

Lived Experiences of Male and Female Hybridity Within Chimamanda  
Adichie's Diaspora

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## Abstract

Postcolonial theory claims that hybridity can bring power and agency to the postcolonial subject, and hybridity is often viewed as a positive experience. However, this optimistic outlook on hybridity hides much of the anxieties and pressures that come along with it, and postcolonialists tend to ignore the complications for the sake of celebrating the benefits of hybridity. In order to avoid simplifying hybridity and overshadowing its dangers, the claims of the celebratory view of hybridity must be investigated, and its failures as a theory to apply to the lived experience of hybrids must be explored. There are several critics who question the optimistic view of hybridity, but their critiques fall short on two counts: the effects of hybridity on subjects within the diaspora, and the differences between male and female hybrids. The Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie, however, addresses these missing pieces in postcolonial theory. In her short stories and novels, Adichie offers a new view of hybridity: she explores how hybridity affects Nigerian characters in America, as well as the effects of gender on hybridity. Adichie creates hybrids that suffer through identity crises and anxieties of falsehood; her hybrids live difficult and dark existences. Yet in her short stories, these anxious hybrids are all females: the men, on the other hand, are confident, content, and examples of “happy hybrids”: they feel little anxiety in their positions, and are portrayed as naïve and shallow for feeling this way. Through allegories that use the diaspora as their stage, Adichie is therefore arguing for a re-examination of hybridity: not only must we challenge the notion of empowered hybrids, but we must also look at how—and begin to explore why—the female experience of hybridity is different from the male experience.

## Lived Experiences of Male and Female Hybridity Within Chimamanda Adichie's Diaspora

"I have crossed an ocean

I have lost my tongue

from the root of the old one

a new one has sprung"

—Grace Nichols, *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*

Postcolonial theory claims that hybridity can bring power and agency to the postcolonial subject: in losing their tongue, liberated hybrids will be able to grow a new one, one that can speak for itself and combine the dual cultures of their pre- and postcolonial existence. In postcolonialism, this is a positive experience: though the loss of the tongue may be painful, the new one springs up from its roots to reclaim its position. However, this positive outlook on hybridity hides much of the anxieties and pressures that come along with it; the new tongue does not spring up without difficulty, yet postcolonialists tend to ignore the complications for the sake of celebrating the benefits of hybridity. In order to avoid simplifying hybridity and overshadowing its dangers, the claims of the celebratory view of hybridity must be investigated, and its failures as a theory to apply to the lived experience of hybrids must be explored. There are several critics who question the optimistic view of hybridity, but their critiques fall short on two counts: the effects of hybridity on subjects within the diaspora<sup>1</sup>, and the differences between male and female hybrids.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "diaspora" is normally capitalized, but I choose to leave it uncapitalized, borrowing from Rogers Brubaker's rejection of the definite article when referring to diasporas: "Diasporas are treated as 'bona fide actual entities' ([Sheffer], p. 245) and cast as unitary actors. They are seen as possessing countable, quantifiable memberships" (10). While I do use the definite article

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### **Third-World Allegories**

Third-world literature<sup>2</sup> has a history of being read allegorically, and this history is important to understand in order to enter the conversation in third-world literature. Adichie’s works are, however, of a different nature from what has been seen as the typical allegory of non-Western writers. Fredric Jameson’s oft-quoted and much debated idea in his essay “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” is the most well-known example of reading non-Western texts through their allegories: the thesis of his essay is that “[t]hird-world texts,

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to avoid confusion, capitalizing “diaspora” turns it into one fixed entity, which it is not: it has multiple definitions and reveals itself in many ways; therefore I leave the term uncapitalized.

<sup>2</sup> The term “third-world literature” is problematic for several reasons: it creates an absolute difference between “first-world” and “third-world” writing, and forms a very clear numerical hierarchy. However, I will use the term occasionally because despite its unfair treatment to writing from developing nations, it is used within the scholarly conversation of literature from Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, thus I will use it when necessary to enter into the conversation.

even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (69). Since third-world cultures are constantly fighting for their national identity against imperialism and post-/neo-colonialism, there is not the “radical split between the private and the public” that there is in the Western world: in the third-world, the political and the personal are intertwined (69). Neil Lazarus explains that texts emerging from the third-world are also necessarily allegorical because we, as Westerners, cannot read them as anything else: since we have defined third-world writers in terms of their national struggle, then the literature that emerges from the third-world will be about that struggle (10). Though many critics have attacked Jameson on this statement—mostly for his overarching generalization about third-world writers, and for the absolutism of Jameson’s claim: the worlds “necessarily” and “always” force these works into a bind that they cannot escape—his claim, which was written in 1986, at a time when many third-world countries were struggling no longer for independence, but for peace and stability, proved true in many instances.

Susan Z. Andrade has, however, tweaked his claim in order to make it more relevant for African women, who do not always write allegorically for the “embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.” Andrade argues that “politics in novels written by women are expressed micro-politically and that the micro-politics warrant closer investigation as an allegory of the larger, macro-political world” (94-95). Instead of writing about larger issues, then, women write on smaller issues as allegorical of something greater. She also calls these “domestic allegories”: stories that take place in the domestic sphere but are used as an allegory for larger

issues. Her use of these allegories allow the reader to connect to the character on a micro-level, but understand the greater implications of the character's plight on the macro-level.

Yet Andrade's study of feminist writing ends in 1988, and her evaluation of allegories is outdated. In an essay she writes on Adichie's works, she admits that her thesis of earlier works does not necessarily still hold true: "the best female novelists no longer hesitate to represent the nation in explicitly political terms, nor does doing so require abandoning a full sense of commitment to female characterization" (93). Modern female African writers, then, no longer feel obliged to write their political views as allegories: they instead write about the nation directly and without apology. Adichie's writing therefore fits into the writing of Third Generation of Nigerian authors, a group of writers—many of whom are female—who are writing from a different stance than previous Nigerian writers, and who often write from African feminist viewpoints. The Third Generation era began in the mid 1980s, and consists of writers that have persevered in writing even during the worst of the Nigerian economy and literary scene. These authors are the "children of the postcolony"—born after independence—and have triumphed over adversity: it is from this position that Adichie creates her characters (Hewett 74).

I argue that Adichie uses a new allegory in her works: an allegory that uses the diaspora as a stage to showcase the anxious hybrid, as well as the differences between the reactions and adjustments of male and female hybrids. Most of her stories about the diaspora offer both a male and female hybrid, with stark differences between them: the males are often overconfident and attempt to completely assimilate, while the females are more cautious, more aware of their Nigerian culture, and find more difficulty in feeling comfortable in America. By showing this difference within hybrids, Adichie is creating an allegory for the differences between how men

and women interact with their surroundings, as well as using the stage of the diaspora to isolate hybrids and examine their anxieties. It must be noted, however, that in calling attention to this allegory, I am not devaluing the rest of Adichie's project: as Andrade points out, Jameson's thesis is problematic partially because he eliminates every other aspect of the text in favor for the allegory; he does not let the private story survive (Andrade, *Nation Writ* 26). Adichie's works are complex and do not only speak to hybridity: by entering into the conversation of allegories within third-world literature, I do not wish to eliminate the private story in favor for the greater allegory; my project simply illuminates something new within Adichie's text.

## **Feminism**

Since Adichie is speaking towards a feminist viewpoint—in that she is bringing attention to the complexities of female identity—it is useful to understand the background of differences between African and Western feminism in order to better understand the stakes of her position. Adichie is entering into a complex conversation of African and Western feminism, and recognizing her place in that conversation can illuminate complexities in her argument: the frustration that African feminists have with Western feminists in current academic conversations can be detected within Adichie's works.

African feminism was born out of dissatisfaction with the homogenization of Western feminism. African women found that Western feminists did not have the same goals nor methods in mind, and that “Western feminist theory present[ed] itself as a universal phenomenon in ways that disguise[d] its profoundly Western concerns and biases” (Mekgwe 167). Western feminists make assumptions that do not necessarily hold true across cultures: for instance, that equality in the workplace, at home, and on the streets is the ultimate goal, or that the ability to wear short

skirts is the utmost symbol of freedom; they rally around phrases such as “the institution of motherhood” and fight for freedom of expression. However, in making the generalized assertions that this is what equality entails, Western feminists are making universal assumptions about gender, when the very definition of gender resists universality: as African feminist Oyeronke Oyewumi puts it, “If gender is socially constructed, then gender cannot behave in the same way across time and space” (11). Western feminists argue adamantly that gender—and even sex—are socially constructed; yet if they are socially constructed, they must be constructed differently in each different society. In other words, the way that gender has been constructed in the West must be different to how gender has been constructed in societies that are different, and thus it cannot be assumed that, for instance, “the institution of motherhood” in Africa is the same as it is in the West. The construction of gender depends on the culture that the gender is in, yet Western feminists, according to Oyewumi, consider women to be a “homogeneous, bio-anatomically determined group which is always constituted as powerless and victimized,” regardless of what culture the body grew up in (11).

The homogenization of feminist theory disallows an honest conversation between African and Western feminists because Western feminists tend to take the position of superiority: Western women believe that they are more liberated than non-Western women, and therefore have the responsibility to ensure that other women can achieve a similar liberation. This creates an atmosphere of arrogance and creates a tendency for Westerners to disregard other notions of feminism. Yet this is dangerous because this arrogance creates an absolute divide between Western and non-Western women, and focuses on the superiority of Western culture. If, for instance, Western feminists accuse cultures that practice clitorrectomy of disregarding women’s rights while ignoring the plastic surgeries that happen in Western culture to make women more



attractive to men, they are overlooking similarities in favor of remaining culturally superior. When Obioma Nnaemeka, author of the essay “Bringing African Women into the Classroom: Rethinking Pedagogy and Epistemology,” teaches clitorrectomy in her class, she does so “in tandem with teaching abuses of the female body in other cultures: forms of plastic surgery in the West and foot-binding in China, for example... We must not be distracted by the arrogance that names one procedure breast reduction and the other sexual *mutilation*, with all the attached connotations of barbarism. In both instances some part of the female body is excised” (61). In both instances, too, the procedure is (often) done in order to make the woman more desirable to men. Nnaemeka accuses Western feminists of demonizing other cultures without taking a closer look at their own. When Western feminists enter the conversation from this elevated point of view, the productive conversation that should occur instead turns into a lecture.

Indeed, Western feminists are often attacked on their unwillingness to listen to non-Western feminists. African feminists claim that Western feminists are often condescending and believe they are the sole possessors of knowledge, while African women are incapable of understanding or changing their own—less liberated—situations. Obioma Nnaemeka gives a convincing example of this: Gloria Steinem, a prominent American feminist and editor of *Ms* magazine, asked Saadawi, who is an expert in female genital cutting, for an article about clitorrectomy. Saadawi sent Steinem an article about the practice within a political, social, and historical analysis, but Steinem cut nearly the entire article and published, completely out of context, a few statements from Saadawi that misrepresented her opinions on clitorrectomy. Steinem ignored the complex cultural and political issues surrounding clitorrectomy, and reduced the issue to a sound bite that Western feminists want to hear: clitorrectomy is bad, and it must be stopped. Instead of listening to non-Western women, Western feminists attempt to fight a battle

they do not understand: As Nnaemeka puts it, “In their enthusiasm, our sisters usurp our wars and fight them badly—very badly. The arrogance that declares African women ‘problems’ objectifies us and undercuts the agency necessary for forging true global sisterhood.... We are the only ones who can set our priorities and agenda” (57). The arrogance that Western women bring to the conversation disallow a true merging of ideas. Nnaemeka continues to explain that the problem in this is that “our Western sisters inadvertently collaborate in tightening the noose around our necks” (61). When Steinem dismissed Saadawi’s opinions about practices that take place in her own culture, she contributed to the oppression that non-Western women face: she believed herself able to speak for non-Western women, thus eliminating their voices.

African feminism was thus established as a theory for African women to use their own voices, instead of having Western mouthpieces speak for them. Though there are many strands of African feminism—just as there are many strands of Western feminism—Filomina Chioma Steady, a prominent African feminist, defines it as:

emphasizing female autonomy and cooperation; nature over culture; and the centrality of children, multiple mothering, and kinship.... It also questions features of traditional African cultures without denigrating them, understanding that these traditional features might be viewed differently by the various classes of women.... [I]f African feminism is to succeed as a human reformation project, it cannot accept separatism from the opposite sex. Eschewing male exclusion, then, becomes one defining feature of African feminism that differentiates it from feminism as it is conceptualized in the West.... African feminism is not antagonistic to men but challenges them to be aware of those aspects of women’s

subjugation that differ from the generalized oppression of all African people.

(Mekgwe 168-169)

African feminism, then, is not just about women. Whereas Western women have the ability to whole-heartedly fight against the ultra-privileged White Male figure, African women do not have that perfect villain to fight against; African men face many of the same battles as African women in terms of finding identity and agency against the White Male. African women, then, face what is called “double colonization”: this refers “to the ways in which women have *simultaneously* experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy” (McLeod 201). Africans have been colonized and oppressed by the West, but African women have *also* been oppressed by patriarchy from both their own cultures and from the colonizers. Thus they must fight this double battle, and a prominent feature of African feminism is to fight this battle alongside men, not against men. African feminism also embraces certain practices that Western feminists often rally against: “multiple mothering,” for instance, which includes polygyny. While Western feminists attack polygyny as a symbol of women’s oppression, African feminists celebrate the advantages of “sharing child care, emotional and economic support, sisterhood, companionship, and so on” (Nnaemeka 62).

Realizing why the growth of African feminism was vital for African women allows us to place Adichie in the feminist conversation, and see how she moves it forward. As a “card-carrying feminist,” as she called herself in an interview, Adichie invests her energy into writing strong, dynamic female characters who are not victims of their situations, but active agents. Out of the twelve short stories within her collection, “The Thing Around Your Neck,” “The Arrangers of Marriage,” “Jumping Monkey Hill,” “The American Embassy,” and “Imitation,” all end with the female character either leaving a situation that is detrimental to her, or strongly

considering leaving: these are not victims, but women who will take their lives into their own hands. Adichie thus challenges Western feminists who would assume that African women are victims who need help: the women in these short stories need no help from Western feminists.

## Hybridity

Adichie's African feminist views come through in her portrayal of male and female hybrids: but it must be noted that Adichie is also unique in her rejection of an empowered hybrid. The danger behind postcolonial theory's tendency to accentuate the positive aspects of hybridity is that the theory shadows its costs and overemphasizes its benefits, allowing a celebration of hybridity where its negative aspects are ignored. In his seminal work on hybridity and culture, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes hybridity as a "force...that disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic" (159). For Bhabha, hybridity is a weapon for fighting against colonial power: hybrids create a space that is in-between the fixed identities of the colonial and pre-colonial subjects, and reject the notion of a single sense of identity. There is muscle that lies within this rejection: "[Hybridity] is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (159). Thus the power that is found in hybridity is that hybrids take the dominant culture and mutilate it to create something of their own; hybrids can turn dominance into difference, enabling their own agency and empowering themselves. This allows the hybrid space—what Bhabha calls the Third Space, the space in-between—to be the best for an artist to succeed: "It is from this hybrid location of cultural value—the transnational as the translational—that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project" (248). Though Bhabha does not deny that with this new identity comes problems of signification, he concludes that hybridity, for

the most part, is a cause for celebration, a place of cross-cultural liberation, an opportunity for originality and interdependence.

While the lived experience of hybridity may include moments of empowerment, of creativity, postcolonial theory has largely ignored the anxieties that arise from living a hybrid life. Theoretically, perhaps, hybrids have an original viewpoint, a space of liberation; yet the theory of hybridity undermines the daily difficulties that arise for hybrids. Several postcolonial theorists have explored these less optimistic views of hybridity, and in her novels and short stories, Chimamanda Adichie continues this conversation by offering the lived experience of hybrids. Her female characters are not happy hybrids: instead, they are anxious ex-patriates, fumbling as they attempt to reconcile their two cultures, their dual identities. In revealing these lived anxieties, Adichie, as well as the critics who argue against the happy hybrid, gives a more realistic view of the hybrid experience, and puts pressure on the idea of a blissfully globalized and cosmopolitan world.

Globalization, which is the social space that hybrids are meant to thrive in, has had a positive connotation in postcolonial theory; yet its inaccurate portrayal has led to an overly optimistic definition of hybridity. In his essay “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” Simon Gikandi critiques the postcolonial celebratory view of globalization: globalization is seen as “a sign of the coming into being of a cultural world order that questions the imperial cartography,” and thus allows a space for hybrids to thrive as “cosmopolitan subjectives,” no longer under the direct imperial rule (629). Gikandi, however, accuses postcolonial thought for ignoring the other side of globalization: the side of globalization that haunts postcolonial studies, the side of globalization that is “defined by a sense of crisis within the postcolony itself” (630).

Contrary to the optimistic globalization that postcolonial theory trumpets, he sees the lived experience of globalization as much darker and more complex.

Gikandi gives an example of this darker face of globalization: he tells a story of two boys from New Guinea who were found dead in a cargo hold of a plane headed to Brussels in 1998. The boys were clutching a letter, addressed to “Excellencies, gentlemen, and responsible citizens of Europe.” The letter begged Europeans to listen to their story of suffering in Africa, and beseeched the continent for help: “We call upon your graciousness and solidarity to help us in Africa. Our problems are many: war, sickness, hunger, lack of education.... And if you find that we have sacrificed our lives, it is because we suffer too much in Africa. We need your help in our struggle against poverty and war.... There is no one else for us to turn to” (630). This is not an image of globalization that we are used to seeing in postcolonial theory: the globalization of a newly enlightened world, where a global culture is based on reciprocal relationships and cultural hybridity. This is the other narrative of globalization: one of crisis and failure. The story of these boys forces us to pause in our assumption that globalization creates, if not happy, then at least non-suicidal subjects that have the ability to learn from other cultures. Instead, we are left with a haunting story of young boys who, from their experience of globalization, came to the conclusion that the only answer could be found outside of their continent, in the hands of their former colonizers. This more realistic, albeit dark, view of globalization allows us to realize a more realistic portrayal of hybrids: if globalization, the place where hybrids supposedly thrive, is in crisis, hybridity is in crisis as well.

Happy hybrids, then, are much less likely to exist when globalization is not as optimistic as postcolonial theory leads us to believe: in reality, lived hybridity comes with a degree of anxiety and even fear. Instead of living in-between worlds, in a new and comforting place of

individual security, the subject is often caught in what Kenneth Harrow describes as a “double-consciousness”: the subject must live simultaneously in both worlds, though only physically occupying one at a time. Instead of a culture that combines the two that the subject is living through—the culture of the (non-Western) old world and the culture of the (Western) new world—the subject must constantly jump between worlds, between realities, unable to reconcile the two as a combined culture. This is not an easy existence: those living in the Diaspora must at once embody two identities, two personas, two cultures. Accommodations and sacrifices must be made within personalities and relationships; love does not play into the equation easily, according to Harrow.

Constantly, the subject must perform cultural crossings, analogous to the linguistic term “code-switching,” the practice of switching between languages within a single conversation. The crossing from world to world—not only the physical crossing but the mental crossing that must take place in day-to-day life—is infused with “craziness, danger, and the horrors of encountering something beyond one’s control” (Harrow 18). It is a crossing that leaves the crosser in a position of dual identity that cannot be reconciled, faced with the challenges of surviving in both worlds. This is not the optimistic hybridity of empowerment that Bhabha describes: this is a difficult, complicated condition that forces a split personality: “one person is one thing at one moment, and then instantaneously another person in the next moment” (15). Harrow takes his argument further to suggest that hybridity cannot exist in this age: “...Nollywood and jet travel have redefined commodity capitalist markers with a vengeance, and we have to be prepared to move in both worlds, here and there, no longer figures caught ‘in-between,’ no longer simply creolized, much less hybridized” (26). Today, then, hybridity cannot exist because it is easier to stay connected with both worlds, to live in both simultaneously.

Yet instead of disregarding hybridity entirely, Adichie offers a way to see this negative, “dangerous” aspect of hybridity that Harrow describes without denying that her characters are hybrids—they do indeed form a “creolized” culture that borrows from both worlds, though they do not do so without a high degree of unease. Instead of happy hybrids, she leaves us with anxious ex-patriates, unable to comfortably make the transition from world to world, and injured by the daily crossings that they must endure. This is, however, a reading of only her female characters. In juxtaposition with her anxious ex-pats, Adichie does offer examples of happy hybrids, all of whom are male. These male characters are overconfident and do their best to assimilate into the culture they are placed in. Compared to the female characters, however, we see the flaws in their attempted assimilation: the characters appear disconnected from reality, attempting to become someone they are not. Adichie mocks these characters and their lack of anxiety is translated into a lack of understanding, a lack of depth of character. Though these hybrids are indeed happy, they still do not have power, and thus Adichie defeats the notion of the empowered hybrid.

## Diaspora

Almost half of the stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* center on Nigerian characters living in the United States: in this essay, I consider these characters to be a part of the Nigerian diaspora, but the use of this term must be defended. The term “diaspora” has been defined and redefined many times—originally, “diaspora” referred specifically to the Jewish diaspora, and this is still how the word is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>3</sup>—but in his essay “The

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<sup>3</sup> “The Dispersion; i.e. (among the Hellenistic Jews) the whole body of Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Captivity (John vii. 35); (among the early Jewish Christians) the body of Jewish Christians outside of Palestine (Jas. i. 1, 1 Pet. i. 1)” (OED)



‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” which investigates the history of the term and its current usage, Rogers Brubaker offers a set of criteria that is considered to be the current definition. An authentic “diaspora” as it is understood today, he claims, requires three characteristics: those within the diasporic community are indeed dispersed from their original country, they have an orientation and loyalty to a homeland, and they preserve “a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society,” which Brubaker calls “boundary-maintenance” (6). Yet within these criteria arise disagreements among critics: earlier discussions on diasporas focused heavily on homeland orientation, but the conversation has steadily moved away from this aspect of diaspora as a strong criterion. Instead of the diaspora necessitating a longing and desire for the home country, critics such as — Clifford have argued that diasporas are “not so much oriented to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations” (qtd. in Brubaker 6). The idea of “boundary-maintenance” has also been critiqued: Stuart Hall does not use the term “diaspora” to describe “scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return,” but rather uses it metaphorically as a “recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*” (235). Hall is complicating the definition of diaspora, disallowing a simple definition of people living in a different country but keeping their own culture. Diasporic subjects must—like Harrow’s hybrids—must live a double consciousness, keeping within their identities a sense of their difference while assimilating to a certain extent.

Hall’s complication of the term allows for “diaspora” to mean more than just a group of nostalgic people, and his definition makes space for Adichie’s characters. Many of her characters in her short stories do not constantly pine for home, nor do they necessarily preserve “a

distinctive identity” from their new country. In fact, Adichie’s male characters in her short stories attempt to completely assimilate, which would disqualify them from being hybrids according to Brubaker’s definition. Yet these characters *are* still a part of the diaspora in that in naming their space “the diaspora,” it allows us a way to recognize their struggles in their identity and hybridity. “The diaspora” is the stage, and hybridity is the actor: with this metaphor in place, we can compare hybrids from different diasporas, or from more complex diasporas that would otherwise be given a different name—the movement of white people, or movement within nations, for instance—because they are given a similar ground to stand on. This definition of diaspora therefore allows us to better analyze Adichie’s characters as a whole instead of individually.

### **Adichie’s Texts**

With a basic background of the conversation that Adichie is entering into, we can examine Adichie’s works to investigate how she carries the conversation forward. The story entitled “Imitation” investigates the ungroundedness and internalized feeling of falsehood within the diaspora, and captures the difference between the male and female experience. Adichie presents a character who is part of the Nigerian diaspora in America, but cannot let go of her anxieties that come with her code-switching. The main character, Nkem, is a Nigerian woman living in the suburbs of Philadelphia with her two children. Her husband, Obiora, works in Nigeria and only comes to visit for two months out of the year, and Nkem and her children travel back to Nigeria every year to spend a three week Christmas break with Obiora. In the beginning of the story, Nkem learns that Obiora has had a girlfriend move in with him in his house in Lagos. Nkem is upset and angry, and when he comes for his yearly visit a week later, she tells him that

she is moving back to Nigeria with him. We do not know if she ultimately succeeds in her wish, but the last sentence of the story is: “There is nothing left to talk about, Nkem knows; it is done” (42).

With every visit to his wife, Obiora brings an imitation of an African mask with him. He is obsessed with these masks in an academic way: he knows their history, their importance, why they are good imitations. Nkem, on the other hand, is fascinated with the masks because she connects with them: she imagines what the custodians of the masks thought, and how they felt. Nkem places her own anxieties on the masks: “She imagines—and this she imagines herself because Obiora did not suggest it happened that way—the proud young men wishing they did not have to behead strangers to bury their king, wishing they could use the masks to protect themselves, too, wishing they had a say” (23). Nkem—who was told, not asked, that she was moving to America, who was told that she would stay there with the children, who was told that she would only see her husband for two months and three weeks out of the year—seems to desire that the custodians of the mask had a say in what they did, just as she wishes she could have a say. Later, she worries aloud to Obiora that the custodians of the mask

“...couldn’t have been *happy*.’

Obiora’s head is tilted to the side as he stares at her. “Well, maybe nine hundred years ago they didn’t define ‘happy’ like you do now.”

She puts the bronze head down; she wants to ask him how he defines “happy.” (40)

She speaks aloud her worries of the masks’ happiness to bring attention to her own unhappiness, of which her husband is quite unaware; just as Obiora cannot imagine what “happiness” was nine hundred years ago, he cannot imagine what his wife needs to be happy.

These connections that Nkem has to the imitation masks—the way she places her anxieties upon them and relates to their past—make one moment in the text specifically important, because it reveals the unease of hybridization, and the difficulty of living dual personalities. After she finds out about her husband's infidelities, "Nkem runs a hand over the rounded metal of the Benin mask's nose.... [She] picks up the mask and presses her face to it; it is cold, heavy, lifeless" (23). The mask is an imitation of an imitation: the original was designed to imitate a human face, and this is an imitation of that original. Nkem, as she covers her own face with the "cold, heavy, lifeless" mask, becomes one with the mask for just a moment, representing not only her own "cold, heavy, lifeless" life that she lives in America, but representing her double imitation as well: she is imitating a Nigerian imitating an American.

Nkem attempts to move from Philadelphia to Lagos by imitating the woman that her husband is sleeping with in Nigeria, a woman that is taking her place in her husband's bed, who is using her towel in the bathroom. Nkem attempts to cut her hair like her husband's girlfriend, to use hair texturizer as she has heard the girlfriend uses, but her efforts to reclaim her place back in Nigeria while staying in America fail: "'Why did you cut your hair?' Obiora asks. 'Don't you like it?' 'I loved your long hair.' 'You don't like short hair?' 'Why did you cut it?...I liked your long hair better. You should grow it back'" (40). In cutting her hair, Nkem is trying to look like her husband's girlfriend, and thus put herself back next to him in their bed; she is trying to put herself physically in both Philadelphia and Lagos. This takes Harrow's notion of "crossing" one step further: instead of "someone who simultaneously occupies both places, while inhabiting at times the one location and at times the other," Nkem is trying to inhabit both places through her imitation of her husband's girlfriend (Harrow 14). As a Nigerian in the United States imitating

another Nigerian, Nkem's hybridity is clearly not one of empowerment: she is unsure of her place and self.

Her anxieties do not stop here: she perceives herself as an imitation American as well, attempting to live the life of "[h]er neighbors on Cherrywood Lane, all white and pale-haired and lean" (24). She does her best to assimilate, to be a happy hybrid: "She goes to a Pilates class twice a week in Philadelphia with her neighbor; she bakes cookies for her children's classes and hers are always the favorites; she expects banks to have drive-ins. America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin." But even as it grows, snaking its way into her consciousness, "[s]he does miss home...her friends, the cadence of Igbo and Yoruba and pidgin English spoken around her. And when the snow covers the yellow fire hydrant on the street, she misses the Lagos sun that glares down even when it rains" (37). Even as she imitates the American lifestyle, she cannot release the desire to be home: while she enjoys the conveniences of America and its different cultural aspects, she misses the sounds and feelings of being home. For Harrow, this splitting of self—the desire to be both American and Nigerian—is an "act of violence": in trying to create a Oneness, a single identity, Nkem is trying to separate herself from her Nigerian past, and thus the division is one that is necessarily violent. Like a poisonous snake, America is entering under her skin, splitting her from her Nigerian-ness.

Thus, in the final scene, after Obiora brings home the first original mask he has bought, Nkem decides that she, too, will no longer be an imitation. She can no longer split herself between enjoying the conveniences of America, and missing the food and smells of Nigeria; she can no longer stand the idea of being her husband's wife in America but watching someone else take her place in Nigeria. She tells Obiora that she is moving back to Lagos with him, and she knows that it will be done. Yet the question that remains in the end is whether she will be able to

release the sense of being a dual imitation: though her decision to return coincides with the acquisition of an original mask, instead of an imitation, will she still be wearing a mask when she returns to Nigeria? Part of the danger in crossing may be that one can never return to an original stance. Nkem asks the wife of a “Big Man” in Nigeria if she ever thought of moving back home:

Nkem had asked the woman if she planned to move back and the woman turned, her eyes round, as though Nkem had just betrayed her. But how can I live in Nigeria again? she said. When you’ve been here so long, you’re not the same, you’re not like the people there. How can my children blend in? And Nkem, although she disliked the woman’s severely shaved eyebrows, had understood.

(29)

The anxieties of being a hybrid cannot simply stop upon the return to the home country. These questions of “how?”—which echo Harrow’s questions of “where does love come into play, where must one stand in order that love might become a possibility?”, the questions of how hybrids can place themselves in their settings (15)—remain unanswered, and we are left unknowing if Nkem will be able to successfully return without compromising her identity. “How can my children blend in?” the woman asks—perhaps the only way they can is if they wear a mask, a mask that hides their hybrid past, that hides the anxieties that come with their hybridity. Just as the “woman’s severely shaved eyebrows” suggest a mask that she is wearing, Nkem might have to return home wearing a Nigerian mask to cloak her hybridity, in order to feel that she and her children can “blend in.”

Obiora, however, does not share Nkem’s anxieties. He is perfectly comfortable in his hybrid position, and does not take Nkem’s concerns seriously. When asked about the happiness of the custodians of the mask, Obiora “stares at her,” unable to connect with what she is asking,

with the idea of someone else's happiness. If Nkem's struggles as a hybrid come from her double imitation and the separation of self to form a Oneness, Obiora faces neither of these problems. When he speaks about the masks, "he makes them seem breathing, warm" (25). Whereas they are "cold, heavy, lifeless" in Nkem's hands, Obiora feels none of their anxieties, none of their unhappiness; he is insensitive to the custodians' emotions, where Nkem is keenly aware of them. Obiora is an unsympathetic character: the readers dislike him long before he appears in Philadelphia, and his happy hybridity is thus easier to see as a flaw, as a product of his insensitivity. Whereas Nkem worries about her children's ability to be able to "blend in" when they return to Nigeria, Obiora simply brags about their assimilation: "When his friends visited or called, he asked the children to greet Uncle, but first he teased his friends with 'I hope you understand the big-big English they speak; they are *Americanah* now, oh!'"'; similarly, Nkem knows that "[s]oon they will stop being lured by toys and summer trips and start to question a father they see so few times a year" (38), while Obiora seems content to allow this situation to continue indefinitely. Adichie contrasts the reactions of men and women within the diaspora as part of a larger allegory of the difference between how men and women interact with their surroundings: while Obiora is overly confident in his hybridity, Nkem—the character that readers sympathize with—is more aware of the nuances and complications that come with hybridity.

Adichie's works are teeming with overconfident men who believe they have mastered the difficulties of hybridity. In "The Arrangers of Marriage," the male character believes himself to have seamlessly adapted to American culture, a notion that Adichie portrays as laughable. Yet while "The Arrangers of Marriage" is comic in how the male hybrid is portrayed, it is a distressing story of a woman who is trapped in a relationship and a place she does not want to be,

and cannot escape. Chinaza enters into an arranged marriage with Ofodile after knowing him for three weeks, and immediately after the wedding she moves to live with him in the United States, where he has been living for eleven years. He corrects her every move, telling her how to be more “American,” and is an overall disagreeable character: the morning after they arrive in America, he forces himself upon her without her consent, and he tells her that he married her only for her lighter skin, so that his children will fit in better in America. One night, Chinaza finds out that the reason she has not been able to get her work permit yet is because Ofodile had not yet finalized the divorce from his marriage that he entered to obtain his green card. Chinaza is upset and packs her bag, and goes across the hall presumably to stay with Nia, a woman in her building that she has been spending time with, as well as her only friend. Nia confides that she had sex with Ofodile two years ago, when he first moved in, and suggests to Chinaza that she just stay long enough to get her papers, and then she can leave Ofodile. Chinaza realizes that she is right, she cannot leave without her papers, so she returns to Ofodile’s apartment across the hall.

The bulk of the dialogue of the story consists of Ofodile—or Dave, as he has changed his name to be—telling Chinaza what is “American” and what isn’t, how she can be more “American,” and how he is superior to foreigners. Many of his comments are comical: when Chinaza comments that the tomatoes on her pizza are undercooked, Ofodile responds, ““We overcook food back home and that is why we lose all the nutrients. Americans cook things right. See how healthy they all look?’ I nodded, looking around. At the next table, a black woman with a body as wide as a pillow held sideways smiled at me.” Adichie mocks Ofodile’s worship of American culture, as well as the accuracy of his facts. He shows Chinaza the “wonders of America,” which include “stores that sold clothes and tools and plates and books and phones....



Before we left, he led the way to McDonald's" (177). Adichie paints Ofodile as a ridiculous character who is far too invested in the American lifestyle.

Yet even Ofodile cannot escape the touch of anxiety that comes with the hybrid identity. When Chinaza asks for milk for her tea, he says, "'Americans don't drink their tea with milk and sugar.' 'Ezi okwu? Don't you drink yours with milk and sugar?' 'No, I got used to the way things are done here a long time ago. You will too, baby'" (171). Even in his own home, where he insists that English is spoken, he will not do anything that might discredit his "American-ness." His persistence in drinking bland tea in order to be more American is laughable, as is the way he treats milk and sugar as a sure marker of a foreigner: "I got used to the way things are done here a long time ago." This is a new kind of anxiety that arises from hybrids: he is so desperate to cut his Nigerian self away from him, that he is constantly aware of performing his American role, even when no one can see him. In public, his anxieties heighten: "'Biko, don't they have a lift instead?' I asked.... 'Speak English. There are people behind you,' he whispered, pulling me away, toward a glass counter full of twinkling jewelry" (177). Unable to bear the idea of strangers hearing his wife speak Igbo, he pulls her away and reprimands her for not speaking English. In their apartment building, he does not allow Chinaza to cook Nigerian food—"I don't want us to be known as the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food"—and instead requests that she cook American food.

Within Ofodile, we can see a hint of Gikandi's New Guinean boys: both the boys and Ofodile see no benefit of their original culture, and believe that the only answer to their woes lie with the material culture of the west. Gikandi writes about the boys to point to a more pessimistic strand of globalization that is often overlooked in postcolonial theory; likewise, Adichie uses Ofodile as an example of hybridity gone awry. Instead of combining cultures, or living in both

worlds, Ofodile has rejected all that is Nigerian (“‘This is not like Nigeria, where you shout out to the conductor,’ he said, sneering, as though he was the one who had invented the superior American system” [173]). In making Ofodile a ridiculous and unlikeable character, Adichie portrays his type of hybridity as ridiculous as well: he has swallowed America for everything he wants it to be, without looking at the country objectively and perhaps seeing benefits to his Nigerian culture.

While Ofodile has rejected his Nigerian past, Chinaza is a hybrid that very much lives in both worlds: while she is physically in the grocery store with Ofodile, she is mentally in Nigeria:

I thought about the open market in Enugu, the traders who sweet-talked you into stopping at their zinc-covered sheds, who were prepared to bargain all day to add one single kobo to the price. They wrapped what you bought in plastic bags when they had them, and when they did not have them, they laughed and offered you worn newspapers. (175)

Chinaza is simultaneously in America and Nigeria, physically in the former and mentally in the latter. According to Harrow, “one always occupies two locations when abroad, but the sense of belonging in the one comes to be supplanted by the physical location of the other” (27). The physical grocery store is displacing her open market, but instead of completely eliminating it, her open market is forced to be only a memory. Here is where Chinaza and her husband differ: whereas Chinaza is “doomed to a double destiny” (Harrow 28), a splitting of self that will not allow comfort in either country, Ofodile resists his doubleness in an effort to eliminate Nigeria from his identity. This juxtaposition, which occurs in the isolated instance of the diaspora, showcases differences between male and female reactions to their new situations: while Ofodile

sacrifices his previous identity, Chinaza tries to hold onto hers, creating an allegory of male and female sensibilities.

Though Ofodile attempts to eliminate Nigeria from Chinaza as well, she resists through language. Even though Ofodile has changed her name to Agatha Bell and forbids his wife to speak English, Chinaza resists: she introduces herself to Nia as Chinaza, and speaks Igbo to herself while she cooks. When Ofodile corrects her incorrect vocabulary, Chinaza does not change her expressions. In a way that suggests annoyance at Ofodile's insistence on using American terms, she simply uses what she knows and puts the "correct" term in parenthesis: "Can we buy these biscuits?" I asked... 'Cookies. Americans call them cookies,' he said. I reached out for the biscuits (cookies)" (174); "'*Biko*, don't they have a lift instead?' I asked.... 'It's an elevator, not a lift. Americans say elevator.' 'Okay.' He led me to the lift (elevator)..." (177); "'Would you pass that, please?' he asked.... 'The jug?' 'Pitcher. Americans say pitcher, not jug.' I pushed the jug (pitcher) across" (183). The similar syntax of each instance emphasizes the monotony in Ofodile's corrections, and Chinaza's refusal to use the correct terms in her inner monologue represent her resistance to complete assimilation: she will not let go of her Igbo language, nor strive to perfect her American English as her husband does. She will not teach herself to speak anew to make Americans accept her, the way Ofodile has: "He sounded different when he spoke to Americans: his *r* was overpronounced and his *t* was underpronounced. And he smiled, the eager smile of a person who wanted to be liked" (176). Chinaza's lingual resistance reaches its peak when she says his name for the first time: "'Ofodile, you should have let me know this before now,'" she says when Ofodile tells her that he is technically married (183). She uses his Nigerian name, a name that he never goes by in America, and verbally asserts herself for the first time since he ignored her when she told him to "Wait—" the first time they had sex

(169). These lingual resistances allow Chinaza to hold on to her Nigerian identity, allow her to fight the absolute assimilation that Ofodile wishes her to go through. Though she is “doomed to a double destiny,” she would rather endure that fate than force herself into a false hybridity where she simply assimilates.

Adichie reveals her stakes in African feminism in the beginning of the story, when Chinaza does not blame Ofodile for his behavior, but instead blames “the arrangers of marriage.” His snoring, his inadequate flat, his “mouth[] that told the story of sleep, that felt clammy like old chewing gum, that smelled like the rubbish dumps at Ogbete Market” (169)—these are all details that “the arrangers of marriage” failed to . In blaming the arrangers of marriage instead of Ofodile, Adichie is putting the responsibility on patriarchy, the very system that arranges these marriages so that men can have ““a Nigerian wife...[that] might even be a virgin”” (184). Adichie does not demonize Ofodile, making him the enemy, but accuses patriarchy of setting up the system which Ofodile is a part of.

Also “doomed to a double destiny”—quite literally—is Akunna in the title story of the collection, “The Thing Around Your Neck.” Akunna, the main character of the story, is a very literal hybrid—a combination of two personas—and experiences the violence that comes with the territory. In the story Akunna moves from Nigeria to the United States into her uncle’s house. Her uncle tries to sleep with her, and she immediately leaves the house and takes a bus to a small town in Connecticut. Akunna gets a job at a restaurant where people are constantly asking her if she is Jamaican; when she explains that she is from Africa, they make comments about safaris and famine, and she is frustrated by their ignorance. She meets a young man who has been to Africa and feels that he understands her position, and they begin dating. But he, too, is

condescending, and when Akunna leaves to go home to her father's funeral, it is left unclear whether she will return to Connecticut and her boyfriend, or stay in Nigeria.

The story is written in second person, which is an unusual choice, and forces Akunna to be a literal hybrid: the readers inhabit Akunna, and she thus becomes a person with two backgrounds, two cultures.<sup>4</sup> Adichie brings our attention to Akunna's dual persona: "The next day, he took you to dinner at Chang's and your fortune cookie had two strips of paper. Both of them were blank" (121). Adichie showcases the fact that there are two strips of paper because there are two people opening this fortune cookie—Akunna as well as the reader. Akunna is thus a product of what the reader places onto her, and her own identity. The futures for both are unknown, and suggest a "horror[] of encountering something beyond one's control" (Harrow 18): the futures are beyond her control, and Akunna does not know what she will encounter next as a newly formed hybrid.

Adichie specifically addresses the literal violence that Akunna faces in becoming a hybrid, though it is different from the violence that Nkem encounters as she tries to form her identities into one: instead, Akunna's violence comes from feeling that she does not have an identity at all.

Nobody knew where you were, because you told no one. Sometimes you felt invisible and tried to walk through your room wall into the hallway, and when you bumped into the wall, it left bruises on your arms. Once, Juan asked if you had a man that hit you because he would take care of him and you laughed a mysterious laugh.

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<sup>4</sup> This is complicated by the fact that the reader may be Western or non-Western, American or Nigerian. For the sake of this argument, I will assume that the reader is Western.

At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that  
very nearly choked you before you fell asleep.

Akunna's feeling of invisibility is so strong that she literally walks into walls—perhaps either to test if she can truly walk through them, or to feel pain and realize that she is still alive and functioning. This is a physical manifestation of Harrow's "crossing": because nobody knows who she is, she feels ungrounded, unidentified, and tries to cross from one physical place to the next through a wall. Yet she cannot, and is hurt in the process, just she cannot succeed in the crossing from Nigeria to the United States. Akunna is "choked" by something that wraps around her neck: though we are never told what this "thing" is, it is perhaps the weight of her inability to successfully navigate as a hybrid in America. She is immobilized by the "thing" around her neck, just as she is damaged by her bruises for trying to be in two places at once. This physical violence symbolizes the violence that necessarily accompanies Akunna's transition into being a hybrid.

If we view Akunna's boyfriend as a hybrid—which he certainly considers himself to be—we can see his overconfidence as a demonstration of the "happy hybrid" syndrome: *he* is content with his situation, but as readers we are meant to see his flaws in this satisfaction. The boyfriend—who remains unnamed in the story, perhaps to take away some of the privilege that he inherently has in his white, middle-class upbringing—believes himself to be a sympathetic, worldly character who understands Akunna and her situation. Because he has visited countries in Africa, he believes himself to be an expert on the continent, and a hybrid of sorts: in an African store, he tells the shopkeeper that he is a white African, and "looked pleased that the store owner had believed him" (123). He scoffs at the "touristy" destinations of Africa because the "real" Africa is in the shantytowns: indeed, he pictures himself as an African of sorts.

Yet his confidence in his hybridity is frustrating to Akunna, and laughable to the readers, because it is so contrived. When Akunna tells him about a time she was ashamed of her father for groveling in front of another man, she is aggravated by his response:

After you told him this, he pursed his lips and held your hand and said he understood how you felt. You shook your hand free, suddenly annoyed, because he thought the world was, or ought to be, full of people like him. You told him there was nothing to understand, it was just the way it was. (123)

The boyfriend's sense of hybridity has made him overconfident, has made him believe that if only the world were "full of people like him" then it would be a better place. He is naïve, and—like most naïve people—entirely unaware of it. Akunna tells him that there is "nothing to understand," but he has based his identity as one who is understanding. His "ability"—as he sees it—to emphasize with Third World citizens is, perhaps, the "empowerment" that Bhabha refers to in hybrids; yet we are able to see that this empowerment makes him look foolish. Yet it *is* empowering in a way: to "understand" is to belittle, to put himself in a position of power over Akunna. To "understand" is to acknowledge that difference and to condescend to it: this makes Akunna "annoyed" and leads her to tell him that "it was just the way it was"—she asks him to not place himself above her like that.

Though the boyfriend sees it as his unique ability, he is not even adequate at "understanding": he still creates a divide between himself and those in developing countries, and cannot see similarities where they clearly exist. When Akunna and he are walking one day, she accuses him of this flaw:

You did not want him to go to Nigeria, to add it to the list of countries where he went to gawk at the lives of poor people who could never gawk back at *his* life.

You told him this on a sunny day, when he took you to see Long Island Sound, and the two of you argued, your voices raised as you walked along the calm water. He said you were wrong to call him self-righteous. You said it was wrong to call only the poor Indians in Bombay the real Indians. Did it mean he wasn't a real American, since he was not like the poor fat people you and he had seen in Hartford? (124-125)

At this comment, the boyfriend becomes angry and walks off. He cannot see that the generalizations that he makes—that “real” Indians are poor—could be made in his own country, and that they are false in both places. He is not a hybrid, Akunna claims: he is a gawker, an outsider who tries to determine what is authentic. Yet when he is gawked at, he does not know how to respond.

The boyfriend's overconfidence in his hybridity is mocked in the story: immediately after he looks “pleased that the store owner had believed” that he was from Africa, “[y]ou cooked that evening with the things you had bought, and after he ate *garri* and *onugbu* soup, he threw up in your sink” (123). In placing these sentences next to each other, Adichie is poking fun at this overly confident white boy who thinks he can pass for African, but then throws up the African food he eats.

Adichie does not, however, simplify gender roles so much as to disallow any complexity within male hybridity: she does write male characters who experience the trauma and anxiety of being a hybrid, but still, they have a greater outward confidence in their identity. By exploring the hybrid identity of an Englishman in Nigeria in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie expands the definition of hybridity in the diaspora. Whereas Bhabha defines hybrids in terms of their relationship with the colonized and their potential to gain back agency, Adichie again gives



a more realistic view of the lived experience of hybrids: those who are in the opposite diaspora—moving from developed to developing countries as opposed to the more frequent opposite movement—suffer through many of the same problems as the traditional hybrid. They, too, do not have an easy transition, and must fumble their way through the movement. This opposite hybridity is seen in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is the story of love and suffering before and during the Biafran War, a civil war in Nigeria that took place from 1967-1970. Conflict began when the Hausa Muslims in the North began systematically killing Igbo Christians in the South because of strained relations that began when the English put Igbo people in power during colonization. The Igbo attempted to secede and create a new nation—The Republic of Biafra, the area where the novel takes place—but this sparked the two and a half year war, because the new Republic of Biafra would have had most of the country's oil resources. The novel spans about ten years, jumping from pre-war years to during the war: Parts I and III take place in the early 1960s, before the war begins, and Parts II and IV take place during the war and just as the war is ending, respectively. *Half of a Yellow Sun* centers around three characters, and rotates third person omniscient narration between the three: Richard is an English man who comes to Nigeria to research a book he is writing, and he falls in love with Kainene; Olanna is Kainene's sister, and lives with—and eventually marries—Odenigbo, a University professor; and Ugwu is the houseboy of Odenigbo.

Similar to Ofodile's desire to assimilate into American culture, Richard wishes to disregard his Englishness to become fully Biafran. He tries to deny what Harrow calls the "double consciousness": he wants to believe himself completely immersed in Biafran life and culture ("‘*Abu m onye Biafra*’": I am a Biafran [181]) and is upset when others call attention to the fact that he is British ("Richard was irritated at the thought that he still was a foreigner who

could be attacked” [314]). He wants to move fully from the British world that he has left, to the Biafran world where he feels more at home. Adichie, however, does not allow this to be an easy transition. Richard is not fully situated in the Biafran world, but instead straddles it and his English world: though he attempts to exemplify his African-ness, he cannot erase the English side of him.

In a scene where Richard tries to have sex for the first time with Kainene, his anxieties about being African—being one with Kainene—are revealed. In an essay examining the relationship between belonging and identification in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Madhu Krishnan provides a useful observation for understanding Richard’s anxiety in having sex with Kainene: Krishnan argues that Richard defines himself through a metonymic chain: he identifies Kainene with the roped pots (“Richard’s initial desire for Kainene is quickly subsumed into a metonymic connection to his desire for the pots.... Richard’s desire for the pots is then displaced to his desire for Kainene” [31]), and the roped pots to him represent Africa (“the land is metonymically represented through the pots which, in turn, become imbued with the conceptual purity of an abstract African identity” [31]). Thus Kainene, to Richard, represents Africa, represents what will later become Biafra; therefore, in his attempt to have sex with Kainene, Richard is symbolically attempting to assert his African-ness. The first time they attempt to have sex, he cannot become erect:

Perhaps it [not allowing himself to hope for sex] was why an erection eluded him: the gelding mix of surprise and desire. They undressed quickly. His naked body was pressed to hers and yet he was limp. He explored the angles of her collarbones and her hips, all the time willing his body and his mind to work better

together, willing his desire to bypass his anxiety. But he did not become hard. He could feel the flaccid weight between his legs. (63)

Here we can see where Richard's attempt at hybridity—at manifesting his African-ness—is instead a manifestation of his anxiety. Richard's "desire" is his desire to become one with Kainene, to be inside of her, and thus to be one with Africa; yet his "anxiety" is the anxiety that comes with the double consciousness of being in two worlds at once: at the same time that he wants to be African, he is a "modern-day explorer of the Dark Continent" (62), as Kainene calls him on the previous page. Even as he "explore[s] the angles of her collarbones," he is this white explorer, and cannot reconcile both identities, just as he cannot reconcile "his body and his mind to work better together." As a solution to his problem, he wants to take "some herbs, potent manhood herbs he remembered reading about somewhere, which African men took" (68). With these African herbs, he hopes to become a Biafran man: a man able to have sex with his Biafran girlfriend and become one with her.

Richard's anxieties in his inability to reconcile his Englishness and his desire to be African are also revealed in his nostalgia for home. When Richard tells Kainene that he has left Susan, and that he is moving to Nsukka, she hugs him in an intimate way that she has never done before. "He thought about that hug often, and each time he did he had the sensation of a wall crumbling" (70). Yet at the very moment of this "crumbling"—the crumbling of the wall that separates Kainene and Richard—we are taken to his "crumbling house in England":

...Richard felt a strangeness overcome him. Kainene was speaking, something about one of her employees, but he felt himself receding, his mind unfurling, rolling back on its own. The orange trees, the presence of so many trees around him, the hum of flies overhead, the abundance of green, brought back memories

of his parents' house in Wentnor. It was incongruous that this tropical humid place, with the sun turning the skin on his arms a mild scarlet and the bees sunning themselves, should remind him of the crumbling house in England, which was drafty even in summer. (77)

His double consciousness here is revealed by the doubling of the world "crumbling": it is used to explain both his relationship with Kainene and also his home in England. Though he is with Kainene, and he realizes that it is "incongruous" that he should be thinking of England now, he cannot let go of that double self, the self that is still a part of England. He then remembers a poem that his father used to read to him:

*Into my heart on air that kills  
From yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remembered hills,  
What spires, what farms are those?*

*That is the land of lost content  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went  
And cannot come again. (77)*

"Air that kills" brings us again to Harrow's idea of violence within the constant crossing between worlds. The air that is blown from "yon far country" is deadly and dangerous: "Crossing, as in any melodrama worth its frisson, means craziness, danger, and the horrors of encountering something beyond one's control" (Harrow 18). This is a poem, too, of nostalgia—of a place that cannot be revisited. Richard's relationship to England has changed completely: in order to

occupy space in Nigeria, he must make sacrifices—“accommodations,” as Harrow puts it (15)—since he cannot be physically in both worlds at once, and this is the sacrifice that he has made: England has become “the land of lost content” that he can never fully occupy again, since Africa will now always be within his consciousness as well.

Part of Richard’s anxiety stems from the fact that, no matter how much he wants to be comfortable with a Biafran identity, he feels displaced. After watching a man he had been talking to be shot down right in front of him, along with many other Igbo in an airport, he becomes uncomfortable with the fact that this has not affected him in the way that he feels like it should.

He didn’t believe that life was the same for all the other people who had witnessed the massacres. Then he felt more frightened at the thought that perhaps he had been nothing more than a voyeur. He had not feared for his own life, so the massacres became external, outside of him; he had watched them through the detached lens of knowing he was safe. (167-168).

Richard is a “voyeur,” “detached”—he is not fully connected to the world that he lives in. He is watching from afar, through a “lens.” But this frightens him, that he could stay a voyeur in this country that he wants to be fully a part of. In this case, he feels that he must fear for his own life in order to connect with the country that he desperately wants to be a part of. Yet Richard still believes that he can become Biafran:

He wanted to ask her to marry him. This was a new start, a new country, *their* country. It was not only because secession was just, considering all that the Igbo had endured, but because of the possibility Biafra held for him. He would be Biafran in a way he could never have been Nigerian—he was here at the

beginning; he had shared in the birth. He would belong. He said, *Marry me, Kainene* in his head many times but he did not say it aloud. (168)

Here we can see again that marrying Kainene and becoming Biafran are interconnected: “He would belong” and “*Marry me, Kainene*”—such simple, short sentences—are placed next to each other, and neither is able to come true. Richard is selfish in the birth of Biafra: “It was not *only* because secession was just”—that millions of people were targeted for massacre—but also because it will help him belong. Just as we see his anxieties in becoming Biafran play out in sexual intercourse with Kainene, here they play out with birthing imagery: “he had shared in the birth,” and this is “*their* country,” as if he and Kainene had together birthed Biafra. Yet he has not lost his anxieties about being the “father” of the country:

He thought about how easily those Igbo words had slipped out of him. “I am a Biafran.” He did not know why, but he hoped the driver would not tell Kainene that he had said that. He hoped, too, that the driver would not tell Kainene that he had referred to her as his wife. (181)

Richard’s outward confidence but inner anxieties are on display here: even as he says that he is Biafran, he hopes that “the driver would not tell Kainene.” He fluctuates between being comfortable in his Biafran role, and being unsure about what that role means. He fears that Kainene will know he is telling people he is Biafran, just as he fears that she will find out he is calling her his wife. Ultimately, however, Richard admits his inability to truly be Biafran: he stops writing his book, saying simply, ““The war isn’t my story to tell, really”” (425). This coincides with his loss of Kainene, and thus his loss of his oneness with Biafra.

Though he is the only character who has moved to Nigeria from a different country, Richard is not the only hybrid in the novel. When Biafra became its own country, all of its

citizens had to reconcile their Nigerian identity with their new Biafran identity. Ugwu's attempt at this reconciliation is the most intriguing, because by the end of the novel, Ugwu lives in not just two worlds, but three: Nigeria before the war, Biafra during the war, and Nigeria after the war. While he is only physically in Nigeria after the war in the last few chapters, he is constantly being forced back into the other places and times through visceral memories: when Richard comes to take Ugwu home, Ugwu is also taken back to the home of years ago: "But he was grateful for Mr. Richard's laughter, the normality of it, the way it came back with a force of memory and made him inhabit the time when Mr. Richard wrote his answers in a leather-covered book" (395). The language used is violent: the memory is a "force" that "ma[kes] him" go somewhere else. He is thrown from his present into his past, from post-war (or, at this point in the novel, at the very end of the war) to pre-war. On the very next page, Ugwu is forced again into a different time and place: from the present into the past, from Nigeria into Biafra: "Later, Ugwu murmured the title to himself: *The World Was Silent When We Died*. It haunted him, filled him with shame. It made him think about that girl in the bar, her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor" (396). The title Ugwu refers to is the book that is being written throughout the novel: at the end of eight different chapters, we are given a piece of this book, which we are told Richard is writing. Yet in the very last sentence of the novel, we realize that it has been Ugwu writing the book: "Ugwu writes his dedication last: *For Master, my good man*" (433). "That girl in the bar" is a barmaid that Ugwu raped when he was a soldier in the war. Thus for Ugwu to keep the title of the book that "haunt[s] him, fill[s] him with shame" and forces him into a different time and place represents his simultaneous occupation of both worlds: he is at once who he was when he was a Biafran and raped the barmaid as well as his present Nigerian self who is filled with the shame from that moment.

This is not an existence that Ugwu desires for himself: Ugwu wishes to clean away the past to live only in the present. When they return for the first time to their old house, Ugwu wants to rid the house of all that it has been through:

He wanted to clean. He wanted to scrub furiously. He feared, though, that it would change nothing. Perhaps the house was stained to its very foundation and that smell of something long dead and dried would always cling to the rooms and the rustle of rats would always come from the ceiling. (419)

Similar to Richard's desire to clean away his Englishness, and Ofodile's desire to clean away his Nigerianness, Ugwu wants to clean away the recent history that has made his house (and his heart) filthy. He fears—and knows—that cleaning the house will not change the past, that the war will now always be a part of the house. He cannot erase the past few years and return to the days before the war. Both he and the house are irreparably stained to their very foundations, but he cleans the house as best as he can, just as he cleans himself in writing about the war. With Richard and Ugwu, Adichie complicates the impression that her short stories give of men unable to understand the complexities of hybridity: these two characters certainly feel the anxieties, emphasizing the African feminist notion of men and women having to understand one another and work together to overcome hardships.

An analysis of Adichie's representation of the rape provides a useful juxtaposition between Western and African feminist viewpoints in regards to the necessary collaboration between men and women. As a character who has been compassionate and likeable throughout the novel, Ugwu's violent act comes as a shock to readers. He is immediately regretful, and the girl's face haunts him throughout the rest of the novel. Adichie is sympathetic to Ugwu, and does not turn readers against him: he turns to writing, and retreats within himself. Yet literary critic



Brenda Cooper<sup>5</sup> accuses Adichie of “compromis[ing] her feminism” for allowing Ugwu to be redeemed after such an atrocious act (148). In placing gendered violence within the context of national pride, “symbols of national pride overwhelm the realities of male brutality against women” (142). Cooper claims that the rape is downplayed, is deflected as a trauma of war and thus “loses its visceral concreteness and becomes symbolic of the abnormality of war” (148), and Ugwu is able to redeem himself “through recording the atrocities in his writing, which seems, at least in part, at the expense of the violated woman” (143). Cooper believes that the novel therefore excuses rape and does not hold Ugwu to the consequences of his actions.

Yet in ultimately forgiving Ugwu, Adichie does not compromise her feminism: she is giving a realistic portrayal of rape and the mentality of war. After getting to know Ugwu for almost 400 pages before his crime, readers are forced to realize that rape is not as simple as bad men doing bad things. Up until this point, Ugwu has proven himself to be a decent young man, and his actions are shocking. Yet Adichie does not demonize him for what he did: she instead allows him to overcome his guilt and “atone for what he had done” (397). As war turns into peace, Adichie suggests that crimes and atrocities must be forgiven if life is to continue. She does not pit men against women, does not accuse men of being wholly responsible for all of the problems that women face; she forgives Ugwu in an attempt at allowing men and women to come together to face the realities of life after war: in such a battered environment, there is no other alternative if there is to be peace. The forgiveness of Ugwu, then, allegorizes the forgiveness of war crimes, of male atrocities, in favor of peace and reconciliation.

When asked in an interview which character Adichie identified with most, her answer was Ugwu: “Ugwu for me is the heart of the book... Ugwu is an eternal student of life... Ugwu

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<sup>5</sup> Though Cooper is South African, her feminist views align with Western feminism, as opposed to Adichie’s alignment with African feminism.

really, despite the fact that he is male, and—he’s really the character I identify with most.” If Ugwu is the heart of the book, the character that we, too, are presumably meant to identify with, then forgiving him is vital. In forgiving Ugwu, we understand that he, too, is doubly colonized: it was England’s influence on Nigeria that allowed the civil war to occur, that thus forced Ugwu into the army. And during the rape scene, it is the pressures of patriarchy and manliness that influence Ugwu to join in on the gang rape. When he walks in on the scene, he is repelled:

Ugwu backed away from the door.

“*Uju abiala o!* Target Destroyer is afraid!”

Ugwu shrugged and moved forward. “Who is afraid?” he said disdainfully.

“I just like to eat before others, that is all.”

“The food is still fresh!”

“Target Destroyer, aren’t you a man? *I bukwa nwoke?*” (365)

This questioning of Ugwu’s manhood—asked in both English and Igbo—is what convinces him to join his peers in violently raping the barmaid. Though clearly Ugwu is not portrayed as a victim of patriarchy in the way that the barmaid is, he is, in a way, victimized by patriarchy in that he feels that he must rape this girl in order to prove his manhood. Adichie does not excuse his actions, but provides a reason for them, thus allowing us to better understand Ugwu and the pressures that he, too, faces from a similar double colonization that women face. Being antagonistic to men will achieve little; learning to forgive them and understand that they are fighting a similar battle allows for collaboration that is a hallmark of African feminism.

Adichie’s discussion of hybridity moves beyond the diaspora and explores the dichotomy that is placed on postcolonial subjects between hybridity and authenticity. In the story “Jumping

Monkey Hill,” rather than emphasize the difficult aspects of hybridity, Adichie explores the power behind hybridity, but how it is in constant battle with authenticity, which creates anxiety within the characters. The main character in the story is Ujunwa, a young Nigerian writer who is invited to an African Writers Workshop outside Cape Town. The Workshop is run by Edward, an old English man, and he asks each participant to write a story during the two week workshop. Edward praises a story, written by a Tanzanian man, about the killings in the Congo, calling it “urgent and relevant,” though Ujunwa thinks it “read[s] like a piece from *The Economist* with cartoon characters painted in” (109). The other stories from the workshop are about sexual harassment, witchcraft, and homosexuality; Edward calls them inauthentic and unrealistic. In the conclusion of the story, he calls Ujunwa’s story unbelievable because the character walks away from a job opportunity because she was sexually harassed, and Ujunwa tells him that it was an autobiographical story.

Edward has a vision of what he believes “Africa” to be, and he denies his characters any chance at being hybrids or being able to step away from the script that the West has written for them. This adds a new dimension to the anxiety of hybridity: it is frowned down upon by Westerners who believe themselves to be the protectors of African culture. Yet from the beginning, we can see that Edward’s idea of authentic “African-ness” is skewed: he chooses Jumping Monkey Hill as the resort, where he used to spend his weekends when he lectured at a university. Though this is a workshop for African writers, this is clearly a white resort: each thatch roofed cabin has names “like Baboon Lodge and Porcupine Place,” and “discreet black maids” do all the work. Ujunwa imagines it as “the kind of place where... affluent foreign tourists would dart around taking pictures of lizards and then return home still mostly unaware that there were more black people than red-capped lizards in South Africa” (95). The other

guests at the resort “—all of whom were white—look[] at the participants suspiciously” (108), and the participants clearly do not fit in because they are neither white tourists nor the black workers. In choosing to have the workshop here, Edward reveals his inability to discern the “real” Africa from the Africa that attracts tourists and white people, even though he proclaims himself as “one who [is] keen on the real Africa” (107).

Edward does not allow the participants in his workshop to show any sign of hybridity, accusing a mixture of cultures as being a Western imposition. He sees it as mimicry instead of hybridity, and does not accept that cultures can shift and bring in new aspects. He reveals his distaste of anything “hybrid” during a story that one of the participants reads:

After dinner, the Senegalese read from her story...Afterwards, everyone turned to Edward... Edward chewed at his pipe thoughtfully before he said that homosexual stories of this sort weren't reflective of Africa, really.

“Which Africa?” Ujunwa blurted out.

The black South African shifted on his seat. Edward chewed further at his pipe. Then he looked at Ujunwa in the way one would look at a child who refused to keep still in church and said that he wasn't speaking as an Oxford-trained Africanist, but as one who was keen on the real Africa and not the imposing of Western ideas on African venues. The Zimbabwean and Tanzanian and white South African began to shake their heads as Edward was speaking.

“This may indeed be the year 2000, but how African is it for a person to tell her family that she is homosexual?” Edward asked

The Senegalese burst out in incomprehensible French and then, a minute of fluid speech later, said, “*I am Senegalese! I am Senegalese!*” Edward

responded in equally swift French and then said in English, with a soft smile, “I think she had too much of that excellent Bordeaux,” and some of the participants chuckled. (107-108)

Adichie’s portrayals of hybrids in other stories is complicated by this excerpt: while she does not allow her characters to be happy hybrids, neither do they cling to the idea of authenticity, and Adichie in fact mocks the idea that there is an “authentic” Africa. According to Kwame Appiah, a Ghanaian-American cultural theorist, the idea of authenticity amounts to a dominating culture telling another culture what to value. By being “keen on the real Africa,” Edward is dictating what the “real” Africa is, disallowing a Senegalese to *be* Senegalese: though she protests that she *is* Senegalese, Edward does not accept it, does not accept her hybridity, her attempt at empowerment for embracing her own sexual identity. The Senegalese’s reaction—“*I am Senegalese! I am Senegalese!*”—represents her anxiety: in her shouting assertion, she is perhaps trying to convince not only Edward, but herself and the other participants as well. She is trying to justify her hybridity in that she can be lesbian *and* Senegalese. Yet as if by reflex, the other participants allow Edward to take this role: they turn to him for his reaction to the story; they chuckle when he brushes off the Senegalese’s indignation at being called inauthentic. Adichie thus places her characters in a nearly impossible situation: when they leave Africa, they are not allowed to be happy hybrids; yet when they try to escape the Western script of how they should live, they are accused of allowing the imposition of Western ideas.

## Conclusion

Literary theories often run the risk of being inapplicable to lived experiences; Bhabha’s theory of hybridity has proven to be no exception. On paper, his concept of hybridity as a mode

of empowerment is logical: postcolonial subjects can regain their agency by morphing the colonial culture to create their own unique culture. Yet in the lived experience, this does not pan out: Adichie takes us into the worlds of hybrids—white and black, inside their country and outside, male and female—and explores the accuracy of Bhabha's theory. The one happy hybrid that we do find is laughable in his self-righteousness, and the other hybrids within her texts do not find a sense of empowerment within their situation; they instead feel false and ungrounded, anxious in their inability to perform their hybrid roles, and face internal violence and dangerous mental crossings. While she uses the differences in male and female hybrids to allegorize the differences in male and female responses to new situations, she also does not demonize men and turn them into enemies: she recognizes that they, too, are caught within the binds of colonization and even, sometimes, patriarchy, and she advocates for peaceful reconciliations with African males as opposed to fighting against them.

Adichie leaves us, then, with a question: what is the fate of hybrid identities, both male and female? Are they inherently doomed to unease and anxiety, or is there a way they can be comfortable in their identity: is there, in other words, a potential for a happy hybrid? Can hybridity indeed be empowering? Adichie does not answer these questions in her texts: many of her characters that move to the United States return home to Nigeria, or at least intend to at the end of the story. Yet as a Nigerian who spends half of her time living in the United States, perhaps we can take the liberty to assume that Adichie herself is a hybrid who is at ease with her surroundings. What greater empowerment can she have, after all, than telling the stories that had gone untold? If she leaves us with no other hope for hybrids, we can at least take it from her own history that there is power in the actual lived hybrid situation, though it might be impeded by the anxieties that weigh down the subject.

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