



A BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S PERSON AND WORK

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Abstract

The environment in which Adichie spent her childhood and education facilitated her writing and reading skills. She is among rare famous writers who started to write under the age of ten. The fact that her father, Adichie James, was a University professor, the family stayed at campus where the young Adichie got easy access to books. Though her father's library was full of Mathematics and Statistics books, her passion of literature pushed her to search in her father's friend who taught literature. Her inspiration caused by reading Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart pushed the young Adichie to imagine herself in the book. The body of work she has written is all about problems her family, society, country

and friends have faced in direct or indirect ways. The books written by Adichie make clear that her own life can be read through.

Key Words: *Americanah, Feminism, Women Empowerment, Racism and Education*

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Introduction

This paper is entirely based on reading Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's life in relationship to her works. The understanding of her personal life from childhood until her today's international reputation provide a clear light on her fictions and philosophy of literature.

Adichie's Birth, Education and Inspiration

In the city of Enugu in Nigeria was born Adichie, the fifth of six children in an Igbo family. She and her family were raised in the university town of Nsukka in Enugu State. In her childhood while she was growing up, her father, James Nwoye Adichie (1932–2020), worked as a professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria. Her mother, Grace Ifeoma (1942–2021), was the university's first female registrar, whom she described in *Notes on Grief*, an essay on her fathers' death and her mother's grief during the death of their father. Adichie family faced Biafra Civil War which caused the loss of almost everything during the in their lives, including both maternal and paternal grandfathers. Her family's ancestral village is in Abba in Anambra State. Later, Adichie wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun*, to tell a feminist and love story during the war Schaub (Michael 2015: 6).

Adichie is described as one of the most intelligent student at high-school where she completed her secondary education at the University of Nigeria Secondary School, Nsukka, with several academic prizes. After graduating from secondary school, she studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. In her various interviews, she argues that her admission to medicine faculty was the fact that she was a best student. In countries like Nigeria, Medicine is not opened to everybody. She later asserts that she left because she realized that she would end unhappy Doctor. She was not made for Medical school. Her passion of reading and writing fiction was stronger than becoming a respected figure in Nigeria, being a Doctor. During her University period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. At the age of 19, Adichie left Nigeria for the United States to study communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Brockes, Emma 2017).

In *Americanah*, her third novel, Adiche describes an event that is half-similar to her own case. She left Nigerian University for US where she could later study something different. She transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) to be near her sister Uche, who had a medical practice in Coventry, Connecticut. She received a Bachelor's Degree from ECSU, *summa cum laude*, in 2001 (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s4vfn>). Front Row. 3 May 2013. BBC Radio 4. Retrieved 18 January 2014).

In 2003, she completed a Master's Degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. In 2008, she received another Master of Arts Degree in African Studies from Yale University. Since then, she is fully involved in writing, teaching and holding speech and conferences in Big and prestigious Universities around the world (Luebering, J.E. *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* 2021:56).

During the 2005–2006 academic year, Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University. In 2008, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She was awarded a 2011–2012 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University (Nixon, Rob 2006).

Though she considers her views Adichie is a Catholic and was raised Catholic as a child, especially those on feminism, to sometimes conflict with her religion. She is not happy with the way that Women are not allowed to do other religious ceremonies like men do. At a 2017 event at Georgetown University, she stated that religion

"Is not a women-friendly institution" and "has been used to justify oppressions that are based on the idea that women are not equal human beings.

She has called for Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria to preach messages of peace and togetherness. Having previously identified as agnostic while raising her daughter Catholic, she has also identified as culturally Catholic, but as a guest in a recent Humboldt forum she stated that she had returned to her Catholic faith (Copnall, James :16 December 2011).

In *Americanah*, which seems to be her semi-autobiographical fictional novel, she discusses the strange thing of being a black in America. A reality she couldn't imagine

while in Africa. As a youth in Nigeria, Adichie was not accustomed to being identified by the color of her skin, which only began to happen when she arrived in the United States for college. As a black African in America, Adichie was confronted with what it meant to be a person of color in the United States. Race as an idea became something that she had to navigate and learn (The London Conference 2018).

Though she is criticized by most of her African readers, Adichie supports LGBT rights in Africa (Class of 2008 - MacArthur Foundation). In 2014, when Nigeria passed an anti-homosexuality bill, she was among the Nigerian writers who objected to the law, calling it unconstitutional and "a strange priority to a country with so many real problems, stating that:

A crime is a crime for a reason because a crime has victims, and that since consensual homosexual conduct between adults does not constitute a crime, the law is unjust.

Adichie was also close friends with Kenyan openly gay writer Binyavanga Wainaina, and when he died on 21 May 2019 after suffering a stroke in Nairobi, Adichie said in her tribute that she was struggling to stop crying (Flood, Alison 2018).

In 2017, Adichie was criticized by some as transphobic, initially for saying that "my feeling is trans women are trans women." Adichie later further clarified her statement, writing:

"There is a distinction between women born female and women who transition, without elevating one or the other, which was my point. I have and will continue to stand up for the rights of transgender people."

In 2020, Adichie weighed into "all the noise" sparked by J. K. Rowling's article on sex and gender, and called Rowling's essay "perfectly reasonable." Adichie again faced accusations of transphobia, some of which came from Nigerian author Akwaeke Emezi, who had graduated from Adichie's writing workshop. In response to the backlash,

Adichie criticized cancel culture, 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."

In a June 2021 essay titled "It Is Obscene", Adichie again criticized cancel culture, discussing her experiences with two unnamed writers who attended her writing workshop and later lambasted her on social media for her comments on transgender people (Martin, Michel 2014). She described their:

"Passionate performance of virtue that is well executed in the public space of Twitter but not in the intimate space of friendship" as "obscene".

Writing Career

Like most of African writers like Chris Abani, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and others, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's original and initial inspiration came from Chinua Achebe, after reading his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*, at the age of 10; Adichie was inspired by seeing her own life represented in the pages (Anyia, Ikechuku 2005). Chinua Achebe's first novel is the first Postcolonial work that has inspired majority of black African writers not only in Africa but also in Diaspora. She has also named Buchi Emecheta as a Nigerian literary precursor, on whose death Adichie said:

"Buchi Emecheta. We are able to speak because you first spoke. Thank you for your courage. Thank you for your art. Nodu na ndokwa (Murray, Senan 2007).

Adichie published a collection of poems in 1997 (*Decisions*) and a play (*For Love of Biafra*) in 1998. Her short story "My Mother, the Crazy African", dating from when Adichie was a college senior living in Connecticut, discusses, wrote Ezebuio, Peace (13 June 2015) in *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Husband, Family, Education, Biography, Facts*, the problems that arise when a person is facing two cultures that are complete opposites from each other. On one hand, there is a traditional Nigerian culture with clear gender roles, while in America there is more freedom in how genders act, and less restrictions on younger people. Ralindu, the protagonist, faces this challenge with her

parents as she grew up in Philadelphia, while they grew up in Nigeria. Adichie dives deep into gender roles and traditions and what problems can occur because of this.

In 2002, she was shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing for her short story "You in America", and her story "That Harmattan Morning" was selected as a joint winner of the 2002 BBC World Service Short Story Awards. In 2003, she won the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize 2002/2003 (PEN Center Award). Her stories were also published in *Zoetrope: All-Story*, and *Topic Magazine* (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-59514598>).

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), received wide critical acclaim; it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005). *Purple Hibiscus* starts with an extended quote from *Things Fall Apart* (Enright, Michael 2018).

Her second novel, asserts Tunca, Daria (27 July 2020), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which is named after the flag of the short-lived nation of Biafra, is set before and during the Nigerian Civil War. Adichie has said of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982):

"[It] was very important for my research when I was writing Half of a Yellow Sun."

Half of a Yellow Sun received the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. *Half of a Yellow Sun* was adapted into a film of the same title directed by Biyi Bandele, starring BAFTA award-winner and Academy Award nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor and BAFTA winner Thandiwe Newton, and was released in 2014 (Brimah, Ayodale 2018).

Adichie's third book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), is a collection of 12 stories that explore the relationships between men and women, parents and children, Africa and the United States (Pennsylvania Center for the Book : 2020).

In 2010 she was listed among the authors of *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40" Fiction Issue. Adichie's story "Ceiling" was included in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Short Stories* (BAILEYS Women's Prize for Fiction: 2004).

Her third novel *Americanah* (2013), an exploration of a young Nigerian encountering race in America was selected by *The New York Times* as one of "The 10 Best Books of 2013" (New York Times: 2013).

In April 2014, she was named as one of 39 writers aged under 40 in the Hay Festival and Rainbow Book Club project Africa39, celebrating Port Harcourt UNESCO World Book Capital 2014 (Hobson, Janell: 2014).

In a 2014 interview, Adichie said on feminism and writing:

"I think of myself as a storyteller but I would not mind at all if someone were to think of me as a feminist writer... I'm very feminist in the way I look at the world, and that world view must somehow be part of my work."(Williams, John : 2017).

In 2015, she was co-curator of the PEN World Voices Festival. In March 2017, *Americanah* was picked as the winner for the "One Book, One New York" program, part of a community reading initiative encouraging all city residents to read the same book (Allardice, Lisa: 2018).

Her next book, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, published in March 2017, had its origins in a letter Adichie wrote to a friend who had asked for advice about how to raise her daughter as a feminist (Law, Katie : 2020).

In April 2017, it was announced that Adichie had been elected into the 237th class of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, one of the highest honours for intellectuals in the United States, as one of 228 new members to be inducted on 7 October 2017 (Weller, Chris 16 March 2017).

In 2020, Adichie published *Zikora*, a stand-alone short story about sexism and single motherhood (Law, Katie (29 October 2020). "Zikora: A Short Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie review).

In November 2020, *Half of a Yellow Sun* was voted by the public to be the best book to have won the Women's Prize for Fiction in its 25-year history (Sam-Duru, Prisca 2021).

In May 2021, Adichie released a memoir based on her father's death titled *Notes on Grief*, based on an essay of the same title published in *The New Yorker* in September 2020. As described by the reviewer for *The Independent*, "Her words put a welcome, authentic voice to this most universal of emotions, which is also one of the most universally avoided.

Lectures

Adichie spoke on *The Danger of a Single Story* for TED in 2009. The talk that has become one of the most-viewed TED Talks of all time with over 27 million views ("TED: *We Should all be Feminists* – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie at TEDxEuston(transcript).

On 15 March 2012, she delivered the *Connecting Cultures* Commonwealth Lecture 2012 at the Guildhall, London. Adichie also spoke on being a feminist for TED Euston in December 2012, with her speech "We should all be feminists". It initiated a worldwide conversation on feminism and was published as a book in 2014 which could later be sampled for the 2013 song "Flawless" by American performer Beyoncé, where it attracted further attention.

- *The Danger of a Single Story*

Adichie spoke in a TED talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story", posted in July 2009, in which she expressed her concern for under-representation of various cultures. In her speech, wrote Lozada, Carlos (2021), she explained that as a young child, she had often read American and British stories where the characters were primarily of Caucasian origin. At the lecture, she said that the under-representation of cultural differences could be dangerous.

In 2019 Rios Carmen (2019:6) notices that Adichie concluded the lecture by noting the significance of different stories in various cultures and the representation that they deserve. She advocated for a greater understanding of stories because people are complex, saying that by understanding only a single story, one misinterprets people, their backgrounds and their histories. The talk has become one of the most-viewed TED Talks of all time with over 27 million views. Since 2009, she revisited the topic when

speaking to audiences such as the Hilton Humanitarian Symposium of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in 2019 (Cruz, Riza 2022).

- *We Should all be Feminists*

In 2012, Adichie gave a TEDx talk entitled: *We Should all be Feminists*, delivered at TedXEuston in London, which has been viewed more than five million times (Brown, Annie 2013). She shared her experiences of being an African feminist, and her views on gender construction and sexuality. Adichie said that the problem with gender is that it shapes who we are. She also said: "I am angry. Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change, but in addition to being angry, I'm also hopeful because I believe deeply in the ability of human beings to make and remake themselves for the better."

In December 2013, parts of Adichie's TEDx talk were sampled in Beyoncé's song *Flawless*. Fourth Estate published an essay based on the speech as a stand-alone volume, *We Should All Be Feminists*, in 2014. Adichie later said as explained Raymer, Miles (2014) in *Billboard' Hot 100 recap: Beyonce's 'Flawless' Finally Hits the Chart*, in an NPR interview that "anything that gets young people talking about feminism is a very good thing". She later qualified the statement in an interview with the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*:

"Another thing I hated was that I read everywhere: now people finally know her, thanks to Beyoncé, or: she must be very grateful. I found that disappointing. I thought: I am a writer and I have been for some time and I refuse to perform in this charade that is now apparently expected of me: 'Thanks to Beyoncé, my life will never be the same again.' That's why I didn't speak about it much."

Adichie has clarified that her particular feminism differs from Beyoncé's, particularly in their disagreements about the role occupied by men in women's lives, saying:

"Her style is not my style but I do find it interesting that she takes a stand in political and social issues since a few years. She portrays a woman who is in charge of her own destiny, who does her own thing, and she has girl power. I am very taken with that." Nevertheless,

Adichie has been outspoken against critics who question the singer's credentials as a feminist, and has said: "Whoever says they're feminist is bloody feminist (Danielle, Britni: 2014)"

Besides a number of listings, she has won numerous awards for her literary work. Just to mention a few, she won the ‘O Henry Prize’ for the short story ‘The American Embassy’ in 2003, the ‘Commonwealth Writers’ Prize : Best First Book’ for her novel ‘Purple Hibiscus’ in 2005, Reader’s Digest ‘Author of the Year’ in 2008 and the ‘National Book Critics Circle Award : Fiction Category’ for her book *Americanah*.(Malec, Jennifer 2017)

She has the distinction of having her books listed among the ‘Ten Best Books’ by New York Times and BBC. She has also been listed by the Time Magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in 2015 (Crockett, Emily 2017).

Adichie splits her time between her birthplace, Nigeria, and the USA, where she works. She is married to a Maryland based doctor and has a daughter. In order to give back to her country, she conducts writing workshops whenever she visits Nigeria (Grenier, Elizabeth; Hucal, Sarah 2021).

Chart of Her Awards and Work

The Caine Prize for African Writing. UK. (2009). Archived from the original (http://www.caineprize.com/winners_02.php) on 12 August 2013.

Year	Award	Work	Result
2002	<u>Caine Prize for African Writing</u>	"You in America"	Nominated
	<u>Commonwealth Short Story Competition</u>	"The Tree in Grandma's Garden"	Nominated
	<u>BBCmeasuring Competition</u>	"That Harmattan Morning"	Won
2002/2003	David T. Wong International Short Story Prize (<u>PEN American Center</u>)	"Half of a YellowSun"	Won

	Award)		
2003	<u>O. Henry Prize</u>	"The American Embassy"	Won
2004	<u>Hurston-Wright Legacy Award: Best DebutFiction Category</u>	<u>Purple Hibiscus</u>	Won
	<u>Orange Prize</u>		Nominated
	<u>Booker Prize</u>		Nominated
	<u>Young Adult Library Services Association Best Books for Young Adults Award</u>		Nominated
2004/2005	<u>John Llewellyn Rhys Prize</u>		Nominated
2005	<u>Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best First Book(Africa)</u>		Won
	<u>Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best First Book(overall)</u>		Won
2006	<u>National Book Critics Circle Award</u>		Nominated
2007	<u>British Book Awards: "Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year" category</u>	<u>Half of a YellowSun</u>	Nominated
	<u>James Tait Black Memorial Prize</u>		Nominated
	<u>Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best Book(Africa)</u>		Nominated
	<u>Anisfield-Wolf Book Award: Fiction category</u>		Won
	<u>PEN Beyond Margins Award</u>		Won
	<u>Orange Broadband Prize: Fiction category</u>		Won
2008	<u>International Dublin Literary Award</u>		Nominated

	<u>Reader's Digest</u> Author of the Year Award		Won
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Conclusion

The best way to well understand any literary work is to take into consideration the author's personal life, social, political, economic and cultural contexts. In this paper, two key facts discovered in Adichie's life summarize her philosophy of literature. Firstly, her *Feminism* theme is the result of her teenager's unhappiness towards social injustice in which African women face in their singleness and/or couple life (s). Secondly, her *Racism* theme is the result of her trip to United States where she was surprised to discover for the first time that people are loved, judged, appreciated, denied, hated or rejected simply because of their skin color. These two realities summarize the writer's intention and philosophy of writing.

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