white man to a Black man, but take different forms. Through Ifemelu's interactions with her romantic partners, Adichie demonstrates that national identity, culture, and class are just as important to how Ifemelu negotiates her identity as the color of her skin.

In order to understand how race intersects with the romantic relationships in Ifemelu's life, it is important to first understand the construction of race in the United States. The identity of the United States is unique, as compared to other nations, because while the country was built on the idea of being a melting pot of immigrants from many countries, those immigrants were primarily white and European. This created systemic Eurocentrism, or white supremacy, that informs the nation's racial power dynamics. For one, the United States was formed through displacing and killing millions of people indigenous to the Americas. Then, the transatlantic slave trade exploited the millions of Africans forced into slavery in the United States, deepening the cultural and political investment in racial inequality. The recent Black Lives Matter movement has brought to light a long history of rampant police violence and brutality against Black Americans. Ava Landry, in her article "Black Is Black Is Black?: African Immigrant Acculturation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*," explains how the history of slavery in the United States has informed the development of people's identities. She writes, "the construction of Blackness is a social project with ideological and material implications. African Americans are bound together by not only the presence of outward physical similarities but also a collective history of American slavery and racial subjecthood" (Landry 127). A racial hierarchy was established hundreds of years ago in the early days of this country.

One of Ifemelu's first relationships in the United States is with Curt, a wealthy white man and the cousin of one of Ifemelu's employers. Curt is wealthier than Ifemelu, older than Ifemelu, and more socially connected than she is. However, the defining difference within their relationship is their race: Curt is white; Ifemelu is Black. This difference is not only defined within the context of their own personal relationship, but also in the way that people around them interpret and react to their relationship. Adichie writes, "Curt had never been with a black woman; he told [Ifemelu] this after their first time, in his penthouse apartment. . . with a self-mocking toss of his head, as if this were something he should have done long ago but had somehow neglected" (Adichie 240). This passage shows an objectification and exoticization of a Black woman in America, something that has been seen since the early days of American slave history. There is a dark history of white slave owners inflicting sexual violence onto enslaved women, and using their power and ownership of them to do whatever they wished to their bodies. They were physical objects, both sexually and materially: a means of work, not human beings. To Curt, he is not just having sex with a woman when he had sex with Ifemelu — he is having sex with a *Black* woman. This objectification of Black women began with the Atlantic Slave Trade, which April Haynes describes in her article "How Did It Feel? Open Secrets about Sex and Race in Early

America.” She notes the “cannibalistic dimensions of Atlantic slavery — consumption of people as commodities” (Haynes 159). African women were initially brought to the United States as commodities, meant to be bought, sold, and consumed as capitalist items. Therefore, it is not a surprise that African American and non-American Black women are so heavily objectified in modern relationships and media, especially interracial relationships. A study of interracial dating from Sherelyn Yancey and George Yancey hypothesized that white individuals seek out interracial relationships more so than racial minorities do (337). Based on this study, it is not surprising that in *Americanah*, Adichie makes Curt Ifemelu’s pursuer, rather than the other way around. Black women are separated from women of different races and ethnic backgrounds, treated as a commodity that men check off their list of experiences to have.

Race is also central to the way people outside of their relationship perceive Curt and Ifemelu together; they are not simply a man and a woman together, or even a beautiful man and woman together. They are a Black woman and a white man. Ifemelu experiences a negative response to their relationship when one day “she stood hand in hand with Curt in front of a tray of apples, [and] a black man walked past and muttered, ‘You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?’” (Adichie 263). This interaction demonstrates the caste system that is present between Black and white people living in America. Landry explains this, “the degradation of black bodies is foundational to the structure of US society. Whiteness and Blackness are relational and contingent because white advantage cannot be constructed and maintained without black disadvantage” (129). White privilege cannot exist without Black lack-of-privilege, and people place these expectations and societal standards onto Curt and Ifemelu’s relationship, without even understanding the intimate intricacies that exist in their personal lives. By being with Curt, this man could also assume that Ifemelu is degrading herself in order to present a fantasy of domination for a white man. She is perceived to be recreating the power system between a white slave owner and his slave that was wrought with sexual violence and abuse. This moment does not just reflect on their relationship, but Ifemelu internalizes this man’s words. She “felt dispirited and . . . drove to the beauty supply store and ran her fingers through small bundles of silky straight weaves” (Adichie 264). Hair is an important facet of self expression and cultural expression, and particularly for Black women, whose bodies are constantly under surveillance. At this moment, Ifemelu feels that there is something wrong with her hair. It makes her feel inferior to her partner and causes her to call her styling choices into question. The man at the farmer’s market has placed ideas and standards about race and relationships onto Ifemelu and Curt, and it has caused Ifemelu to have an identity crisis of her own.

Ifemelu herself sees how much of an issue race can be, especially in interracial relationships, even if she does not when she is with Curt. After her relationship with Curt has come to an end and Ifemelu is well into her next relationship with Blaine, she is offered the opportunity to discuss the idea with a Black Haitian woman at a dinner party in Manhattan. This woman does not perceive race as having been an issue in her long term relationship with a white man, and Ifemelu cannot keep herself from correcting her:

The only reason that you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it’s a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. . . We don’t tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and things we wish they understood better, because we’re worried they will say we’re overreacting, or we’re being too sensitive. (Adichie 359)

Race is central within an interracial relationship, especially when outside of the four walls of one’s home, which is how Ifemelu understands it. In Ifemelu and Curt’s relationship, this racial divide between them creates barriers for Curt to fully understand Ifemelu. He does not understand what it means to be a Black woman, specifically an African immigrant, in America. Ifemelu cites multiple occasions where Curt does not seem to fully understand her, and this drives her to feel disconnected from him.

The relationship between Curt and Ifemelu ends in a less than satisfactory way: Ifemelu cheats on Curt. Interestingly, her discussion with Curt afterwards becomes one centered around race rather than the actual cheating. After Ifemelu tells Curt that she has cheated on him, Curt asks not only who the man is but also whether he was white, which takes Ifemelu by surprise (Adichie 356). Curt asking Ifemelu the race of the man she cheated with might seem irrelevant, but it could have offered a simple explanation for Curt. If Ifemelu had cheated on him with a Black man, it would have been clear to Curt, at least in his mind, that he was inadequate solely based on his whiteness. Ifemelu wanted a Black man. It would not point to other possible inadequacies he had or any of the ways she felt unsatisfied in their relationship.

Ifemelu experiences a sense of uncertainty in her relationship with Curt prior to cheating, and feels a loss or displacement of self following the breakup. H. Oby Okolocha offers a possible explanation for this sense of displacement in their article “Negotiating Race, Identity & Homecoming in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Pede Hollist’s *So the Path Does Not Die*.” For many immigrants, the reality of migrating is filled with psychological and physical displacement as well as the complete disillusionment in the system placed in front of them. Okolocha says, “the circumstances leading to migration are diverse but many instances of migration are geared towards a desire for something better than what exists in the home nation”

(144). By sleeping with Rob, Ifemelu finds a way out of her unsatisfying relationship with Curt. On the other side of the end of their relationship was a possibility better than what she was living through. However, the reality of immigration often quickly shines through, as Okolocha writes, “the young women find that the reality of America greatly differs from their expectations” (145). The same applies to Ifemelu cheating on Curt. The reality of cheating on her significant other greatly disillusioned her: “it puzzled her, the ability of romantic love to mutate, how quickly a loved one could become a stranger . . . her relationship with Curt was what she wanted, a crested wave in her life, and yet she had taken an axe and hacked at it” (Adichie 357-358). This is not to say that Ifemelu cheated on Curt thinking things would go over well. However, she becomes disillusioned by the fact that her relationship seemed better once it was in the rear view mirror, just as life in the United States might not be as great as some immigrants will come to see it as.

Based on the way racial differences shaped Ifemelu's experiences with Curt, one could assume that having a Black partner would make her romantic life much easier. However, racial identity is far more nuanced than just the simple color of one's skin as is demonstrated through Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine. Blaine is African American, making his skin color arguably the same as Ifemelu's, but race remains a source of contention in their relationship as they demonstrate the differences between the experience of an African American and an African immigrant. This becomes clear when Ifemelu does not show up for a protest to support a colleague who experienced racial profiling on the college campus where they work. Blaine, who organizes the protest, is furious that Ifemelu is not similarly invested in the situation. Blaine calls Ifemelu lazy, and Ifemelu “recognized, in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American” (Adichie 428). This altercation between the couple, which begins a period of not speaking to one another for nine days, is indicative of some of the differences between Africans in America and African Americans. Though police brutality and racial profiling has a long and fraught history in the United States, Ifemelu does not feel as angered or affected by it as Blaine does, perhaps she has lived her entire life as a Black person in the United States the way he has.

Ifemelu does not identify as an “American Black,” and she, in fact, did not identify as being Black until she came to the United States. In her blog, Ifemelu does a series of posts titled “Understanding America for the Non American Black.” She explores cultural phenomena in the United States that those raised outside might not understand, such as American Tribalism, the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), and the appeal of Obama's candidacy. Ifemelu also explores what it means to be labeled “Black” when coming from a country that did not evaluate race the same way as Americans do. She tells her readers that Americans do not care if you are from Ghana or Jamaica or anywhere else — you are simply Black, and you are shouldering all of the societal and cultural norms and expectations around being Black whether you want to or not (Adichie 274). Mindi McMann explains this idea in her article ““You're Black”: Transnational perceptions of race in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*.” She writes, “being black becomes equated with a distinctly racist and hierarchical American experience for Ifemelu — an experience that is often foisted on her” (211). Blaine is trying to force the experience of American Blackness on Ifemelu by wanting her to engage in the same causes he does, even if she does not feel it aligns with her own personal experience as a Black immigrant.

Barack Obama and his presidential candidacy exposed continued inequities in racial perception in the United States. Many Americans said we “weren't ready” for a Black president, despite the qualifications Obama presented. His campaign became something for Blaine and Ifemelu to connect and bond over during a tumultuous time in their relationship. Susanna Dilliplane, in her article “Race, Rhetoric, and Running for President: Unpacking the Significance of Barack Obama's ‘A More Perfect Union’ Speech,” breaks down how Obama pulled people into his campaign using rhetorical strategies: “complex historical and contemporary dynamics of African American oratory, Black churches, race relations, and American politics” are some of the many reasons why his “A More Perfect Union” speech was significant. This is likely part of the reason that Blaine feels such a connection to Barack Obama's political campaign — he is tying it to roots that make up his genealogical and self identity. However, that is not the case for everyone in Blaine's family. His sister, Shan, a writer, does not have the same level of passion regarding Obama as Ifemelu and Blaine do. When Ifemelu asks Shan, “Isn't Obama exciting?” Shan responds, “Oh. I'm not following this election.” (Adichie 445). Despite the fact that Obama is greatly appealing to the plight of African Americans, Ifemelu still feels connected to his campaign. In this instance, Shan has let Ifemelu down, because she would have expected an African American woman to feel connected to and fight for his campaign. This is not to say that every single person of color needs to vote for the only other candidate of color running in an election. It does show that, while sometimes skin color was not enough to keep Blaine and Ifemelu connected, on the issue of Obama, it is. It does not matter that Ifemelu is “African Black” and Blaine is “American Black;” they were both Black, and they were able to come behind the policies and campaign goals of a Black presidential candidate together, and that was enough at the time. Obama's campaign appealed to many minorities, as he showed that people could persevere in a racialized United States with ingrained hierarchies and institutionalized forms of oppression.

Despite the fact that Obama's presidential campaign offers bonding opportunities and a moment of reprieve in the tensions of Blaine and Ifemelu's relationship, their shared racial affiliation is not enough to prevent misunderstanding based on their cultural differences. Ifemelu examines her own jealousies regarding Blaine's relationships with his ex-girlfriend, Paula, offering a way to

understand how race and nationality intersect. Like Blaine, Paula immerses herself in activist and intellectual work, but she is also white. Her education status is closer to Blaine's than Ifemelu's — Paula and Blaine both have graduate degrees and continue to work in academia, whereas Ifemelu only has a Bachelor's. In reflecting on how Blaine interacts with Paula as compared to her, Ifemelu looks at the differences between nationalities; Blaine and Paula are both American, whereas Ifemelu is Nigerian. It does not matter to her that she and Blaine are both Black and Paula is white. Adichie says to Blaine, "For you and Paula, fried chicken is battered. For me, fried chicken has no batter. I just thought about how you both have a lot in common." This relates back to transnational identities, and how a transnational identity can overcome a racial identity. McCann explores this in her article; Ifemelu has been called Black in the most unsophisticated terms. She is Black based only on the color of her skin tone, nothing else, and the same goes for Blaine. However, they both have identities that go far, far deeper than that, and this "Black" identity fails to acknowledge it. Ifemelu has experienced diaspora and displacement on multiple levels. Because of the trauma that immigration can cause, Ifemelu still feels a strong connection to her Nigerian identity and descent. She has not fully assimilated or acculturated to American identities and customs, so, being the same "race" or "color" as Blaine does not fully fix her relationship issues; their national and cultural identities still remain a source of significant difference between them.

Romantic relationships are about far more than just the color of each individual's skin tone. However, when someone is witnessing your relationship from the outside, if one individual is Black and the other is white, it might be the only thing that they can see. Curt and Ifemelu's relationship demonstrates how family and strangers will judge a relationship based on the fact that the individuals are different skin colors. So, when reading *Americanah*, one can assume that those relationship issues will be remedied when Ifemelu begins dating a Black man. However, this is not the case. The African American identity is heavily rooted in a shared history of slavery started with the Atlantic Slave Trade, and what it meant to become "free men," but still live through constant oppression and prejudice, with a system constantly meant to tear them down. Ifemelu does not have this same shared identification with African Americans, despite sharing the same skin color, as many white Americans might assume. This book, particularly Ifemelu's relationships, show us that skin color is really only skin deep; instead, our identities are made up of so much more than that.

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## 4.3: "War and Sexual Violence- An Analysis of Ugwu in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" By Anna Keller

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War and Sexual Violence: An Analysis of Ugwu in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

By Anna Keller

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie illuminates the crux of humanity in her historical novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. She creates certain tensions that exist between characters' actions and their extraneous circumstances that hinge upon the violence of war. Ugwu is an incredibly complex character whose actions drive the plot forward significantly. He is transformed from an innocent, young boy with typical human desires to somebody who commits sexual violence, and what makes the narrative all the more tragic is that war shapes all his experiences. Ultimately, although Ugwu commits a heinous crime, Adichie compels readers to sympathize with him through graphically illustrating his endearing qualities and firsthand war traumas, all the while eliciting questions about what role masculinity and power play in the perpetration of sexual violence.

Ugwu comes across as an eager and excited character, who aims to please those around him. When he imagines giving Nnesinachi chicken to get her to notice him, the gesture is innocent enough (Adichie 9). Additionally, he continuously calls Odenigbo "sah" even after Odenigbo repeatedly asks him to stop (Adichie 17). However, we see this innocence later devolve into deplorable violence. When he kisses Eberechi, the first woman he has romantic feelings for and fosters an emotional connection with, he still sexualizes and dehumanizes her. He notices Eberechi's "perfectly rounded buttocks" (Adichie 252). The novel explicitly points out that her buttocks are the very first thing he notices about her. She also pushes his hand away when he reaches for her breast (Adichie 446). Then, further attempting to sexualize their encounter, he hastily "[slips] his hand under her skirt" (Adichie 446). He insists, "Just let me see" (Adichie 447). This behavior dehumanizes her, demonstrating his inability to respect her boundaries, which is a hallmark sign of immaturity. In spite of this scene, Adichie immediately gives readers an emotional whiplash by juxtaposing the sexual aggression of the scene with Ugwu's raw, emotional vulnerability: "It didn't matter that she was still seeing the officer. What mattered was the *more* . . ." (Adichie 447). Eberechi, in spite of the way Ugwu sexualizes her, is the first woman he comes to truly care for. Adichie pulls on our heartstrings even more by making Ugwu get conscripted immediately after his encounter with Eberechi, effectively robbing him of his chance to tell her he loves her (Adichie 447). Even though Ugwu sexualizes Eberechi's body, he still cares for her. He cannot cognitively combat the sexist ideals that have been drilled into him from a young age. His asking Eberechi to see up her skirt is a manifestation of the sexist principles in the society Adichie constructs.

Ugwu matures emotionally and sexually throughout the course of the novel only to a certain extent. This incomplete maturation is clarified through his involuntary erection at the scene of gang raping the bartender. However, Adichie plays with foreshadowing, tone, and setting very precisely here because she sets the parameters for a possible validation of Ugwu's sexual assault as a result of the way he is raised to objectify women. He also harbors a certain fear of rejection from his fellow soldiers that contributes to his decision to rape the girl. Ugwu "[suspects] it [will] be important to win High-Tech's respect, and he [will] succeed only by showing nothing of the fear that [is] crawling all over him" (Adichie 449). It is this fear of not being respected or accepted by his comrades that causes him to participate in the rape. Adichie includes Ugwu's fear in order to humanize him to a certain degree in spite of the dehumanization he participates in. This juxtaposition illustrates Adichie's larger thematic revelation in the novel: people placed in challenging situations will make mistakes, and they should still be sympathized with because they are only human.

Some of Ugwu's actions are a mixture of endearing and revolting, which makes his characterization even more confounding. For instance, he wants to feel his own sister's breasts so that he can compare them to Nnesinachi's (Adichie 10). He wonders if "those pointy breasts" would feel "mushy-soft or hard like the unripe fruit from the *ube* tree" (Adichie 9-10). This statement actualizes his sense of entitlement towards young and attractive women. However, this entitlement comes from a larger scope of sexism: young men are encouraged to participate in the objectification of women. Ugwu's socialization complicates his perception of women considerably. In the case of Eberechi, he "[sees] a figure with rounded buttocks leaving the compound and he [wants] to call out, Eberechi! . . ." (Adichie 451). The fact that he is reminded of Eberechi is heart-wrenching, but the gesture is still primarily sexually objectifying in nature. It is also endearing that Ugwu wants to prevent himself from making friends with his comrades, because if those friends die it will be harder to grieve (Adichie 453). Building off of this complex characterization, High-Tech calls Ugwu Target Destroyer after his performance at their last battle (Adichie 458). "Target Destroyer" becomes Ugwu's wartime identity, allowing him to commit atrocities that "regular" Ugwu would not dare dream of.

In contrast to these alarming character qualities, Ugwu also demonstrates humanity and suffers the most directly from the hands of the war, which compels readers to sympathize with his otherwise unforgivable actions. For instance, he acts as a caretaker for Baby, Odenigbo and Olanna's child. He gives her baths, makes her dinner, and plays with her. This caretaking is one way Ugwu becomes family to Olanna and Odenigbo. Another, more complex and multifaceted example is his repulsion at the idea of his sister Anulika as sexually mature. He "[cannot] bear to think of the man's ugly body thrusting into his sister's" (Adichie 151). On the one hand, he may feel protective over his sister, which highlights his human side. But on the other hand, he has internalized that sexual empowerment is a realm that belongs exclusively to men, so he has this compulsion to control Anulika's sexuality. Due to the sexist nature of the society Adichie creates, Ugwu has learned from a young age that men should be "in charge" in more avenues than one, including sex, which alludes to the sexual violence that takes place later in the novel.

Adichie also alludes to the ambiguity concerning Ugwu's violence during the war, and asserts that he is in his own way a victim of the war. His humanity is further actualized when Adichie reveals how angry Ugwu feels on Eberechi's behalf when her parents coerce her to sleep with an army man. Ugwu "would treat her with the respect she [deserves] and do only what she [likes], only what she [wants] him to do" (Adichie 369). This realization is the first explicit proof in the novel that Ugwu likes Eberechi for more than just her body. Additionally, his sadness at the sex positions book not being in their house morphs into a greater sadness at there not being a lot of books in the house in general (Adichie 370). This web of emotions makes Ugwu more sympathetic because he loves books so much that he ends up writing one himself. Ugwu acknowledges that Eberechi is more than just a fantasy to him, for he says Eberechi is "one he [has] come to care for because of what she [says] and [does], and not what he [imagines] she [will] say and do" (Adichie 371). In contrast to Nnesinachi, who is only a fantasy to him, Eberechi is a tangible representation of Ugwu's matured perception of women. Ugwu "[wells] up with a surge of recognition and [wants] to say, over and over, that he [loves] her" (Adichie 371). Of course, as noted above, this moment never occurs. However, even though it never occurs, the moment is crucial to his emotional growth because he is able to express that he loves a woman even if he cannot show it in all the right ways. In this recognition, Ugwu demonstrates *some* emotional growth, which makes his sexual violence significantly harder to interpret.

In her construction of the rape scene, Adichie focuses our attention on the inherent masculinity of war. Adichie explores masculinity in this particular historical context, in the way it is manipulated and exploited for certain causes. This masculinity becomes synonymous with particular kinds of violences, such as sexual assault. War is a historically masculine phenomenon. Once the war begins, Ugwu views the fighting as an avenue of power and assertion. He is immediately thrown into a world of cruelty and darkness that will permanently corrupt his soul. Ugwu has fear mixed with excitement about being a soldier, and it is unclear how much of this supposed excitement is due to Odenigbo imposing his Biafran nationalism on him (Adichie 451). Odenigbo may not impose nationalism on Ugwu intentionally, but he is so dedicated to the cause and Ugwu looks up to him so much that the results are inevitable. Ugwu desperately wants to please Odenigbo, and will go to significant lengths to maintain that relationship. Odenigbo is an early masculine presence in his life, which fosters a deep connection. Due to the nature of the way Odenigbo talks about Biafra, Ugwu also thinks a Biafran landmine sounds "glamorous" (Adichie 451). He may even see the weapon as glamorous because he is associating the weapon to his relationship with Odenigbo. Either way, this dichotomy of emotions has tumultuous effects on both Ugwu and his victim.

Adichie alludes to a split in Ugwu's identity during the war. Although he has sexualized every female figure in his life, even his own sister, his rape of the bartender is still shocking because he is so young and likeable. Ugwu describes his sexual release as "self-loathing," which complicates the atrocity of the deed considerably (Adichie 458). Adichie describes Ugwu as "[unwrapping] his mind from his body, [separating] the two . . ." (Adichie 458). This separation of mind and body exposes the trauma of war and violence, and Adichie narrates the rape in such a way that suggests that Ugwu must have split his mind from his body while violating the girl. He gives into his bodily urges, but in a separate context the rape is mental because he is reclaiming a supposed, false power. The novel has made it explicitly clear that Ugwu struggles with his identity throughout the war. Ugwu "[touches] his own skin and [thinks] of its decay" (Adichie 458). A part of him dies after he rapes the girl, and he perceives his decaying skin as a physical manifestation of his spiritual death. He has basically dehumanized himself now, and so keeps fighting without really experiencing emotion.

Another way Adichie conveys Ugwu's likability is through his diminished pride in the Biafran cause. Ugwu has nightmares of raping the girl, except instead of the bartender he sees Eberechi's face. He wakes up hating himself (Adichie 497). Additionally, Ugwu tearing up his own written work out of insecurity is both endearing and tragic (Adichie 498). All his passion for Biafra gets snuffed out when he faces the reality of the cause. He asks Harrison to turn the radio off when "His Excellency" is about to deliver a speech, and says, "There is no such thing as greatness" (Adichie 500). Ugwu struggles against his despair and self-loathing and tries to cling onto humanity and love. He diminishes his own work when Richard asks him about it, calling the writing a "small thing" (Adichie 508). When Ugwu and the others return to Olanna and Odenigbo's house after the war, he wants to "clean" and "scrub furiously" (Adichie 523). He "[fears], though, that it [will] change nothing" (Adichie 523). Here Ugwu refers to Odenigbo and Olanna's house, but he could be referencing his own spirit, his childlike innocence that existed before war and violence swept over the nation like a bird attacking its prey. What Ugwu really wants to clean and scrub is his soul, and he cannot.

Ugwu's internal conflict is analogous to the lack of unity in both Biafra as a whole and its soldiers. Turning schools into refugee camps, Biafra as a nation cannot provide education much less safety for its citizens. Children starve. The cause they are fighting for becomes moot because they are unable to sustain themselves as a nation. Furthermore, their soldiers are conscripted by force, which fosters disillusionment with the Biafran cause and emotional separation amongst the troops. According to Dara Kay Cohen, "combatant socialization is the explanation for the variation of rape in civil war" (461). What she means is that because the soldiers do not have the natural patriotism necessary for fighting together and social cohesion outside the immediate context of frontline battle, soldiers find alternate methods to bond. She says that gang rape "enables groups with forcibly recruited fighters to create bonds of loyalty and esteem from initial circumstances of fear and mistrust" (461). There is certainly fear and mistrust from Ugwu that Adichie narrates heavily throughout the portion of the novel dedicated to the war. Therein lies a certain tension in the text between the masculinity that Ugwu seeks and the humanity he so desperately attempts to cling onto. In Cohen's scholarship, she asserts that soldiers participate in rape to "revel in a sense of enhanced masculinity" (464). This participation raises the question of what it really means to be masculine, which Adichie explores in depth in her novel. During the rape scene, High-Tech says, "Target Destroyer, aren't you a man?" (Adichie 458). Ugwu feels as though his masculinity is being threatened; the definition of "man" is manipulated in heavily toxic ways in contexts of war. High-Tech believes that to be a respectable man is to sexually dominate a woman against her consent. It is concerning how much rape is normalized in violent contexts.

Additionally, there are patterns of masculinity in war contexts that serve solely to degrade women. Maria Eriksson Baaz interviews Congolese soldiers about rape, and the responses show the dangers of objectifying women. One soldier says that "women are like flowers, and she could also satisfy [his] needs. When you have been in battle it is like a desert, and she could help you with that" (506). Soldiers participate in rape for a variety of reasons, but one primary common denominator is the demonstration of a preconceived, false notion of masculinity. One significant aspect of the rape scene is that it occurs immediately after the Biafran soldiers claim a victory. They are raping this girl in celebration. Ugwu has just been named "Target Destroyer," so his identity has just begun to collapse in on itself. Once this implosion occurs, Ugwu is vulnerable to the pressures that his comrades place on him as well as the larger pressures of a patriarchal Nigerian society. Baaz asserts that their "experiences and performances of masculinities [are] both multiple and incoherent, perpetually evoking a sense of failure at ever arriving at being 'masculine'" (497). Men in war consistently have a distorted idea about what masculinity represents. Congolese soldiers "explicitly [link] their rationale for rape with their inabilities (or 'failures') to inhabit certain idealized notions of heterosexual manhood" (Baaz 497). To soldiers, a lack of sex equals a lack of masculinity. Men's sexuality serves as "a driving force, which, when unleashed by the climate of warring in which 'normal' societal controls are suspended and the rules of warfare reign, easily results in rape" (Baaz 498). One soldier says, "If there is one rotten orange in a bag, it will make all oranges in the sack rot" (Baaz 501). This statement alludes to the gang rape Ugwu participates in because Ugwu experiences the effects of peer pressure from his comrades. Another stipulates that rape is a "problem of the organization of society," meaning that the number of rapes is directly contingent upon the level of poverty and suffering in that society (Baaz 509). In Biafra, for instance, the country is tarnished with war and violence, and as a result the country suffers from high amounts of poverty. People are additionally being displaced in refugee camps. As a result, Adichie gives us two examples where rape becomes a result of the conditions of Biafra: the bartender, and Ugwu's sister, Anulika.

Opportunities for sexual violence seem to change within the framework of war. Baaz says that "previously unthinkable behavior becomes conceivable and even dedramatized through the process of dehumanizing and 'normalization' of violence and killing" (510). The reasons for the violence, the soldiers say, "lie outside of their 'normal' character; instead, violence is induced by drugs and the craziness of war which 'destroys' the otherwise healthy 'minds of the people'" (512). The soldiers' shifting of the blame from themselves to the circumstances highlights the atrocity and tragedy of wartime rape. They insist that the deed is morally wrong, yet they still senselessly justify rape as a means to satisfy their own sexual hunger and assert masculine power. This inaccurate definition of masculinity has damaging effects on society that Adichie displays in her novel. Patriarchy is normal in this society that Adichie represents. There is already a recipe for sexual disaster, but war exacerbates this problem. Sexism and patriarchy is a larger issue within the scope of Nigerian culture.

Adichie ties in the problem of soldiers' perceived masculinity with Ugwu's own personal struggle with masculinity. As it occurs, as soon as High-Tech asks him if he is a "man" he responds accordingly and gets aroused (Adichie 458). Because Ugwu responds to a threat to his masculinity, he rapes the girl not because he is attracted to her but because he has a readily available method to assert his masculinity and power. As a result, Adichie has considerable leverage in her attempt to humanize him at the novel's conclusion because ideals of masculinity are instilled into men from a very young age, and it can take years of careful, deliberate deconstruction to unlearn those toxic principles. Ugwu adapts fairly well to change, especially considering how *much* change he acclimates to in a short period of time. At the bar before he rapes the girl, as he soaks in the victory and undoubtedly contemplates whether he truly feels victorious for contributing to the destruction of innocent lives, he says, "Everything [is] moving so fast. He [is] not living his life; life [is] living him" (Adichie 457). His thoughts reflect the uncanny ability for an instrument as powerful as war to inflict major wounds upon the mind. As a result, he feels a loss of control when fighting because he is forced into the activity. His struggle to recover from a loss of control manifests in his assault of the girl.

Ugwu's rape of the girl in the bar symbolizes a larger distortion of masculinity and power. In Augustine Asaah's rhetoric, she asserts that whether rape is perpetrated in non-conflict contexts or conditions of armed conflict, "[it] is always a patriarchal issue, for it is grounded in the sexist belief that brute force can be used to elicit sexual favor" (336). In Ugwu's case, he is afraid of his comrades' perception of him, specifically that he would be perceived as "weak." His fear of weakness manifests itself in his act of sexual violence, and it could even be perceived that he feels as though he is growing into himself as he rapes the bartender. Asaah says that leadership in militia, particularly adolescent militia, is "bestowed upon those who have caused the most violence to victims and the vulnerable" (349). Ugwu is growing into a masculine identity that fits the ideals he has been exposed to since he was a boy.

Rape is an issue which has roots that are deeply engrained in masculine control. Jeremy Posadas, in his rhetoric, says that "while rape culture is the mechanism that channels toxic masculinity into specific, socially legitimized practices of sexual violence," the solution to "[eradicating] sexual violence" is to "[transform] the apparatuses by which boys are subjectified into toxically masculine men" (178). In other words, changing the ideals that are instilled in men at a young age is key to moving our culture away from rape tolerance. Another deterrent is that women feel inferior and diminished by their experience, and are therefore afraid to speak up. According to Katharine Baker, juries often blame the victim (234). Outward victim-blaming leads to an internalization of sexist ideals and frameworks. Additionally, Baker asserts that men have not internalized the atrocity of rape, which results in a continuation of the vicious cycle. Baker says that rapists "understand rape as a means of acquiring social goods" (235). Ugwu wants to socially and emotionally belong to the group of soldiers since at the time, the soldiers are the only community he has. He is also compelled to assert his power and masculinity in ways that reflect the deeply sexist principles of the culture in which he has been socialized.

The novel ultimately reveals that the book within the book, "The World Was Silent When We Died," is Ugwu's, which grants him a form of redemption. Adichie rehumanizes him at the end of the novel and provides him with a source of power — writing — that amplifies his endearing personality rather than deteriorates his humanity. Throughout the majority of the novel, Ugwu struggles to feel important or validated. As a young adolescent boy who has all these sexual urges without fully understanding women or gender dynamics, coming of age during war where toxic masculinity is at its peak, it is almost no wonder he participates in such violent activities. However, the novel provides him an alternative avenue at its conclusion by making him a writer. In addition to feeling true sorrow and remorse, he is able to voice his struggles through the power of storytelling rather than the power of toxic masculinity, which is a significant improvement. Masculinity, power, war and rape are all interconnected and create a system of sexism through which we see Ugwu. It is also through this system that we are able to see how Ugwu's person is negatively affected. Adichie highlights the complexity of human beings in her novel, and conveys through the war's tragedy that her characters are not defined by their traumas or systems of power. Ugwu is a victim in his own way because he is subject to the same toxic masculinity that he is playing into.

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## 4.4: "Feminism and the Theme of Marriage in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Writing" By Shayla O'Connor

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Feminism and the Theme of Marriage in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Writing

By Shayla O'Connor

Adichie approaches the theme of marriage within her novels by exploring the ways in which unbalanced power dynamics affect participants in relationships. She reflects on both Nigerian and American culture, as well as the immigrant experience in marriages and how different cultural values can affect the perception of a healthy relationship. In her nonfiction feminist writing and in the fictional "The Arrangers of Marriage" and *Americanah*, she discusses the concept of marriage both directly and through characters to convey to the reader how gender dynamics impact a husband and wife. She has cautionary tales, such as Obinze and Kosi, and Chianza and Dave that show that when there is an imbalance of power in a marriage, it is doomed for failure. Adichie's writings show readers when there is mutual respect and an equal partnership, the marriage will thrive. In "We Should All Be Feminists," Adichie discusses many topics, including how to prepare young women for understanding marriage as a concept and what it means for them. She speaks on how to raise young women to respect themselves as people and not place their value in relation to how men perceive them. She talks about the power of words and how to see how feminism within a partnership is to benefit both parties. An example of equal treatment is in her book "Dear Ijeawele" where Adichie says, "Many people believe that a woman's feminist response to a husband's infidelity should be to leave. But I think staying can also be a feminist choice, depending on the context" (Adichie 6). She goes on to describe how it can be a feminist choice if the situation were reversed, should the man decide to stay with his wife if she were unfaithful. By that logic, it is feminist for her to decide to stay with him, and vice versa. It depends on the expectations set up in the marriage, both partners need to be held to the same level of accountability. Unfortunately, in most marriages a man would not forgive a woman, and a woman is most often expected to forgive the man. Adichie describes this reasoning in "Dear Ijeawele" as "gender based- that absurd idea of 'men will be men,' which means having a much lower standard for men" (Adichie 7). In effect, men have the ability to be unfaithful and not face severe consequences, rendering the decision to act on impulse all the easier. By being unfaithful he breaks the trust in his marriage which will either lead to two miserable people stuck together using each other for spousal duties only and no emotional fulfillment, or a divorce.

In "We Should All Be Feminists: The Portrayal of Female Characters in the Novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" Roberta Maierhofer discusses the intentions behind Adichie's feminist principles. Maierhofer states, "Presenting women as being used in marriage, child care and domestic work, feminists believe in a healthy coexistence between both sexes. She calls herself a Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men. She tries to reject the negative idea about feminism in terms of hatred feminists feel for men" (Maierhofer 11). This is important in removing the stigma the term 'feminism' carries. It is not only a pro-woman movement, but a pro-everyone movement. Equality between men and women is mutually beneficial in a relationship, choosing to not take away a woman's power does not result in a weaker man, but a stronger team.

Within her works of fiction, Adichie's main focus is not often the struggles of women, but rather the experiences women go through and how they can be shaped by patriarchal values. The experiences are not all necessarily negative but focus on how society fixates on how women exist in relation to men, rather than independently as their own person. This is an important observation to make when understanding the role of gender in our society. Maierhofer comments on Adichie's portrayal of gender inequality, saying, "Through her characters she tries to present her ideas not only about gender equality, but about women in general. When she talks about gender inequality, she talks about Nigeria, especially the Igbo society where women are still treated very differently" (Maierhofer 5). By analyzing Adichie's intention through this lens, we can understand that her focus is not narrowed to the wrongdoings men do against women, but rather the experience they go through together in life, and why it may cause harm. In the paper, "An Examination of Women's voices in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'The Thing Around Your Neck,'" Christy Aisha Olorunfemi discusses a study that pertains to this idea:

Susan Arndt's *The Dynamics of African Feminism* (2002) offers an analysis of theories of African feminism. She highlights African women writers' focus on Womanism, which acknowledges that while women suffer from sexism, women and men in African societies are both victims of oppressive and corrupt systems, necessitating solidarity and efforts to eliminate inequalities not only for women, but for all people. (Olorunfemi 32)

The most obvious ways in which women's lives are directly affected by men is within a marriage, and so it is an easy tool to use within a narrative to exemplify the ways in which women are treated.

It should be noted that in all cases of marriage discussed in Adichie's literature, they are always heterosexual. Adichie chooses not to explore the relationship dynamics between a couple in the LGBTQ+ community, as in those relationships there is a different balance of power, distribution of resources, and style of communication. In a 2014 paper published by Dr. O. A. Odiase-Alegimenlen and Jacob Osamagiagiemwen Garuba, they describe the legal situation of same sex marriage in Nigeria. They wrote, "The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013 which is the extant law in Nigeria prohibits and criminalises marriage contract or civil union between persons of same sex" (Alegimenlen and Osamagiagiemwen 281). The law has been heavily criticized as it has been used to arrest and attack men who are suspected of being gay when in a public space. A theory as to the absence of same-sex relationships in her literature may be to assume that because it is not as widely accepted in Nigeria as in the US at this time, Adichie may inherently not be overly accepting of it. However, in a 2014 conference she said,

On what basis is homosexuality a crime? Adults do no harm to society in how they love and whom they love. This is a law that will not prevent crime, but will, instead, lead to crimes of violence: there are already, in different parts of Nigeria, attacks on people 'suspected' of being gay. Ours is a society where men are openly affectionate with one another. Men hold hands. Men hug each other. Shall we now arrest friends who share a hotel room, or who walk side by side? How do we determine the clunky expressions in the law — "mutually beneficial," "directly or indirectly?" (qtd. in King)

Another theory is, she may not want to alienate her audience of readers in Africa who do agree with the law. From a bookseller's perspective she might avoid LGBTQ+ themes as a way of making money. According to a 2015 BBC report, "Nigeria Poll Suggests 87% Oppose Gay Rights." A 2015 US poll found that, "A 60% of Americans supported same-sex marriage, 37% opposed, and 3% had no opinion" (McCarthy). There was a dramatic difference in opinion that may have held sway over the kind of content she decided to make. It may be an economic strategy, or perhaps just a personal choice given that she does not feel comfortable describing characters in which she does not fully understand their experience. Regardless, of the reason the absence of same sex marriage noticeable especially as she so heavily focuses on relationships in her body of work. Perhaps the focus on cisgendered, heterosexual relationships is due to her intention to ground the reader in a feminist lens that relationships are mostly shaped by the patriarchy. LGBTQ+ relationships often are forged against patriarchal norms, including gay relationships, and so by not including them, she specifically investigates how heterosexual partnerships are informed by their patriarchal contexts.

In "The Arrangers of Marriage," Adichie explores the ways in which our society normalizes marital expectations that serve to satisfy men's desires while forcing women to adopt a position of subservience, often requiring them to relinquish their own personal ambitions for the sake of their husbands. The character, Chianza, is asked to sacrifice her own identity by being forced to adapt to American culture by means of cutting off her Nigerian roots. Dave, her husband, tries to force her to adopt a new persona by pushing a new anglicized name onto her, in a way trying to strip her of her sole identifier to mold her into something that better fits his American lifestyle. He says, "You don't understand how it works in this country...you have to use your English name here" (Adichie 172). This is not only a blatant lie, but an attempt to wield the power he has of having more knowledge on American culture over her to manipulate her into doing what he wants. Dave does not view Chianza as an equal and it is evident in the way he holds no regard for her thoughts, feelings or personhood. The language specifically, "you have" is a demand, he is not presenting this as a choice for Chianza to make for herself. As her husband, and self-appointed teacher on all things American, he resorts to bullying from a place of entitlement that stems from a masculine culture that has empowered him to feel superior to women.

Dave is not asked to change anything about himself to better suit Chianza's needs within the relationship. The entire burden of conformity is pushed upon the woman and normalized by Chianza's family members who obviously expect compliance from her. This struggle of traditional identity in a new environment is also studied by Joane Nagel in her paper "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture." She writes, "Ethnic identity, is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designations—i.e., what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is" (Nagel 154). This correlates to Chianza and Dave's situation in the way that there is a disconnect in how they perceive the Nigerian immigrant experience. Chianza takes pride in her cultural history, traditions, food, clothes and past, she shows joy at participating in cultural norms like when she cooks him coconut rice. She was so happy to share the meal with him, and he would not even indulge her saying, "I don't want to be known as the people who fill the building with scents of foreign food" (Adichie 179). Dave finds it all to be shameful, something to be repressed in favor of an American identity. This conflict of insider vs outsider perceptions takes a toll on their marriage. Dave is hyper aware of outsider opinions and acts accordingly to try and blend in as much as possible. Chianza is much more internally focused and does not see her heritage as something that needs to be hidden because to her it is not a lesser comparison to Americanism. Adichie shows both sides of this argument in hopes that the reader understands the Black, woman, immigrant experience when they come to America via marriage. There are unspoken expectations that exist to take away the woman's agency, empower the man in the relationship, and ultimately shift her identity. Dave's identity also consists entirely of his ability to conform to American society and be accepted. He must erase parts of himself, his roots, and his heritage in order to present a more 'palatable' version of himself and achieve professional success, connections, and status. All of those things are necessary for him to fulfill his masculine role of husband. He is also trapped by not being able to be authentic, and his need to hold power

over Chianza is entirely due to his desire to feel more masculine by trying to make her weak in comparison.

Adichie shows the way that women face unique struggles within marriage that men simply do not. It is the woman's duty to maintain the marriage by making the man happy, because she is stripped of her independence, her very survival depends on it. Chianza's struggle is also unique to her situation specifically as a female immigrant. The difference in power dynamics, in this case with Dave carrying the citizenship, the papers, the house, and all connections in America, oppresses Chianza by the very nature of being in a relationship with someone who has absolute control over all the aspects of life she relies on for survival. Other women who are not immigrants will not go through the exact same hardships in a marriage because the option to divorce is not as catastrophic. An American woman still has privileges due to her citizenship that allow her to survive more easily without a husband. Furthermore, a male immigrant would also have a different experience because the inherent power imbalance that comes with a male/female marriage in our society would not be working against his favor. It would be more difficult for him to be abused in the same way. Additionally, Chianza is let down by the U.S. government, which does not offer resources to help support her leaving this toxic marriage. She is stuck with no option than to be obedient to Ofodile's expectations or face extreme consequences that are unique to her person. Adichie often touches on themes of women who get pressured into agreeing to marriage under false pretenses that in the end result in exploitation and abuse.

Furthermore, in Adichie's novel *Americanah*, the marriage of characters Obinze and Kosi is a central plot point showing the flaws in their partnership and the ways in which society, as well as their own personal expectations have set them up for failure. Their relationship differs greatly from Chianza and Ofodile's relationship. Rather than poor immigrants in a new country that are not receptive to their culture or traditions, they are wealthy and hold a high class status that allows them to live life far more comfortably. However, regardless of their privileges in those aspects, their relationship still suffers similar problems also stemming from a lack of feminism. Kosi has traditional expectations of Obinze fulfilling a head of house role as provider, husband and father. Kosi's narrative foil, and the protagonist Ifemelu has a contrasting attitude towards marriage. She is at times repulsed by it, but when she does consider it, she wants an equal partnership. Adichie shows how women are raised to desire and expect subservient roles and that they will never find true fulfillment as is the case with Kosi. In *Americanah*, Adichie writes, "[Obinze] should not compare, but he did. Ifemelu demanded of him ... She expected to be satisfied, but Kosi did not. Kosi always met his touch with complaisance and sometimes he would imagine her pastor telling her that a wife should have sex with her husband" (569). Kosi is only doing what she has been told to do her entire life, she has not had the opportunity to explore other cultures where it is more acceptable for a woman to pursue her own agency and take what she wants, like Ifemelu. Ifemelu has also had the experience of bearing witness to Auntie Uju's marriage, which exposed her to what she did not want in a relationship regardless of whether it is normalized by those around her or not. She was able to understand her own desires outside the pressures of the status quo. On the other hand, Kosi's goals are to please Obinze in order to maintain her family, rather than out of a love for Obinze himself and the relationship they share together. It is a dutiful act rather than a loving one. Obinze can tell, which is why he is unfaithful; it is not Kosi's fault, but is a consequence of not having a feminist marriage where both parties are equally respected. Kosi does not respect herself, as seen in the text: "her insecurity, so great and so ordinary, silenced him. She was worried about a housegirl whom it would never even occur to him to seduce. Lagos could do this to a woman married to a young and wealthy man" (Adichie 42). She was so insecure that it made Obinze see infidelity as a valid option to take in the marriage because it was clear that Kosi was passive and never going to demand his full respect. Had Kosi given herself more agency, authority, and ability to express her own passions, Obinze would have felt desire and perhaps not betrayed her. Again, it is not Kosi's responsibility to keep Obinze from cheating on her, but what is lacking in their relationship is what is abundant with Ifemelu, and that is having someone be an active participant. Kosi already has what she wants; she has reached her life's goal with Obinze and just needs to maintain it all.

On the other hand, Ifemelu does not see marriage as the end goal, but rather something she may consider having because it could prove to be mutually beneficial for both her and Obinze. The article "'The Grittiness of Being Human': Individualizing Sexual Expectations in Adichie's Novels" expands on this idea of subservience in marriage. In it, the author states that "Ifemelu clearly defines the woman's sexual role in this culture as one of submission. The women she describes define success as the happiness and wealth of the man that they sleep with, and this does not mesh with Ifemelu's sexual experience or her career goals" (Vaughn 4). Adichie is trying to convey that the best marriages are feminist marriages, where the man and woman are equal. In "We Should All be Feminists," Adichie says, "The best feminist I know is my brother Kene, who is also a kind, good-looking and very masculine young man. My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, 'Yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better.' All of us, women and men, must do better" (Adichie 17). The point here being that a lack of feminism is not an exclusively female problem, on the contrary it is something that affects, and should include, men. In order for true equality to be reached, both women and men must actively work towards the ideal. Adichie comments on how some aspects of Nigerian culture can serve to objectify the woman in the relationship, as well as the man. The mentality of a woman being a prize to be won, one who will act as a servant and take care of the household duties and child rearing, is harmful to everyone involved. The man is reduced to a status based on wealth, family, and resources that the woman is able to possess by her association with him. Adichie writes, "many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never truly have, crippled by

their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists” (Adichie 521). This description further highlights the meaning men and the prospect of marriage have on women and the culture that comes about from being told that the only way to have value and stability is through a man. Ifemelu is unique in that she is independently successful and financially lucrative; she does not *need* Obinze but chooses him because she wants him.

Obinze in kind also finds happiness in a feminist relationship with Ifemelu. As the paper “Shifting intersections: Fluidity of gender and race in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*” elaborates, “After his early years with Ifemelu, who was willing to challenge him on gender issues, Obinze realizes that he enjoys being around women who are not bound by patriarchal gender roles. As Obinze recognizes the restrictive nature of these binary and hierarchical roles, he begins to long for a society and a partner who defies tradition by adopting both conventionally masculine and feminine traits” (Bonvillain 32). This choice creates a healthy relationship where they both have needs that are being fulfilled, but are not toxically codependent. Unfortunately this has the negative consequence of marginalizing Kosi, who truly is a victim of the culture of marriage and subservience in which she was raised.

Ifemelu and Chianza’s relationships are drastically different from one another, with key similarities. They both are Nigerian, immigrant women who end up marrying, but Ifemelu ends up happy whereas Chianza has to stay in an unhappy marriage with the hope that one day she will be able to escape. The difference of endings may be due to their differing material circumstances: Chianza is in a uniquely vulnerable situation, where Ifemelu is not. Chianza lacks the resources to be independent in the way that Ifem is. For Chianza, marriage is not a choice, but a necessary tool for her survival in the United States. With respect to sexuality, *Americanah* is clearly a longer narrative, and thus it goes into more detail about the various sexual relationships characters have. Ifemelu has many intimate relationships that are explored deeply in the novel. Vaughn comments on how other female characters besides Ifemelu view sex with their husbands in *Americanah* by saying, “The women in this novel discuss the expectations for female partners in the actual sexual encounter, which promotes the expectation that woman are not meant to enjoy sex but to use it as a means of reproduction and of pleasing a husband” (Vaughn 18). The significance of the women prioritizing the man’s experience over their own shows the ingrained gendered role of subservience that goes to create an unequal partnership. Kosi’s priority is how to please Obinze rather than seeking pleasure herself out of the relationship. Their marriage is not mutually satisfying because she does not advocate for her own needs, having internalized the sense that they do not matter. This situation is similar to “The Arrangers of Marriage,” in which Chianza’s sexual dissatisfaction is so palpable in the early pages of the story that the reader feels she views sex with her husband as a burden.

In conclusion, Adichie uses the theme of marriage as a narrative device within her books to draw attention to the ways in which partnerships in marriage can be understood through the lens of feminism. Adichie writes through an intersectional feminist lens, showing the experiences of Nigerian women immigrants being both Black and female in an environment that is set up for male success, where the only means of stability is to give in to the intense societal pressures urging them to settle down. She uses characters to show the dangers of marrying men who do not respect women, like Chianza, as well as characters who benefit from marrying men who respect them, such as Ifemelu. When considering the purpose behind the relationships Adichie crafts and what she is trying to convey to her audience, we can better understand the feminist claims she is making about the nature of marriage.

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## 4.5: "Language, Immigration, and Decolonization- An Exploration of the Linguistic Battleground in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Work" By Brynne Volpe

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Language, Immigration, and Decolonization:

An Exploration of the Linguistic Battleground in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Work

By Brynne Volpe

Language is one of the most fundamental aspects of an individual's identity. It has the power to carry both the voice of the individual as well as the voice and history of cultures. This is especially true within the context of ethnolinguistic groups, such as the three largest cultural groups within modern-day Nigeria – the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Additionally, language plays an integral role in the negotiation of cultural identity in the context of the immigrant experience. As a result of European colonization of the African continent, however, language has become a point of contention among various writers and scholars. In 1962, Makerere University College hosted a historic meeting of African writers. This conference, titled "A Conference of African Writers of English Expression," set out to define what exactly African literature is and looks like. The late Chinua Achebe attended this conference just three years after the publication of *Things Fall Apart* and in 1965, he wrote "English and the African Writer" in response to this conference. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o also attended this conference, as an English student at Makerere, and his essay, "The Language of African Literature," though published nearly two decades later, is a direct response to this conference and the ideas it brought up around language, colonization, and African literature. Ngũgĩ and Achebe thus come to represent two opposing approaches to English within the postcolonial context of African nations and identity. On the one hand, Achebe maintains that English is, as a result of colonization, a language that African writers have at their disposal; African writers should not be attacked for choosing to write in English as they are existing within and responding to the cultural ramifications of the project of European colonization. On the other hand, Ngũgĩ maintains that African literature should be written in African languages so as to reclaim the culture and sense of identity that was lost as a result of English being forced upon the continent during colonization. Taking both of these perspectives into account, the contemporary Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, through her characters of Ifemelu and Afamefuna, is able to strike a balance between Ngũgĩ's and Achebe's understandings of how language is and should be used within African literatures. Her fiction, thus, presents language as a means through which the struggles of immigration and decolonization can be understood as interconnected on both the personal and the cultural scales.

Chinua Achebe is widely accepted as one of the fathers of Nigerian literature. His novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is a foundational text across literary canon and has been taught around the world for decades since its publication. Through the perspective of the novel's Igbo protagonist, Okonkwo, *Things Fall Apart* examines the various ways in which European missionaries sought to colonize the African continent as a whole. As a result of the way in which Achebe is able to illustrate the effects of colonization on the individual, *Things Fall Apart* is often understood as the great Nigerian work of literature and the definitive narrative of Nigeria as a nation. Thanks to this, Achebe is also often turned to when discussing what language African literature should be written in. In his article, "English and the African Writer," Achebe maintains that "the national literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa is, or will be, written in English" (Achebe 344). Achebe goes on to explain that while this statement may sound controversial upon first hearing it, it is rather as a result of the European colonization of the African continent that English has largely become the language of Nigerian literature. As a result, Achebe explains that "Those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs, with an eye on the main chance outside their countries. They are by-products of the same processes that made the new nation-states of Africa" (Achebe 344). That is, African writers who choose not to write in African languages should not be understood as appealing to the marketplace and readership of the Western world – as sellouts – but as the products of the systems under which they were raised. African writers who write in English or French are the result of the same system of colonization that has fundamentally and irrevocably shaped and altered the cultures of the continent, and writing in English calls attention to this violence.

In developing this understanding of English as the language of the national literature of many African countries, Achebe goes on to explain that English can be harnessed in a specifically African manner when utilized by African writers. Achebe emphasizes that English can be used and manipulated by the African writer in ways that both brings out their messages and maintains English as a "medium of international exchange" (Achebe 347). That is, the African writer can fashion "an English that is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (Achebe 347). Achebe recognizes English as the product of colonization, and in this recognition, he comes to the understanding that English can be used to the African writer's advantage. English is simply a fact

of life in many postcolonial African nation states and as a result, African writers should be allowed to embrace this fact and use English to tell their stories in a uniquely African manner.

In direct response to Achebe, Ngũgĩ takes the stance that African literature should be written in African languages. In his text, “The Language of African Literature,” Ngũgĩ begins explaining his argument by pushing his readers to acknowledge that “the language of African literature cannot be discussed meaningfully outside the context of those social forces which have made it both an issue demanding our attention and a problem calling for resolution” (Ngũgĩ 4). English is the official language in so many African countries only as a direct result of European colonization. Language is one of the most fundamental aspects of any personal identity, and more importantly, any culture, and because of this fundamental aspect of language, “the domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised” (Ngũgĩ 16). As a result, Ngũgĩ’s belief that African literatures should be written in African languages is one that reflects the project, and the struggle, of intentional decolonization. Ngũgĩ succinctly, and quite powerfully, asks the question: “What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?” (Ngũgĩ 26). This query directly refutes Achebe’s understanding and subsequent endorsement of English as a language of African literature. Instead, Ngũgĩ takes the stance that English is the language of the colonizer and should be treated as such – and actively resisted in decolonial efforts.

Ngũgĩ explains his own experience in school where English became “the measure of intelligence and ability” and therefore “the main determinant of a child’s progress up the ladder of formal education” (Ngũgĩ 12). This reliance on English as a standard for measuring both intelligence and educational success is what is at the core of Ngũgĩ’s issue with English being used for African literatures. Instead of English being one of many various languages used throughout the continent, the ethnic languages of Africa were systematically suppressed while English was elevated. As a result of this systematic elevation of English, the ethnic languages of Africa have, historically, been understood as fundamentally inferior to English. By adopting this stance on African literature being written in African languages, Ngũgĩ is able to reclaim the identity and culture transmitted through African languages while also taking a decidedly anticolonial stance on language itself.

English as the language of colonization is a concept that is highlighted throughout Adichie’s fiction and something that is constantly being negotiated by her characters. When turning to Adichie and her work more generally, it is clear that Adichie is following in the footsteps of Achebe, her literary predecessor. Adichie writes English-language texts and intersperses Igbo words, phrases, and statements in ways that make it clear Adichie is “keenly aware of the colonial legacies of English” (Esplin 76). That is, Adichie is aware that English is the language that was introduced – and forced upon – modern-day Nigeria as a direct result of colonization. However, where Adichie differs from Ngũgĩ in this acknowledgement and understanding of English as the language of the colonizer is in her explanation: “it was important for me to have the Igbo bits in the book because I wanted to try and capture the reality of characters who were constantly straddling two languages” (Esplin 76-7). Because Nigeria exists as a postcolonial nation state, it must constantly navigate the linguistic ramifications of colonization. English is the official language of Nigeria, and many people grow up speaking English and ethnic languages, and by making space for both English and Igbo in her prose, Adichie is able to highlight the experience of straddling two languages – the colonizing language and the colonized language.

This combination of languages can be understood through the lens of the term, “diglossia.” Diglossia, within the context of Adichie’s writing, is the “practice of introducing words and phrases from Igbo into predominantly English-language narration” (Ross 113). As a result, Adichie’s interspersing of Igbo throughout her texts allows readers to absorb Igbo into their “working vocabulary” (Ross 115). Due to the ways in which Adichie is able to integrate Igbo into the linguistic fabric of her works, she is able to create a space where readers are brought into the cultural fold. Readers are at the same time building up their reading vocabulary of Igbo, largely through context, and are constantly reminded of the complicated, colonial history of these two languages and their relationships to one another. Adichie complicates Ngũgĩ’s notion that English is the language of the colonizer and that using African languages is the only decolonizing way to tell African stories. Instead, Adichie is able to create an argument through her writing that presents English as both an indicator of colonization – and thus a form of linguistic oppression – and a mode of rebellion with a similar decolonizing potential as Igbo.

In turning to Adichie’s short story, “The Headstrong Historian,” it is clear that this work is in conversation with Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. However, Adichie’s approach in this conversation is one that challenges Achebe’s silencing of Igbo women. *Things Fall Apart* is first, and foremost, a story about Okonkwo, Achebe’s male protagonist. As a result, the women in the novel are left in the periphery and largely silent. At the heart of Adichie’s approach in “The Headstrong Historian” is the fact that Adichie, herself, is a woman writer and that “the narratives told by men and women are distinct, even divergent” (Ejikeme 310). Gender, and the experiences of the author, is integral to understanding the ways in which these two stories of Igbo history diverge from one another. In *Things Fall Apart*, it is “easy to cast [women] as subordinated, or even oppressed,” but in “The Headstrong Historian,” where women are the central characters – from Nwamgba to Afamefuna – “it is the embrace of Christianity and the new ideas about marriage brought by the Christian missionaries which erodes the powers and options of women” (Ejikeme 319).

This difference highlights Adichie's understanding of the ways in which women are oppressed in a patriarchal society as well as the ways in which her own feminism plays a role in how she conceptualizes characters. As a result, "Adichie's exploration of the interconnectedness of Christianity and patriarchy both reflects and revises *Things Fall Apart*" (Hewett 80). It is nearly impossible to unravel the ways in which Christianity, patriarchy, and colonization are woven together and have fundamentally changed present-day Nigeria. In the end, Adichie pushes readers to acknowledge that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is not the singular, definitive story of Nigeria.

With this understanding of "The Headstrong Historian" as a response to Achebe and *Things Fall Apart*, it becomes clear that this story is one that highlights the project of decolonization. Nwamgba, the main character of this short story, and the family matriarch, largely refuses to abandon her traditional beliefs and language in the way that her son, Anikwenwa, does. When Nwamgba's granddaughter, Anikwenwa's child, is born, "Father O'Donnell baptized her Grace, but Nwamgba called her Afamefuna, 'My Name Will Not Be Lost'" (Adichie 214). Just a line before, Adichie writes, "from the moment Nwamgba held her, the baby's bright eyes delightfully focused on her, she knew that it was the spirit of Obierika that had returned" (Adichie 214). Obierika was Nwamgba's husband, and he died before the Christian missionaries began their work of colonization. As a result, Obierika comes to represent a pre-colonial Nigeria that becomes harder and harder for Nwamgba to reach as she moves through her life after his passing. What Nwamgba sees in her granddaughter, Afamefuna, is not only the spirit of her late husband, but also the spirit of pre-colonial Nigeria. Afamefuna, herself, comes to represent the possibilities of intentional decolonization in a way that highlights both the struggles of that endeavor as well as the reclamation of culture that can result.

While Afamefuna's name indicates the possibility of decolonization early on, her trajectory is one that exemplifies the struggles of such a project. When Nwamgba is dying, and Afamefuna, who at this point in the story still goes by Grace, returns home to her grandmother, the book that she has with her in her school bag is an English history book. It contains a chapter titled, "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Southern Nigeria," written "by an administrator from Worcestershire who had lived among them for seven years" (Adichie 215). At this point, Grace is experiencing education in a fashion that is reminiscent of what Ngũgĩ experiences – the elevation of the English language and the stories, cultures, and ideals that are transmitted through it. It is not until Grace has changed her major at university to history and is "shifting through moldy files in archives for the book she would write called *Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria*," that she begins the work of intentional decolonization (Adichie 217). However, with the inclusion of this arguably small point regarding the title of her book, Adichie is able to show just how completely Grace transforms her conception of both her educational experiences and her culture. Interestingly, the title of her book is one that is reminiscent of Ngũgĩ's explanation that "the bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation" (Ngũgĩ 9). In this quotation, Ngũgĩ emphasizes the ways in which language is used as a form of colonization that subjugates the mind. That is, when the language of the colonizer is forced upon others, it separates the individual from their community, and in the case of the colonization of Africa, it separates the individual from their ethnolinguistic groups.

This loss of connection is one that Adichie explores further when Grace reclaims her name itself. Adichie explains that "it was Grace who, feeling an odd rootlessness in the later years of her life, surrounded by her awards, her friends, her garden of peerless roses, would go to the courthouse in Lagos and officially change her first name from Grace to Afamefuna" (Adichie 218). Afamefuna is the name her grandmother gave her – the name that only her grandmother called her. In describing the "odd rootlessness" Grace was feeling in her life even though she had accomplished so much and was surrounded by the people and things she loved, Adichie is able to highlight the experience of being linguistically disconnected from a community. With Nwamgba gone, Grace has no connection to pre-colonial Igbo culture. In changing her name from Grace – her English, Christian name – to Afamefuna – the name her grandmother gave her – she is able to reclaim a small part of her collective history as a southern Nigerian. Layered upon this is the fact that Afamefuna means "My Name Will Not Be Lost" (Adichie 214). In the end, Obierika and all that he came to represent within "The Headstrong Historian" does return through the granddaughter he never met and the life she carved out for herself. Afamefuna engages with her history and does the work of decolonization, even in this small act of realigning her identity with that of Nwamgba and Obierika.

While Adichie's novel, *Americanah*, is primarily concerned with immigration, Ifemelu's experience with the linguistic negotiations that accompany immigrant experiences is one that reflects the feeling of rootlessness that Afamefuna describes prior to reclaiming her name. Early on in the novel, Adichie explains an episode where Ifemelu is commended on her ability to "sound American" – the subtext being that non-immigrant Americans are surprised when non-Americans speak English without an accent (Adichie 215). Adichie explains that Ifemelu "had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers" (Adichie 215-6). Ifemelu's experiences as an immigrant in the United States led her to understand that complete assimilation was both expected and required if she were to be taken seriously. However, in assimilating, Ifemelu had lost a part of herself – she had taken on a way of being "that was not hers." In crafting an outward expression of self that would be respected, Ifemelu had alienated herself from one of the most fundamental parts of her identity – her linguistic connection to Nigeria. Adichie goes on to explain that it was only after she had accepted the praise for sounding American that "she [began] to feel the stain of a

burgeoning shame spreading all over her” (Adichie 215). Even though Ifemelu has been able to manipulate linguistic expectations to work for her, not against her, in removing herself from her experience of language, Ifemelu was wholly disconnected from Nigeria. English is the official language of Nigeria, but because Ifemelu speaks English with a non-American accent, she is not taken seriously. However, in choosing to take on an American accent and use of English, more generally, Ifemelu inadvertently isolated herself to a level that she was not able to recognize until she was forced to question why it was an accomplishment to sound American in the first place.

Ifemelu’s own linguistic alienation is fully realized when she experiences a severe period of depression. However, as a result of her own limited understanding of mental health, Ifemelu does not believe that she can be depressed: “Depression was what happened to Americans, with their self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness. She was not suffering from depression; she was merely a little tired and a little slow” (Adichie 194). Precisely because of her immigrant experience, Ifemelu is unable to acknowledge the fact that she is suffering. For Ifemelu, depression is a specifically American problem because of the American “self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness.” Ifemelu is not physically ill, and as a result, she does not see a need to see a doctor for something that, according to her view of things, does not occur in the first place. On top of this, “Ifemelu’s bout of depression closely aligns with the extent to which she alienates herself linguistically” (Esplin 80). When Ifemelu is at the height of working to completely assimilate herself into American society and culture she is also at her most isolated. Assimilation strips the individual of any and all connection to their culture of origin and maintains that disconnection, at least for Ifemelu, through linguistic expectations. Ifemelu is expected to lose her accent and to speak entirely in English, and it is in doing this that she is completely and utterly lost and alone, which manifested through her experience of depression.

However, when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria thirteen years later, she does not quite fit in with Nigerian society. Ifemelu’s time in the United States changed her and her experiences as an immigrant in a place that demands assimilation fundamentally shaped her. After her return to Nigeria, the term *Americanah* – also the title of the work, meaning someone who has been Americanized – is introduced and used in reference to Ifemelu. However, as Ifemelu’s friend Ranyinudo points out, “the problem is that you are not even a real *Americanah*. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!” (Adichie 475-6). Ifemelu, because of the ways in which she has both encountered and navigated language as an immigrant in the United States, does not have an American accent like many other returnees; she consciously maintained her Nigerian English. She tried full assimilation. She tried changing that part of her identity, and in the end, it left her with an “echoing space” and a “shame” that she was forced to confront (Adichie 215-6). Even though she was able to keep that connection to Nigeria while she was in the United States, once she returned to Nigeria it was something that separated her from others who had also spent time abroad and eventually returned. As a result, this disconnection even from Nigeria, the place she had worked so hard to preserve a linguistic connection to, “offers a revealing glimpse into the ways in which [Ifemelu’s] diasporic experience has altered her relationship with her country of origin” (Tunca and Ledent 3). Ifemelu’s experiences highlight the ways in which diaspora can change a person. Ifemelu’s fundamental tie to her country of origin, Nigeria, was one based around the way she used language while in the United States. Ifemelu never completely stopped using Igbo, and she deliberately chose to keep her Igbo-accented English. It helped her to maintain her connection to Nigeria, but because she never fully assimilated to the United States, like so many other expatriates do, Ifemelu does not have similar experiences to those who have returned to Nigeria like her. Instead, her accent becomes yet another way in which she is disconnected, even from her home country, just as she was in the United States.

As a result, it becomes clear that through these two characters – Afeefuna and Ifemelu – Adichie has been able to incorporate aspects of both Achebe’s case and Ngũgĩ’s case for the different ways of representing African stories. Adichie, as an author, complicates both of these foundational arguments and pushes her readers to see these complexities for themselves. The modern-day experiences of postcolonial Nigeria have been fundamentally impacted by European colonization and it is impossible to ignore the fact that English is a part of that experience. As Adichie highlights, her characters straddle languages and are constantly asked to negotiate their own linguistic experiences whether it be as an immigrant, an *Americanah*, or a member of the new, postcolonial generation of young people. What these characters show is that it is not as simple as merely choosing one language over the other – the colonized, ethnic language over the colonizing, European language. Adichie’s own use of diglossia forces readers to experience this alongside her characters and ultimately finds a point of balance along the spectrum of linguistic understanding that is created through both Achebe and Ngũgĩ.

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## GLOSSARY

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