



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

DECOLONIAL FEMINISM IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S
WORKS: A STUDY OF PURPLE HIBISCUS, HALF OF A YELLOW
SUN, AND AMERICANAH

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 870

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Rémi Armand Tchokothe, for his guidance and thoughtful suggestions throughout the course of this thesis. His insights have been instrumental in shaping the direction and core ideas of this work. I am especially thankful for the many thought-provoking perspectives he introduced, which enriched my understanding and helped give this thesis its foundation.

Note on Sources and Citations

In this paper, I cite both primary sources I have read directly and ideas from other scholars accessed through secondary references, especially where those original texts were unavailable. When referencing ideas cited within another author's work, I indicate this clearly with phrases such as "as cited in." For transparency and accuracy, the bibliography includes only the works I have consulted firsthand.

Trigger Warning

This thesis contains discussions and descriptions of sensitive topics, including physical abuse, violence, suicide, violence against women, and rape. Readers who may find such content distressing are advised to proceed with care.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4
Decolonial Feminism and Contemporary Nigerian Literature.....	4
Why Adichie?.....	5
State of the Art.....	5
Research Questions, Methodology, and Theoretical Framework.....	6
Chapter Breakdown.....	8
CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS OF DECOLONIAL FEMINISM.....	11
Decolonial Feminism: A Framework of Entanglement.....	11
Sensuous Knowledge and African Feminist Epistemologies: “Spider Feminism” & “Harmony Feminism”.....	14
Afro-Feminism and the Politics of De-colonization.....	18
Conclusion: Toward a Decolonial Feminist Literary Methodology.....	21
CHAPTER 2: EARLY FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN PURPLE HIBISCUS.....	22
Home–Away–Home Structure in Purple Hibiscus: Between Enugu and Nsukka.....	23
Toxic Masculinity and Catholicism: A false Omelora.....	27
Feminist Resistance: A Case Study of Auntie Ifeoma.....	30
“The Love Sip”: The Politics of Food in the Achike’s Household.....	32
Conclusion.....	35
CHAPTER 3: WOMEN, WAR, AND SURVIVAL: AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF HALF OF A YELLOW SUN.....	36
The Nigerian Civil War in Half of a Yellow Sun: Historical Contextualization of the Novel.....	37
Feminist Anti-Militarism and the Ecology of Feminism: An Ecofeminist Praxis for Reading the Genocidal War Novel.....	42
Metafictionality and Polyphonic Narratives: “Feminizing” the Genocide Fiction.....	49
Notions of Masculinity and Motherhood: The Gendered Aftermath of War.....	53
Conclusion.....	61
CHAPTER 4: MIGRATION, IDENTITY, AND FEMINISM IN AMERICANAH....	62

The Politics of Migration: Barack Obama and the Shattered American Dream in Americanah.....	63
Transgression, Body and Space: Racial Othering in Americanah.....	70
Hair Politics and Racial Identification.....	75
<i>Americanah and Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come (2005), Swallow (2008), and A Bit of Difference (2012): A Comparative Study of Nigerian Diasporic Literatures.....</i>	82
CONCLUSION: Toward a Decolonial Feminist Imagination – Literature as Praxis.	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	98

DECOLONIAL FEMINISM IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S WORKS
A STUDY OF *PURPLE HIBISCUS*, *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*, AND
AMERICANAH

INTRODUCTION

Decolonial Feminism and Contemporary Nigerian Literature

In recent years, feminist discourse has undergone a significant reorientation—from globalized, universalist narratives toward feminist perspectives grounded in specific cultural, historical, and epistemic contexts. Decolonial feminism emerges not simply as a critique of dominant paradigms, but as a reclaiming of knowledge systems that have long been marginalized or erased. In the realm of African women’s writing, particularly by Nigerian authors both within the country and across the diaspora, this shift has profoundly shaped how gender, identity, and resistance are represented and interpreted.

This thesis engages with the literary works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—*Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013)—as central texts through which decolonial feminist ideas are expressed. However, in alignment with the thesis’s comparative literature framework, Adichie’s work will be placed in dialogue with other Nigerian female authors, notably Sefi Atta, whose fiction similarly reflects the tensions and possibilities of diasporic identity, gendered experience, and postcolonial modernity.

Atta, like Adichie, belongs to a generation of Nigerian women writers who craft feminist narratives informed by both local cultural realities and global diasporic locations. As Dobrota Pucherová observes in *Feminism and Modernity in Anglophone African Women’s Literature* (2022), “Adichie’s and Atta’s feminist discourse are typical of postcolonial migrant women who, in a quest for feminist emancipation, leave for abroad [...] to seek freedom and happiness away from the oppressive systems of their own conservative cultures.” (58) This observation opens a valuable pathway for a comparative analysis of diasporic feminism—not as a monolithic departure from “home,” but as a generative reimagining of feminist subjectivity through the movement across borders, both literal and conceptual.

Thus, while Adichie remains the primary focus of this study, her work will be situated within a broader corpus of diasporic Nigerian women's literatures, with Atta serving as a key point of contrast and complement. Their differing narrative styles, character formations, and feminist articulations will be explored in light of African feminist visions advanced by Minna Salami, Françoise Vergès, Sylvia Tamale, and Audre Lorde. These theorists shift the focus away from a preoccupation with Western feminist critique and act toward a centering of African worldviews, bodies, and experiences. As Salami writes, "It is not my aim to convince the first explorer that he's wrong about the mountain. That would place him, yet again, at the center of the narrative. What is important to me is the second explorer's hidden narrative, to put her world at the center" (Salami, 2020: 2). This thesis takes up that call.

Why Adichie?

Adichie's fiction—rooted in Nigeria but often extending to diasporic contexts—offers narratives that mirror the complexities and contradictions of Nigerian women's lives. Her protagonists experience displacement, violence, love, spiritual conflict, and political rupture, often negotiating spaces between tradition and transformation. These experiences, while not representative of all African women, offer significant literary engagements with what African feminisms might look like in practice.

Rather than viewing Adichie as a conduit for translating African feminism into Western discourse (a view often attached to her public persona by the mainstream media), this thesis argues that her novels enact a form of African-centered feminist thinking. Her stories offer room for the reimagination of agency, for resisting colonial residues, and for feminist solidarities grounded in lived African realities, themes that align with the visions of Salami, Vergès, and Tamale.

State of the Art

A number of scholars, such as Aghogho Akpome (2017), Edit Fazakas (2023), Nardjas Zeghib and Karima Bouchene (2024), have explored feminist themes in Adichie's work, including critiques of patriarchy, sexuality, and social mobility. However, much of this scholarship either leans heavily into Western feminist categories or situates Adichie within

a transnational feminist frame that, while useful, can obscure the specifically African feminist logics present in her narratives. To illustrate this, one could analyse the character of Auntie Ifeoma from the debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Auntie Ifeoma is portrayed as a woman who firmly challenges patriarchal norms. Rather than rejecting her culture, she challenges these norms by living a different kind of life, being a diametrically opposed character to her ultraconservative brother, Eugene, the father of Kambili. Ifeoma raises her children to express their thoughts, pursues an academic career and maintains an atmosphere of open discussion and laughter in her home. She often prioritises her independence, even at the expense of her own comfort or security. Rather than relying on the individualistic, rights-focused approach common in Western feminism, she draws her strength from her role in the community and her ability to navigate family dynamics. This type of feminism is reflective of what Obioma Nnaemeka (2004: 357–385) calls “nego-feminism” and it is based on negotiation and compromise, reflecting distinct African feminist perspectives.

The present thesis seeks to interpret Adichie’s fiction through the prism of African feminist epistemologies, by engaging with three key concepts. Firstly, there is the decolonisation of feminism from capitalist, carceral, and Eurocentric assumptions, as proposed by Françoise Vergès. Secondly, there is the centring of African epistemologies and relational ethics, as argued by Minna Salami. Thirdly, there is the Afro-feminist vision of liberation and communal justice, as espoused by Sylvia Tamale. These theorists do not merely critique the global feminist order – they propose alternative frameworks for conceptualising liberation and justice. The present project seeks to establish a dialogue between these frameworks and Adichie’s fiction.

Research Questions, Methodology, and Theoretical Framework

This thesis explores how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as a diasporic Nigerian writer, constructs feminist narratives that emerge from, and respond to, the complex realities of African women’s lives both within Nigeria and abroad. The core research questions guiding this project are as follows: How do Adichie’s novels portray feminist struggles within (post)colonial African and diasporic contexts? In what ways do her characters articulate African-centered feminist values, particularly as they navigate between inherited

cultural norms and globalized experiences? And how might the decolonial feminist visions of Françoise Vergès, Minna Salami, and Sylvia Tamale help illuminate the layered feminist discourse in Adichie's fiction?

To answer these questions, this study adopts a qualitative, close-reading methodology, grounded in textual analysis. The three novels under examination—*Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americanah*—are treated as complex texts that not only represent feminist concerns but also participate in theorizing them. As Dobrota Pucherová highlights, African women's novels have often functioned as “fictionalised theory” or “theorised fiction,” a term originally coined by Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi (1997b) to describe how narrative form becomes a space for feminist epistemology (Pucherová, 21). In this sense, Adichie's literary work is not merely illustrative of theory, but actively generates decolonial feminist knowledge from within. The comparative dimension of the thesis emerges in the consideration of other diasporic Nigerian writers such as Sefi Atta, whose literary engagement with migration, gender, and “modernity” offers a productive counterpoint to Adichie's work. This not only broadens the scope of the analysis but also reinforces the necessity of viewing African feminist narratives through multiple, non-monolithic lenses, attentive to both shared conditions and divergent experiences.

The primary theoretical framework of this thesis is decolonial feminism, especially as articulated by Françoise Vergès. Decolonial feminism begins from the premise that feminism itself has been shaped by colonial hierarchies, privileging White, Western, liberal models of agency and liberation. Vergès argues that “a decolonial feminism does not aim to produce a universal feminist theory but to multiply the voices, experiences, and knowledge of women from the Global South” (2021: 14). Central to this framework is the recognition that liberation cannot be achieved within systems of capitalist extraction, carceral logic, and Eurocentric rationality. Instead, it requires a rethinking of the very foundations of power and gender, as they are historically entangled with coloniality.

Vergès's analysis aligns with the literary and political work of African feminist thinkers such as Minna Salami and Sylvia Tamale, whose visions enrich and extend the theoretical scope of this study. Salami's concept of the “second explorer” – the African woman whose narrative has long been hidden or dismissed – resonates deeply with the narrative strategies employed in Adichie's fiction. Sylvia Tamale, meanwhile, challenges the epistemological

boundaries of feminist theory itself, calling for an Afro-feminist praxis that incorporates local knowledge systems, spirituality, and non-linear understandings of justice and liberation.

While African feminisms and postcolonial theory serve as valuable supplementary lenses—especially in engaging themes of migration, memory, and identity—it is decolonial feminism that structures the core interpretive method of this thesis. Rather than applying these frameworks as external tools to judge the feminist content of Adichie’s novels, this study approaches her fiction as a site of feminist knowledge production, where theory and narrative are deeply intertwined. The goal is not to evaluate whether Adichie’s feminism is sufficiently “radical” or “authentic”, but to understand how her stories themselves imagine, stage, and critique the struggles and possibilities of Nigerian womanhood in a (post)colonial, globalized world.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One: Foundations of Decolonial Feminism in African Women’s Literature

The opening chapter lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the thesis. It begins with an exploration of decolonial feminism as articulated by Françoise Vergès in *A Decolonial Feminism* (2021), situating it as a critical intervention against liberal, Eurocentric models of gender justice. Vergès’s emphasis on how capitalism, coloniality, and patriarchy are historically entangled, forms the bedrock of this study’s feminist framework. Her rejection of universality in favor of plural, grounded feminist practices aligns closely with the narrative strategies of Nigerian diasporic literature. This chapter also draws on Minna Salami’s *Can Feminism Be African?* (2025) and *Sensuous Knowledge* (2020), and Sylvia Tamale’s *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) to further delineate the specific contours of African feminisms, which prioritize the centering of embodied experience, ancestral knowledge, and alternative cosmologies. In this context, Audre Lorde’s landmark essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” serves as a historical and ideological bridge between Black diasporic feminisms and contemporary African thought, particularly through her influence on Salami’s work. The chapter concludes by applying these theories to African feminist literary criticism,

establishing the interpretive approach that will guide the close readings in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two: Early Feminist Resistance in *Purple Hibiscus*

This chapter offers a close analysis of Adichie's debut novel *Purple Hibiscus*, through the lens of decolonial and African feminist theory. The narrative of Kambili, a young girl constrained by patriarchal religious orthodoxy, is examined as a story of interior feminist awakening. Her transformation is contrasted with the more overt resistance embodied by Auntie Ifeoma, whose character represents a model of feminist defiance rooted in intellectual independence, maternal care, and moral courage. This chapter explores how Adichie constructs a domestic and religious landscape that is fraught with colonial residues, particularly in the figure of Eugene, whose violence is deeply shaped by colonial Catholic values. Adichie's refusal to depict resistance solely in overt or Westernized terms complicates feminist expectations and underscores the importance of culturally situated forms of empowerment. By juxtaposing silence and speech, obedience and subversion, Adichie critiques Eurocentric feminist binaries and centers a more relational, context-specific feminist politics.

Chapter Three: Women, War, and Survival – An Ecofeminist Reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun*

In the third chapter, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is analyzed through an ecofeminist lens, emphasizing the interconnectedness between gendered oppression, militarized violence, and environmental crisis. The novel's dual protagonists, Olanna and Kainene, are read as feminist figures navigating the physical and psychological toll of war. Their trajectories reveal how war amplifies existing patriarchal structures, turning women into both targets and agents of survival. This chapter incorporates Sylvia Tamale's reflections on gendered violence in African history, exploring how collective trauma and memory function as sites of feminist resistance and recovery. To deepen this analysis, the chapter also engages with Ynestra King's influential work on ecofeminism and anti-militarism, which articulates the intrinsic connection between ecological destruction, patriarchal violence, and militarized power structures. King's framework helps illuminate how *Half of a Yellow Sun* critiques war not only as a political failure, but as a gendered and

environmental catastrophe, further anchoring the novel within a decolonial ecofeminist discourse. Through its depiction of the Biafran War, Adichie's narrative disrupts nationalist and masculinist versions of history, instead offering a feminist counter-archive rooted in care and survival. Feminist anti-militarism is paired here with ecofeminist thought, showing how environmental degradation and gendered violence often coexist in postcolonial conflict zones.

Chapter Four: Migration, Identity, and Feminism in *Americanah*

This chapter turns to Adichie's transatlantic novel *Americanah*, where themes of migration, racial identity, and beauty politics are brought to the fore. Ifemelu's journey between Nigeria and the United States allows for a nuanced critique of both Western feminism and its inability to fully account for African women's experiences, and Nigerian gender politics shaped by class, religion, and tradition. Central to this analysis is the politics of hair, a recurring metaphor in the novel, and a literal site of resistance. As Adichie herself notes in her public appearances, "Hair is always political," and Ifemelu's natural hair journey mirrors her feminist awakening and rejection of assimilation. Minna Salami's concept of *sensuous*, embodied feminism is key here, offering a way to understand how Adichie foregrounds the intimate, material realities of Black womanhood in diaspora. The chapter also introduces Sefi Atta as a comparative voice, another acclaimed Nigerian diasporic writer whose female protagonists similarly confront the dilemmas of modernity, gender, and transnational belonging. The comparative angle helps to highlight divergent and shared feminist trajectories across the diasporic spectrum.

CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS OF DECOLONIAL FEMINISM

“Decolonization of the mind is using powdered gold not only to heal the mind but also to turn trauma into strength.”

—Minna Salami, *Sensuous Knowledge* (2020: 72)

In her above-mentioned book, the social critic and writer Minna Salami employs the metaphor of *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with powdered gold, to offer a visual analogy for the intellectual and emotional labour involved in decolonial feminism. In this Japanese craft, the cracks and breaks of the object aren’t hidden; instead, they are highlighted, turned into glowing veins that hint at both past damage and the ongoing process of change. Salami draws parallels between the decolonisation of the mind and the process of healing, suggesting that it does not entail a return to an unbroken origin, but rather a process of acknowledgement and revaluation of the wounds of histories. This image establishes the theoretical foundation of this thesis, which interprets Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s fiction as a form of feminist “golden repair.”

This chapter establishes the theoretical and methodological foundations of the thesis by engaging with key thinkers in decolonial feminist thought. It begins with Françoise Vergès’s *A Decolonial Feminism*, which unpacks the historical entanglements of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. The framework is then expanded through African-centred perspectives articulated by Minna Salami and Sylvia Tamale, who foreground ancestral knowledge, embodied epistemologies, and alternative cosmologies in their feminist critiques. The discussion also considers the major influence of Audre Lorde, whose work, shaped by her position within the African diaspora, resonates significantly with contemporary Nigerian and diasporic feminist voices such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Decolonial Feminism: A Framework of Entanglement

Françoise Vergès’s *A Decolonial Feminism* (2021) opens with a very provocative question: “Who cleans the world?” (vi), framing the global care economy as a continuation of colonial logics, wherein racialized women from the Global South sustain life through undervalued and invisibilized labor. The structural exploitation of domestic workers, nurses, and caregivers is not incidental but constitutive of capitalist modernity. This

framing sets the tone for a feminism that is not about representation within power structures, but about *dismantling* (using an Audre Lorde's term) the racial, economic, and patriarchal architectures that uphold them.

Vergès is sharply critical of liberal and institutional feminisms, especially those she terms White, imperialist, or femonationalist. These frameworks, she argues, universalize Western gender norms, celebrate symbolic victories like corporate representation, and often align with carceral and militarized state apparatuses under the guise of protection. Drawing on Gloria Wekker's concept of *white innocence* (25), Vergès highlights how Western feminist narratives often presume moral superiority while remaining complicit in racialized and imperial systems of domination. Such narratives depoliticize struggle by reducing it to individual empowerment or mindset shifts, obscuring the structural and historical dimensions of oppression. Importantly, Vergès also warns that feminism itself is increasingly being confiscated and repurposed as a tool of far right-wing governance. She argues that feminism, when separated from anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial critique, becomes vulnerable to co-option by nationalist, xenophobic, and even fascist ideologies. Many White privileged women are using feminist language and identity politics to promote exclusionary policies, often under the banners of protection, morality, or cultural preservation. Figures like Giorgia Meloni, Italy's far-right prime minister, exemplify what philosopher Giorgia Serughetti has termed "maternalismo identitario" (identity maternalism), a strategy that mobilizes maternalist and feminine imagery to offer voters a "reassuring and protective face in times of great uncertainty" (Serughetti, 2024: 17). Meloni's rhetoric uses feminism not to expand rights, but to police the boundaries of citizenship and national identity. "Gender" becomes a slur for feminist and LGBTQ movements, and the defense of "traditional" family values is framed as a patriotic duty. Similarly, Alice Weidel, a leading figure in Germany's far-right AfD party, has been described as "the lesbian against gay rights", a striking example of how identity can be weaponized against the very movements it would appear to represent (Rosalie Vaarten in *Diggitt Magazine*, 2017). In such cases, feminism is no longer a project of emancipation but a rhetorical tool of control. Vergès cautions that this form of "inclusive" feminism – stripped of its political content and structural critique – serves to reinforce the very hierarchies it claims to oppose. Against this backdrop, decolonial feminism emerges as a necessary rupture: a refusal of feminist narratives that accommodate empire, nationalism,

and neoliberal governance, and a call to imagine liberation beyond the frameworks of individual success or national belonging. In this context, it is important to listen to voices like that of Tsitsi Dangaremba, the first Black woman to be published in Zimbabwe and a sharp critic of how power operates through gender. In her 2022 book *Black and Female*, she writes:

Certain women are elevated to privilege in our patriarchal societies. These are the ones who conform to their subjugation. The mechanism works at all levels of society. Elite women are often used as examples for the rest of female society as to how women should acquiesce to gendered constructions of power, the argument being that a woman can still be successful from a position of subordination to men. (2022: 97)

Her words are a potent reminder that what looks like progress on the surface can sometimes just be the system finding new ways to keep women in their place. And that is exactly what one can see when feminism is twisted by far-right agendas – not a liberation, but a reinforcement of the very hierarchies it is meant to dismantle: “Elite women quietly enjoy the privileges of patriarchy, knowing that their elite status could be revoked at any moment.” (Dangaremba, 94)

Furthermore, Vergès singles out Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s widely circulated essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) as emblematic of a seductive, yet insufficient, model of feminism. She writes: “This idea that we change the world by changing our minds, by learning to accept difference, is based on an idealist conception of social relations. But this idea is seductive because it exempts us from acting on these structures.” (Vergès 53) Adichie’s call for a more inclusive feminism, one that acknowledges the constraints placed on both women and men by rigid gender roles, appeals to a global liberal audience. As Vergès notes, *We Should All Be Feminists* has achieved massive success, translated into numerous languages and even distributed to high school students in Sweden. Yet Vergès critiques this version of feminism for two key reasons. First, it “obscures the entire critique

of Black and decolonial feminisms,” (54) which aim not simply at gender equality but at structural transformation for all. Second, it reduces feminism to “a simple shift in mindset valid for all women and men, in all places and all times,” (54), thereby ignoring the material conditions, historical specificities, and intersecting oppressions that shape everyday life.

However, one could argue that this critique may oversimplify Adichie’s broader feminist vision. While *We Should All Be Feminists* does present a more accessible and liberal form of feminism, Adichie’s novels and short stories frequently enact the kind of intersectional, historically grounded critique that Vergès advocates. In works like *Americanah* (2013) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Adichie interrogates not only gender but also race, class, migration, and colonial memory. Her characters navigate the entanglements of tradition and modernity, (post)colonial nationhood, and diasporic identity, often illustrating how structural forces, rather than personal attitudes alone, determine the contours of freedom and constraint.

Thus, while Adichie’s *We Should All Be Feminists* might be susceptible to Vergès’s critique, Adichie’s literary corpus in its entirety indicates a more intricate engagement with decolonial and intersectional feminist concerns. Rather than perceiving Adichie and Vergès as ideologically opposed, this thesis interprets their work as being in productive tension. Vergès challenges the conventional boundaries of popular feminism, while Adichie’s fiction provides nuanced narratives that frequently extend beyond the scope of her public-facing essays.

***Sensuous Knowledge* and African Feminist Epistemologies: “Spider Feminism” & “Harmony Feminism”**

Building on the critique of Western epistemology, Minna Salami offers a vision of feminism rooted in what she calls *sensuous knowledge* – a mode of understanding that is embodied, intuitive, and holistic. In *Sensuous Knowledge* (2020) and *Can Feminism Be African?* (2025), Salami challenges the superiorist, rationalist, and disembodied foundations of Western feminist theory, arguing that all types of feminism must center the emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of experience. She traces the term “sensuous” back to the poet John Milton, who coined it in his 1644 tract *Of Education* to distinguish it

from the sexual connotation of “sensual”. Milton described his poetry as “simple, sensuous, and passionate,” evoking a form of knowledge that is deeply felt and affective. Drawing on this lineage, Salami defines sensuous knowledge as “the marriage of emotional intelligence with intellectual skill” (2020: 15), a poetic approach that views knowledge as a living, breathing entity rather than a static commodity to be consumed.

In contrast, Salami critiques what she calls “Europatriarchal knowledge” (17) – a rigid, hierarchical, and rule-bound mode of thought that originated with elite European men as a tool to propagate and universalize their worldview. This knowledge system, rooted in the Age of Discovery, positioned Europe as the center of truth and exploration while branding other regions as “the unknown.” (18) It privileges quantification, objectivity, and categorization, and *propagates* the idea that the European phenotype and male genotype are uniquely suited to produce legitimate knowledge. Notably, Salami points out that the word “propaganda”, coming from “propagate”, originally used about plant reproduction, is fitting here, because this model of knowledge has been remarkably adaptable across generations, subtly embedding itself in systems of education, science, and governance:

The rigid, rule-bound, robotic way that dominates how we view knowledge today is what I refer to as *Europatriarchal Knowledge*, a hierarchy-fixated construct of knowledge that was initiated by elite European men as propaganda to solidify their worldviews on a massive scale. (17)

Indeed, the way society approaches knowledge shapes how individuals perceive the world and relate to the *status quo*: whether they accept it, challenge it, or (re)imagine it entirely.

“The purpose of feminism is to offer a political critique” (2025: 48), writes Salami in her latest work, *Can Feminism be African?*, continuing the above critical and conceptual trajectory from *Sensuous Knowledge* and expanding her analysis of oppressive systems through the term “Superiorism” (49). For Salami, both patriarchy and (neo)colonialism are anchored in this ideology of inherent superiority, a Eurocentric system that justifies domination by positioning certain bodies, cultures, and ways of knowing as naturally better

than others. She traces this logic back to the valorization of rationality in Western philosophy, from Aristotle and Descartes to Enlightenment figures like Kant and Hobbes. Through this lineage, the ideal human, epitomized in the *Vitruvian Man*, becomes not just male, but White as well, shaping assumptions about who is fit to govern, to reason, and ultimately, to matter. By naming and historicizing “Superiorism”, Salami offers a stark framework for understanding how deeply entrenched ideas of dominance continue to structure the world and how feminism, especially in African contexts, must respond not just to gendered injustice but to this broader architecture of exclusion.

Salami’s feminist epistemology exemplifies a radical departure from the dichotomous frameworks that have long structured Western feminist discourse. Her work resists the binaries of objective/subjective, reason/emotion, and tradition/modernity not merely by rejecting them, but by reframing them through an African philosophical lens that privileges wholeness, fluidity, and relationality. Rather than aspiring to “balance” or “bridge” these oppositions, Salami advocates a mode of knowing rooted in the above mentioned *sensuous knowledge*, advocating for what she calls “Harmony Feminism” (139), a type of feminism that focuses on making progress by fostering harmony instead of using confrontational or disruptive tactics. As Salami explains it, “Harmony Feminism” promotes a method based on seeking agreement and mutual understanding: “It prioritises the inclusion of women into cultural narratives through tactics such as representation or gender-inclusive history that incorporates women’s perspectives, achievements and struggles into the historical record.” (139)

Salami also coined the term “Spider Feminism”, encouraging a type of feminist approach that is inspired by the mythical figure of Anansi:

Unlike most insects, spiders do not live in eusocial societies, which are characterised by complex social structures and a division of labour. Insects who live in such eusocial societies (like bees, ants and termites), typically live in a hierarchical world divided into clans, where individuals have specific roles like ‘worker’, ‘soldier’, ‘drone’, or ‘queen’ [...] Spiders, however, do not engage in cooperative behaviours, which is the observation that ancestral African storytellers seem to have made when they envisioned the stubborn and charming Anansi. (128)

As stated in the chapter “Spider Mentality” (121), Spider Feminism encourages living authentically and expressively, even within systems not designed for one’s needs. At its core, Spider Feminism is about “refusing to conform” (129), not out of rebellion for its own sake, but from a deep care for what truly matters. It is about building autonomy, weaving a personal world that resists external control, especially patriarchal expectations. Spider Feminism also teaches persistence: when one falls, like the spider, they rebuild, continuing to create, to take up space, and to protect what they value. Importantly, Spider Feminism doesn’t deny that we, as individuals, live within patriarchy: it actually insists on living as freely as possible within it. Undoubtedly, this methodology that Salami proposes ties closely to Harmony Feminism, in that both seek transformation without destruction. Where Harmony Feminism advocates progress through connection, balance, and concord, Spider Feminism adds a layer of expressive defiance: a quiet but stark refusal to be shaped by oppressive norms. Together, they offer a model of feminism that is firm but fluid, nurturing yet unyielding, grounded in care and sustained by creativity.

It is also important to add here that a crucial influence for Salami is Audre Lorde, whose famous essay, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (1979), plays a significant role in *Sensuous Knowledge* and the critic’s works. Salami recounts first encountering this phrase after leaving a career in marketing and immersing herself in Black and African feminist thought, particularly Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (1984). Like many, she grappled with the eternal question: “If not the master’s tools, then which tools?” (2020: 33) Rather than simply identifying these tools as structural systems such as capitalism, colonialism or Enlightenment rationalism, Salami urges a shift of focus from the “tools” to the “house” itself. The master’s house, she argues, is not a site of comfort or power to be repurposed, but an illusion – a structure of imprisonment masquerading as security and legitimacy. To dismantle it means not just to critique its foundations, but to remove the “mantle” of its seductive narratives. (34)

In contrast to “the master’s tools”, Salami offers a generative list of alternative epistemic modalities: poetry, playfulness, Eros, stillness, intuition, dialogue, and what she calls *ogbon-inu* – a Yoruba term that translates roughly as “inner wisdom” or “knowledge of the gut” (12). *Ogbon-inu* is a sensibility that arises from introspection, communal belonging,

and attunement to the non-material aspects of life. Moreover, it is knowledge that pulses with soulfulness, “the language of the interior of the soul” (21). The critic explains later that “Yoruba philosophy [...] traditionally denounces separation” (2025: 70) and quotes Wande Abimbola when mentioning that the Yoruba cosmology is based on a “world in which animals, birds, trees, the entire creation is looked at as our own brothers and sisters” (Salami quoting Abimbola, 2025: 70). It is without a doubt an anti-specist, anti-stereotype epistemology.

This reorientation may indeed have profound implications for literary criticism. Under Salami’s influence, literature might become not merely a vehicle for plot or argument but an epistemic site where meaning emerges through rhythm, metaphor, ancestral memory, and affective resonance. Nigerian diasporic writing, such as that of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, frequently embodies this *sensuous* mode, foregrounding myth, embodied trauma, and intergenerational dialogue as ways of knowing. To read such literature through the lens of decolonial feminism is not merely an interpretive choice but a political and epistemological act. It means engaging the text with the right “tools”, those that can apprehend nuance, multiplicity, and silence, those that can feel, not just decode. In a world still structured by “the master’s house”, the act of reading with *ogbon-inu* is itself a “dismantling” gesture, a reclaiming of knowledge in service of liberation and de-colonization.

Afro-Feminism and the Politics of De-colonization

Sylvia Tamale’s *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) furthers the project of African-centered feminist critique by grounding it explicitly in African worldviews and philosophical traditions. At the core of her work is a critical unpacking of the term “decolonization” itself. As she writes,

The prefix “de-” in the terms “decolonization” and “decoloniality” connotes an active action of undoing or reversal. For Africa, the concept is heavily burdened with deep histories, many of whose consequences are irreversible. It speaks to the dismantling of several layers of complex and entrenched colonial structures, ideologies, narratives, identities and practices that pervade every aspect of our lives. (20)

This emphasis foregrounds Tamale's argument that decolonization must not be treated merely as a political event or goal, but rather as a fundamentally epistemic, ontological, and spiritual pursuit. Moreover, the Ugandan theorist carefully distinguishes between "decolonization" (a broad, multi-layered process of liberation from political, economic, and cultural colonization) and "decoloniality," which she defines more specifically as an effort to "disrupt legacies of racial, gender and geopolitical inequalities and domination" (xiv), drawing on Walter Dignolo's call to "delink from the colonial matrix of power." (2011: xxvii-viii) In African contexts, this distinction allows Tamale to emphasize not only the structural nature of colonial residues, but also the internalized, everyday expressions of coloniality in law, education, sexuality, and knowledge production. As Salami also explains, to Dignolo, "coloniality is the logic of hegemony that is inherent to modernity" (2025: 111), permeating four social domains: the economic, the political, the civic, and, lastly, the epistemic. Even though formal colonialism has ended, the same systems of dominance and control continue to shape the modern world. It is important to add that these systems are not just leftovers, but they are built into how modern society functions and understands itself: "the structure and hegemonies that facilitated the reinforced colonialism did not disappear with flag independence. We should not view various hierarchical dimensions as separate systems of oppression, but as integrated (or entangled) heterogeneous structural processes." (Tamale 2020: 29) Salami goes even further and adds to Dignolo's categorisation a fifth domain: the temporal. Coloniality exerts control over the temporal dimension by shaping dominant frameworks for interpreting and organizing time, including historical narratives, perceptions of the past, and projections of the future. As Salami notes, in the context of African historiography, colonialism has become the primary axis around which historical narratives are structured. The conventional division of African history into Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial eras implicitly reinforces the notion that Africa's history only gains significance with the advent of European colonisation: "[it] implies that Africa had no history before Western colonisation." (111) To that, Tamale adds: "Our sense of history should be delinked from that of the empire to allow us delve further into Africa's past, beyond the skewed periodization of 'pre-colonial', 'colonial' and 'post-colonial'." (2020: 36) By referencing thinkers like Kwame Anthony Appiah, Tamale highlights the extent to which even African identities

themselves have been shaped through colonial epistemes. Appiah's assertion that "a specifically African identity began as a product of a European gaze" (1992: 71) supports Tamale's argument that we need to critically examine how colonial power structures still influence what we think of as "authentic" or "natural" ways of identifying – such as gender, sexuality, cultural identity, or nationality. This brings us back to the Vitruvian Man and Donna Haraway's mode of understanding "the god trick", a "conquering gaze from nowhere" claiming "the power to see and not be seen" (1988: 575-99). When these authoritarian power structures become invisible, they are the most powerful. But Salami states truthfully: "The decolonisation movement is one of the strongest articulations of resistance against the god trick." (2025: 107).

Furthermore, Tamale critiques the liberal, individualist assumptions that underpin much of Western feminist thought, models that privilege autonomy and personal agency in isolation. However, she advocates for a relational, community-rooted ontology drawn from African philosophies, in which identity is co-constituted through social bonds, land, spirituality, and interdependence. To build this alternative, Tamale turns to the dictum of *ubuntu*¹ as a foundation for reconstructing feminist thought beyond colonial logics. She argues that decolonization must ultimately be more than a process of dismantling; it must also entail reimagining: reclaiming humanity, restoring spiritual and territorial integrity, reasserting collective self-determination, and embracing an ethics grounded in connection, reciprocity, and the sacred. *Ubuntu* offers such a framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life, the unity of mind, body, and spirit, and the inseparability of individual and community.

Tamale's work is significant in that it brings much-needed attention back to African feminisms that have long been sidelined in dominant feminist scholarship. By recovering these frameworks, she offers alternative ways of interpreting African literatures and theories, moving beyond Western² paradigms towards ways of knowing rooted in African

¹ Accordingly to Tamale, *ubuntu* is a traditional African ethical framework grounded in principles of collective humanity, mutual care, and interconnectedness. It emphasizes justice, fairness, and the value of community over individualism. In the above mentioned work, *Can Feminism be African* (2025), Minna Salami contextualises the concept of *ubuntu*, attributing its origins to the Zululand region and proposing a literal translation of the term: "I am because you are" (133). For Salami, the renowned *ubuntu* dictum embodies more than the slogan from which it is derived: "Umuntu ngumuntu ngbanye bantu", which translates to "A person is a person through other people." (134)

² In line with Sylvia Tamale's insights, the term "Western" in this context is not meant to suggest that there is a single, uniform way of thinking. It's not just about geography (i.e., Western Europe or North America) or

cultural realities and sensibilities. Claiming that histories are “androcentric” (a term borrowed from Mesembe Edet, 2008: 413), Tamale states that (African) “Women have been ‘written out’ of historical accounts and political memory. The consequences of such omissions [...] is to reinscribe male dominance in all fields of life.” (2020: 23) As she writes in the introduction of *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*, it is impossible to talk about race outside of gender and vice versa: “the project of decolonization must begin by rupturing internalized racism and sexism through the decolonization of the mind.” (39) She advocates for “creative frameworks of inquiry outside the dominant ways of knowing” (40), situating herself on the same page with the Indian theorist Gayatri Spivak when it comes to bringing forward the need of a shift: “a place where we do not need *Other* in order to understand *Self*.” (39)

Conclusion: Toward a Decolonial Feminist Literary Methodology

The theoretical ground that informs this thesis’s particular framing of Nigerian women’s literatures is where the ideas of Vergès and Salami meet those of Tamale and Lorde. Together they seek a decolonial feminism that is anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-specist, holistic, and culturally specific. It is this vision that provides the basis for the interpretive strategies employed in the following chapters. Indeed, this chapter has revealed how African feminist literary criticism has long privileged context, experience, and resistance in theorizing literatures. Certainly Nigerian diasporic narratives written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are fertile bod for this examination, as her stories deal with migration, memory, and identity in a manner which undermines the linear, geographical structures of colonialism. The utilisation of myth, multilingualism, and storytelling is indicative of the *sensuous*, plural, and resistant feminism practised by the theorists under discussion.

all the intellectual traditions found in these regions. Instead, Tamale suggests that it points to a particular set of dominant ideas, like neoliberalism, Cartesian dualism, and the production of knowledge that ignores political or social contexts, that have historically supported colonial and neocolonial power structures. As Tamale points out, many scholars, both White and non-White, from the West have long criticized these dominant ways of thinking, and their work has been central to anti-colonial and decolonial movements. This footnote is meant to acknowledge that complexity and to avoid oversimplifying or reducing “the West” to a one-size-fits-all category (Tamale, 2020, p. 13).

CHAPTER 2: EARLY FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

“She spoke the way a bird eats, in small amounts.”

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003: 20)

Few novels manage to convey in such a sensory way the trauma caused by abuse and domestic violence as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Without a doubt, this is a novel of violences (directed against women in the family, but not only) which confirms that, as authors Luci Cavallero and Veronica Gago (2021) would say, the precariousness caused by neoliberal policies constitutes an economy specific to violence, which culminates in femicide. According to the aforementioned authors, femicide must be understood as a political crime through the link between gender-based violence, racist violence, institutional violence (here one must mention religion, the health and education systems), economic and financial violence. Adichie wrote this novel at the age of only 26, a novel of incredible power that explains, in a subsidiary manner, that what we call “domestic violence” must be viewed through the prism of these connections, or, more clearly, through the prism of intersectionality.

The novel tells the story of Kambili, a 15-year-old girl who lives in a house where abuse from her father is the order of the day. The brutality with which he beats her, her brother Jaja and their mother Beatrice is often difficult to read. However, the author does not allow the story to end in femicide (although there are three or four scenes in which this is very close to happening). On the contrary, Adichie chooses to portray the regained power of women, so the novel ends with the murder of the abuser, Eugene, by poisoning.

In this chapter, I examine *Purple Hibiscus* as a *Bildungsroman* that follows a classic home-away-home narrative structure, reminiscent of traditional epic journeys and adventure stories, but also echoing the structural framework of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Moreover, central to this chapter is an analysis of the paternal figure, Eugene Achike, whose performance of ultraconservative, disciplinary masculinity, rooted in Catholic orthodoxy, renders his household a space of punishment and “moral” surveillance. Drawing on Uchechukwu Umezurike’s analysis of Eugene as a figure of hegemonic and orthodox masculinity (2022), I argue that Adichie critiques both patriarchal violence and religious authoritarianism, positioning figures like Aunty Ifeoma and Father Amadi as agents of feminist and spiritual resistance. The chapter will also explore the symbolic and

political roles of food, where acts such as eating reflect religious ideologies and (post)colonial tensions, linking these motifs to the theories of Frantz Fanon.

Home–Away–Home Structure in *Purple Hibiscus*: Between Enugu and Nsukka

The spatiality of the novel *Purple Hibiscus* involves three main locations: Enugu, a wealthy urban area in south-eastern Nigeria; Nsukka, a university town known for being more liberal and intellectual; and Abba, the Achike family's village of origin. The topography of the novel's space is essential to understanding why the novel is categorized as a Bildungsroman. Taking up the model of the ancient epic, the novel also follows the tradition inherited from Achebe and places the protagonist Kambili between spaces: if the novel opens at home in Enugu, it will advance with her and her brother's move to Nsukka, to the home of their aunt and cousins, where the real emancipation and liberation take place. However, it is not only the narrative structure that is borrowed from Achebe. Adichie opens her novel with a direct intertextual nod to the book that established Achebe's reputation: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère." (2003: 1) This *in medias res* opening serves several purposes: first, as a literary device, it creates immediacy and closeness. Narrated in the first person, it automatically sets the stage for a homodiegetic narrative with an internal focus, using an "avec" narrative vision (to use Genette's categorization). The narrative is subjective, but the voice belongs to Kambili, the often silent character who truly regains her voice through the narrative, just as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie establishes her voice as a writer with this debut. Last but not least, the opening also contributes to the novel's positioning in dialogue with the Nigerian literary tradition, especially when it comes to interfamily relationships, patriarchy and (post)colonialism.

This classic narrative structure of *Purple Hibiscus* was also identified by Reimer and Nodelman (2003) as the most common in children's literature, and seen in ancient texts like the *Odyssey* or *Illiad*. While not a children's book, *Purple Hibiscus* shares this timeless structure and uses it to chart Kambili's growth not only as a character, but as a young Nigerian woman discovering her identity. At the novel's beginning, "home" is definitely not a place of comfort, but a site of extreme abuse, dominated by Eugene's oppressive and

violent control. Her journey “away” to Aunty Ifeoma’s home creates a big contrast: Ifeoma’s modest but cozy home offers warmth, laughter, and intellectual freedom. This shift also mirrors Joseph Campbell’s idea of the hero’s journey (1949), where the protagonist must leave, undergo trials, and return transformed. Similar to Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline* (2002), where home is initially dangerous, Kambili’s return is part of her evolution. By the end of *Purple Hibiscus*, she returns changed, making the novel undeniably a coming-of-age story.

As Aba Sam and Saboro claim, “space is [...] ideologically charged in *Purple Hibiscus*” (2022: 102), because it is used as a device to explore two different forms of masculinity (Eugene and Father Amadi). The Enugu home is a place ruled by fear, control, and violence, all masked by religious devotion. One could argue that the household symbolises colonial influence, toxic masculinity, and religious hypocrisy, as it evokes how Catholicism was used to justify violence and suppress Nigerian cultures, languages, and female agency. Moreover, Eugene’s private tyranny mirrors Nigeria’s political instability, creating a link between the home and the nation. In simpler words, “Papa liked order” (2004: 24) and “changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British” (46), acting with a kind of eager politeness he always reserved for religious figures, particularly White ones. Moreover, he controlled every single aspect of Jaja and Kambili lives: bathing, eating, reading, playing, talking, watching TV, and sleeping – carefully scheduled and enforced. This rigid routine creates an atmosphere of intense fear and obedience in Eugene’s children and it also echoes a tyrannic colonial order.

According to Sam and Saboro, Enugu can be read as a masculine space and as a violent topography (103-4), “dominated by rigid phallocentric principles.” The violences that are present in the street are echoed in the beatings that happen inside the Achike’s household:

Soldiers were milling around. Market women were shouting and many had both hands placed on their heads, in the way that people do to show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, rearing at her short afro. [...] As we hurried past, I saw a woman spit at a soldier. I saw the soldier raise a whip in the air before it landed on the woman’s shoulders. [...] Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing (Adichie, 2004: 52).

The aforementioned theorists note a similar observation made by Kivai (2010), who highlights how the family functions as a microcosm of the nation. He asserts that “Eugene represents the phallogentric state authority whereas his wife and children are symbolic of the dehumanized citizens. The state power represented by the soldiers who demolish vegetables stalls in the market is equivalent to Papa’s authority in his household” (67).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, is the town of Nsukka, where Auntie Ifeoma and her children live. To Kambili’s surprise, Ifeoma prays for peace and laughter, which seems very strange to Kambili and Jaja, who live in a house where there is no laughter or smiles, only silence, discipline, and abuse. If Enugu is read as a topography of violence, Nsukka should be read as a topography of democracy and emancipation:

‘We’re entering the town of Nsukka’, Kevin said few minutes later. [...] I turned to stare at the statue in the middle of the lawn, a black lion standing on its hind legs, tail curved upward, chest puffed out. I didn’t realize Jaja was looking, too, until he read aloud the words inscribed on the pedestal: ‘To restore the dignity of man’. It’s the university’s motto (Adichie, 2004: 119-120).

Life in Nsukka is enjoyable and relaxing, filled with laughter. Yet Jaja and Kambili often feel out of place. Nsukka seems unfamiliar, unstructured and permissive to them, and even displaced. Ifeoma is a university lecturer too, so her children enjoy intellectual freedom in their choice of books and music. Moreover, Jaja and Kambili are struck by the fact that, although Auntie Ifeoma and her children are Catholic, they still sing traditional Igbo songs and interact warmly with their grandfather, Papa-Nnuwku, whom Eugene considers a pagan because he has not converted to Catholicism. When Auntie Ifeoma expresses her intention to bring Papa-Nnuwku home and questions why their father would disapprove, Jaja responds with, “I don’t know,” while Kambili answers, “Because Papa-Nnuwku is a pagan,” (81) silently thinking that their father would be pleased with her response. To this, Ifeoma responds without hesitation: “Your Papa-Nnuwku is not a pagan, Kambili, he is a traditionalist” (81). In fact, if Enugu represents a space of colonial order, then Nsukka, through the emancipated and *uprooted* character of Ifeoma, represents the exact opposite: decoloniality. As well as resisting oppression, Ifeoma shows respect for Igbo traditions by caring for and preserving them, as demonstrated by the way she treats her father in his last days on Earth. Unlike her brother Eugene, she does not consider him a pagan, but honours

him and his traditions, showing in multiple ways to Kambili that faith comes in different forms.

Furthermore, Nsukka functions as a carnivalesque space in *Purple Hibiscus*, offering an alternative social order that contrasts with the rigid, colonial reminiscent environment of Enugu. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, Sam and Saboro argue in their article that this space symbolises not just liberation, and renewal, but the collapse of oppressive ideologies through laughter, equality, and, using another term coined by Bakhtin, polyphony (2022: 106-7). In Nsukka, authoritarian control dissolves, and characters like Jaja begin to rediscover themselves outside the bounds of religious and patriarchal dominance. The absence of class hierarchy and presence of multiple voices in Ifeoma's household not only challenge Eugene's repressive domestic rule but also ignite the "futuristic tendencies" that Jaja carries back to Enugu.

Nsukka is, therefore, a feminine, homogeneous, democratic topology, in which plurality of voices is present and in which religious figures such as Father Amadi reimagine a different type of masculinity. Father Amadi represents a more compassionate, Igbo grounded model of priesthood. He is usually dressed casually and connects with his community, blending English with Igbo, singing and dancing on local songs. His kindness can be seen in his gentle interactions with Jaja and Kambili, offering an alternative model of masculinity and Catholicism. Applying Minna Salami's theory and concepts from the previous chapter of the thesis, one could argue that Enugu (represented by Eugene) belongs to what the theorist refers to as "Europatriarchal Knowledge", whereas Nsukka (represented by Ifeoma) is a space where the "Sensuous Knowledge" can be both understood and produced. Routines such as study schedules, fixed mealtimes and sleep times, and religious readings are replaced by poetry, Igbo music and the loving sharing of food. The graphic table below shows the profound differences between the two spaces.

The topographies of <i>Purple Hibiscus</i> (2004)		
THEMES	ENUGU	NSUKKA
household	The house in Enugu is a place of absolute authority, where the roles of each family member are clearly defined. Eugene has his own spot on the sofa that no one else is permitted to sit on; the children must learn and obey unconditionally and his wife must endure beatings and humiliation. It represents a topology of terror and violence, reminiscent of the colonial era.	Although modest and far from luxurious, the house in Nsukka where Aunty Ifeoma lives is a homogeneous, rhizomatic space. The plurality of voices, music and literature encourage individual freedom. It is a space of transformation.
religion	Extreme, hypocritical, cruel, and rigid Catholic orthodoxy.	It combines Catholic practice with Igbo elements and respect for traditional religions.
food	Food is plentiful and served at regular times, according to British standards of etiquette. Children must praise the products from their father's factory.	The food is often poor and barely edible. Meat is scarce and everything is shared, but everyone is grateful.
knowledge	Europatriarchal Knowledge (Minna Salami)	Sensuous Knowledge (Minna Salami)

Figure 1: The Topographies of *Purple Hibiscus*. Source: Author's own work.

Lastly, the origin village of the family, Abba, functions as an in-between or liminal space. Even if it is rich with cultural significance and communal ties, it is still governed by Eugene's authority. In Abba, Eugene is admired as a generous benefactor and devout Catholic, as known as an *Omelora*, a false title that will be analysed in the next part of the chapter.

Toxic Masculinity and Catholicism: A false *Omelora*

"Papa deserved praise for not choosing to have more sons with another woman, of course, for not choosing to take a second wife" (2004: 20) – this is the general atmosphere in the house, where Eugene has established himself as the supreme patriarch. His performance of hegemonic masculinity is rooted in Catholic piety and enforced through domestic discipline. As Uchechukwu Umezurike argues in "Omelora: Orthodox and Disciplinary Masculinities," (2022) Eugene's obsession with order and purity turns his home into a site of surveillance and punishment, where his wife and children become "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1979) stripped of autonomy. This masculinist control is challenged by feminist resistance embodied in characters like Aunty Ifeoma and Father Amadi, who represent alternative models of authority based on freedom, empathy, and receptivity to human

difference. Kambili's transformation, going from silence to self-expression, takes place in these liberatory spaces.

The community holds Eugene in high regard, considering him a true "Omelora"—"one who does for the community" (Umezurike, 567). His philanthropic acts greatly impress the community, who regard him as a god-like figure. On the surface, he seems to be a wealthy generous man who uses his class privilege to help and feed poorer people. However, this is merely an illusion, as he physically and psychologically abuses his family at home. As Umezurike highlights, Eugene Achike illustrates Foucault's theories on discipline and punishment by abusing his wife and children, thereby demonstrating how male power operates within the domestic sphere and its impact on individuals and their bodies. Beatrice, Kambili and Jaja are abused and silenced, transformed from subjects into objects that act out of fear of hegemonic masculinity:

Eugene obsesses about mastering bodies, time, space, and activity involving his wife and children. Similarly, he is fixated on the littlest detail around him, in the church, at home. He is a man of discipline, who disciplines—punishes—his emotions, his family, and whomever he likes, as he deems fit. A man who exerts control of his household, their bodies, their minds. He believes in and demands total submission, not only from his wife and children but also from his father and any other elder who attempts to challenge him. In sum, he epitomizes Foucault's image of the disciplined man. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene recognizes that discipline and detail are crucial to his project of normalization, reproducing pious bodies, and installing an order of piety in his home. By disciplining his wife and their children, he transforms them into manipulable bodies—subjects of docility. Viewed this way, his investments in religion constitute piety as a "disciplinary tool." (Umezurike, 572)

Continuing these thoughts, Umezurike recalls in his article one of the most brutal scenes from the novel, in which Eugene exercises his power. This scene is from the chapter "Speaking with our Spirits. Before Palm Sunday", in which Beatrice asks Eugene to wait in the car while he and the children visit Father Benedict, as she is suffering from severe nausea due to her pregnancy:

"Are you sure you want to stay in the car?" Papa asked.

Mama was *looking down*; her hands were placed on her belly, to hold the wrapper from untying itself or to keep her bread and tea breakfast down. “My body does not feel right,” she mumbled.

“I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car?”

Mama *looked up*. “I’ll come with you. It’s really not that bad.”

Papa’s face did not change. (Adichie, 2003, p. 29, *italics added*)

In this scene, Beatrice’s gaze is extremely important to analyse. After *looking down*, she *looks up* and makes eye contact with the *male gaze*. After this interaction, the narrative reveals that Eugene will beat Beatrice so violently that she will suffer a miscarriage. This brutal scene reminds of a cinematic technique used since the early days of the horror genre to punish the female figure for looking back at her attacker (notably in the 1960 film *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, in which Marion Crane dies after making eye contact with the killer). Similarly, Beatrice is punished for the symbolic gesture of “looking up” and for her intention to minimally contradict her husband’s authority.

However, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie does not allow the novel to be the stage of a femicide, but she does allow many other scenes of brutal violence to occur, such as Eugene’s near-fatal beating of Kambili that led to her hospitalization. After finding that Kambili has hidden a painting that represents Papa-Nnuwku, Eugene brutally whips her with a belt. Furious because Kambili brought something “sinful” in his house, he beats her: “The belt stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. The pain of contact spread through my body... He swung the belt again. And then I saw the painting fly across the room, its green frame cracking, and I felt the sting on my back.” (194) On a different occasion, Eugene also poured boiling water on Kambili’s feet and legs for having spent time near Papa-Nnuwku, who was allowed to sleep in Auntie Ifeoma’s house. Both moments of brutal violence are related to the relationship Kambili developed with her grandfather, whom Eugene, although Papa-Nnuwku is his father, considers a pagan. This violence stems from Eugene’s long-standing contempt and hatred of Igbo culture. He considers it not only inferior, but also dangerous for his children. Driven by his extreme Catholic beliefs, Eugene cuts off all ties with his father, restricts contact between his children and their grandfather and refuses to let his family members speak Igbo. Undoubtedly, this hatred is nothing more than an effect of Eurocentric colonial thinking, which considers itself superior.

In a nutshell, at the heart of *Purple Hibiscus* is a family held hostage by a man whose public virtue hides private violence. Eugene Achike is praised as an *Omelora*, a benefactor and model Christian, yet within his own home, he rules with fear, pain, and silence. His Catholicism is a weapon used to control and punish. Under the weight of this oppressive “love”, Beatrice, Kambili, and Jaja shrink themselves to survive. They learn to speak softly, to move carefully, to read moods like scripture. But even in that silence, resistance grows. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie allows the reader to see the cracks in this façade – not just in Eugene’s brutality, but in the small, defiant moments of those around him. Aunty Ifeoma laughs freely. Father Amadi listens gently. These figures offer Kambili and Jaja something completely new: kindness, freedom, and the space to think critically. The next part of the chapter will analyse Aunty Ifeoma’s decolonial thinking.

Feminist Resistance: A Case Study of Aunty Ifeoma

Aunty Ifeoma represents a radical alternative to patriarchal dominance, with a strong decolonial thinking and life principles that reflect the “ubuntu” philosophy that Tamale and Salami referred to (see Chapter 1 for more details on “ubuntu”). For Kambili, Ifeoma stands out as fearless and almost auratic: “Her whisper was like her—tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life” (95) and is a strong independent woman with an academic career and a stark faith rooted in interconnectedness and compassion. Other scholars have seen in Aunty Ifeoma an alter-ego of other future characters from Adichie’s novels (Dina Yerima-Avazi, Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang), namely Obinze’s mother from *Americanah* (2013). Her figure may be read as “the hybrid woman” (Yerima-Avazi and Opoku-Agyemang, 2021: 131), strongly opposed to the “passive/powerless phase” in which Beatrice and Kambili initially find themselves. These Nigerian and Ghanaian theorists use the term hybridity in regard to Aunty Ifeoma to explain the creation of new identities or cultural forms that women develop when they are caught in environments shaped by patriarchy and misogyny. Ifeoma’s hybridity is deeply linked to Obioma Nnaemeka’s nego-feminism, as her character always values negotiation over direct opposition. This is evident especially in Ifeoma’s respect for cultural specificity in her relationship with Papa-Nnuwku: she values the wisdom of elders and traditions but she is not putting aside her fight for justice and gender equity—When Papa-Nnuwku says, “...you are a woman. You do not count” she quickly reacts: “Eh? So I don’t count? Has Eugene

ever asked about your aching leg? If I do not count, then I will stop asking if you rose well in the morning.” (Adichie, 2003: 91) She does not break ties with her father, despite their religious differences and despite the fact that he belongs to a traditionalist patriarchal class. She remains close to him and cares for him on his deathbed, teaching her children a lesson about community spirit and, ultimately, a practical lesson in how “ubuntu” works.

Ifeoma tries to rouse Kambili from her “passive phase” by various means. The scene in which Ifeoma wakes Kambili up in the morning at her home in Nsukka and urges her to go out onto the veranda and watch her grandfather praying is probably the best-written in the novel. The reader can progressively feel that something is awakening in Kambili’s heart:

I remembered Auntie Ifeoma’s words from the day before, about Papa-Nnuwku being a traditionalist and not a heathen. Still, I was not sure why she wanted me to go and watch him on the verandah [...] He was speaking, his face down as if addressing the white chalk line, which now looked yellow. He was talking to the gods or the ancestors; I remembered Auntie Ifeoma saying that the two could be interchanged [...] I was surprised that he prayed for Papa with the same earnestness that he prayed for himself and Auntie Ifeoma [...] I did not look away, although it was sinful to look upon another person’s nakedness [...] He was still smiling as I quietly turned and went back to the bedroom. I never smiled after we said the rosary back home. None of us did. (167-169)

Through this scene, “Ifeoma attempts to educate Kambili to build her knowledge of her people and tolerance of other people’s religions and viewpoints” (Yerima-Avazi and Opoku-Agyemang, 132). Moreover, her children speak Igbo, although they practice Catholicism (which may seem contradictory to Kambili and Jaja, since Eugene only speaks Igbo to them when he is very angry). In strong opposition with Beatrice, who is docile and extremely conformist (considered an early alter-ego of Kosisochukwu from *Americannah*), Ifeoma’s hybrid identity helps Kambili “to negotiate a form of feminism.” (129) After returning from Nsukka to Enugu and discovering a new way of being, Kambili emerges from the gray area of passivity and starts gaining autonomy on her actions. She hides the painting of her grandfather precisely because of this desire to have something of her own, to be able to possess an object which, although forbidden in her home, represented the freedom to be herself.

However, the analysis done by Dina Yerima-Avazi and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang may be somewhat unfair in unequivocally placing Beatrice in a passive category. The authors emphasize repeatedly throughout the article that Beatrice lacks higher education (contrasting her with Ifeoma, who benefited from a Western education), yet they do so without critically examining the implications of Western education itself. Ifeoma's decolonial thinking and autonomy are not the results of her Western education (which rather reflects the rigidity of colonial Eurocentric thinking), but rather stem from the freedom she had to raise her children without being subjected to patriarchal domination. Indeed, Beatrice neither has a higher education nor, at the beginning of the novel, the power to resist her husband's violence and she may be unable to protect her children. But these limitations should not be held against her, as doing so risks slipping into victim-blaming. What is essential to understand in the Ifeoma–Beatrice dynamic is that Beatrice was never afforded the opportunity to emancipate herself, which also points to a class-based dimension of their differing experiences. And yet, by the end of the novel, Beatrice finds the strength to poison her abuser, reclaiming some agency. What the authors refer to as a “psychotic determination” (127) is, rather, a gesture of reclaiming the primordial power of Beatrice as a woman. The novel is no longer just about Kambili's character development, but also about Beatrice's. After Jaja pleads guilty to Eugene's murder so that Beatrice will not be sent to prison, and after he himself is released much sooner than expected, the novel ends on a bright note: “I am laughing. I reach out and place my arm around Mama's shoulder and she leans toward me and smiles.” (307) Beatrice smiles for the first time in the novel—and it happens on the very last page.

“The Love Sip”: The Politics of Food in the Achike's Household

This final part of the chapter dedicated to the novel *Purple Hibiscus* focuses on the politics of food and is derived from the article written by Njeri Githire (2023) in which the author linked food with power and control, in order to show how patriarchal systems can affect women and children. Additionally, this part will also address the symbolic meaning of the title and will link it to Sefi Atta's debut, *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and to Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002).

Eugene Achike owns several factories producing beverages such as bottled drinks and cashew juice.³ As Cheryl Stobie highlights, his factories also produce wafer, which links these products to the Catholic mass “in which a wafer and wine, seen as the body of Christ, are consumed” (2010: 424). This gives the food consumed and produced by the Achike family a religious dimension, linking it to the colonial dimension of Catholicism. The food from the novel is therefore ideological from the outset. Njeri Githire uses the scene in which Jaja got nauseous when the priest touched his mouth during the administration of the Eucharist to apply Fanon’s theory from *The Wretched of the Earth* regarding “colonization as a process wherein the colonised are force-fed foreign values and attitudes” (2023: 305). This is why one must read Jaja’s refusal to digest the Eucharist as a political act of resistance not only against the coloniser’s religion, but also against the patriarchal authority of his father who, accordingly to Githire, is portrayed as “divine and worthy of worship” (307). Eugene is a tyrannical despot in his home and will not only decide his children’s religion, but everything else they do: what they read, when they sleep, and what they eat and drink.

Drawing on this despot figure, Heather Hewett compares the figure of Eugene with Sani Abacha, the Nigerian military dictator who seized power in 1993 (2003: 89). Githire highlights:

rulers the likes of Abacha disburse the spoils of power through patronage, intimidation, and control. Establishing themselves as custodians of the neocolonial agenda in a highly unequal global economic order, they reap profit and maintain their positions through a vicious cycle of exporting natural resources, while importing food staples and essential commodities. (308)

This analogy is worth connecting to Wole Soyinka’s play, *King Baabu* (2002), which functions as a parody of Sani Abacha. Coincidence or not, Soyinka portrays the dictator as a pantagruelian, *ubuesque* figure obsessed with the “Operation Fill the Stomach.” Just as in Soyinka’s play, where food-related policies dominate the scene, Adichie’s character, Eugene, establishes his authority primarily through control of food. Although not at all

³ In addition to his industrial ventures, he also owns and publishes a newspaper called *The Standard*, which is known for its outspoken criticism of the Nigerian military government.

satirized, Eugene resembles King Baabu (which translates from Hausa to “King Nothing”) in many ways: he is absurd, obsessed with power and control, and extremely violent. Both also meet a tragic end, commensurate with their deeds.

Using subtle irony as a narrative device, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie chooses to have Eugene’s character die after being poisoned by Beatrice. She pours poison into his tea, thus continuing to use food as a political tool: “As the emblem of Britain’s colonial legacy and a metonymy for Englishness, the ubiquity of tea as the allegorical emblem of abusive power par excellence is subtly reinforced through the “love sip” that Eugene occasionally shares with his children.” (Githire, 314) From the beginning of the novel, the “love sip”⁴ has now been transformed into the “death sip”, as Beatrice has decided that she will no longer tolerate her and her children’s abuser.

The title of the novel foreshadows, to some extent, this death by tea poisoning, as hibiscus flowers are commonly infused in tea; moreover, hibiscus tea has an intense blood-red color due to the natural pigments in the dried flowers and can be reminiscent of the bloody scenes throughout the novel. However, the symbolism of the hibiscus flower goes even deeper. Githire mentions Highfield’s comparative analysis of *Purple Hibiscus* and Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* (2002), where the theorist perceives the hibiscus flower in both works as a symbol of resistance against the pervasive violence targeting women. In Adichie’s novel, the flower grows beautifully in Ifeoma’s garden: “Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a handpainted wreath” (2004: 112). Aunty Ifeoma’s garden is one where plants grow freely, reminiscent of the gardens in Impressionist paintings. Jaja and Kambili are very impressed by the almost blue colours of the hibiscus, and Jaja even plans to plant a few stems in their house in Enugu.

Therefore, the flowers become a symbol of resistance, as Kambili narrates:

Jaja’s defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the

⁴ In the first chapter, Kambili would describe the tea ritual as follows: “Papa sat down at the table and poured his tea from the china tea set with pink flowers on the edges. I waited for him to ask Jaja and me to take a sip, as he always did. A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved. Have a love sip, he would say, and Jaja would go first. Then I would hold the cup with both hands and raise it to my lips. One sip. The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue [...] my raw tongue suffered. But it didn’t matter, because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa’s love into me.” (2004: 8) Githire believes that the hot tea foreshadows the final, cruel moment when Eugene scalds Kambili’s feet with boiling water, claiming to be doing it out of love. (2023: 314)

crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. (16)

The hibiscus flower also appears in Yvonne Vera's novel, *The Stone Virgins* (2002), in chapter 8. Nonceba remains trapped within her own mind, struggling to come to terms with the painful experiences she has endured, while also contending with the appearance of her surroundings—especially the blooming hibiscus flowers, which she finds deeply unsettling. Here, the flower, often used as symbols of beauty and resilience, contrast sharply with the internal trauma. A similar approach can be found in Sefi Atta's debut, "Everything Good Will Come" (2005). Jonas E. Akung considers that Atta uses the hibiscus flower to depict Sheri as a flower that attracts insects (meaning men); after being raped, Sheri is described as a "scarlet hibiscus," because the rape and the abortion left her with a damaged womb (2012: 120) – another case in which hibiscus flowers symbolise violence(s) against women.

In concluding this analysis, it becomes clear that Adichie uses the politics of food in *Purple Hibiscus* serve to illustrate how patriarchal and colonial domination work within the Achike work. Moreover, the hibiscus flower represents resilience, as well as the trauma experienced by women under oppressive systems, highlighting a broader literary discourse on violence, power, and the quest for freedom in (post)colonial African societies.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, from a decolonial feminist perspective. In order to identify the extent to which this novel functions as a device of decolonial thinking, it was important to look at the narrative structure, which is reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. By writing a *bildungsroman* as her debut, Adichie not only helps her protagonist, Kambili, overcome her "passive phase" and find a voice, but also establishes herself as an author in the feminist movement. The chapter also analyzed the patriarchal figure of Eugene Achike—recognized in his community as an "Omelora"—and dismantled his image as a benevolent figure, focusing on all the abuses he committed within his family. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the chapter highlighted the character of Auntie Ifeoma, who, although not the main character, is the figure who inspires and helps Kambili to begin to negotiate a certain type of feminism. She is an independent, autonomous figure who respects local traditions and also has a

prominent academic career. Finally, the chapter showed how food policies function within the novel as a device for exercising control, based on Githire's article and Fanon's ideas.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN, WAR, AND SURVIVAL: AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*

“The real tragedy of our postcolonial world
is not that the majority of people had no say
in whether or not they wanted this new world;
rather, it is that the majority have not been given
the tools to negotiate this new world.”

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p. 101 (*italics added*)

In Chapter 5 of *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Odenigbo's character laments the absence of “tools to negotiate” the (post)colonial world, placing the reader into a vital, if implicit, conversation with Audre Lorde's assertion that “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,” essay that was already analysed in the first part of this thesis. While Lorde warns against relying on the instruments of oppressive systems to achieve liberation, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie draws here attention to the structural absence of any tools at all for those expected to navigate a violently reshaped world. It is crystal clear that both thinkers emphasise the urgent need for alternative frameworks: not only to critique the imposed systems and the status quo, but also to construct new means of understanding, surviving, and resisting within (and beyond) the (post)colonial condition.

Adopting an ecofeminist approach, this chapter examines the genocidal war novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, focusing on anti-militarism, motherhood, masculinity and metafictionality, and exploring the connections between gendered oppression, militarised violence and ecological degradation. Central to this reading is the novel's polyphonic narrative structure, which brings forward diverse, often marginalised voices and disrupts singular, masculinist accounts of war. Through its multiple perspectives and characters, especially those of Olanna, Kainene, Richard and Ugwu, the text reveals the gendered nature of conflict, portraying women not only as victims, but also as agents of resistance and survival.

Moreover, the chapter also dives into how the novel presents motherhood not merely as a biological function, but as a choice intertwined with political implications. It also explores the ways masculinities are shaped by war, offering an ecofeminist perspective on how

patriarchal structures are rooted in militarism, ultimately making victims of everyone involved, regardless of gender. Drawing inspiration from Ynestra King's pioneering ecofeminist and anti-militarist theories, the present part of the thesis highlights the connections between environmental degradation, patriarchal oppression, and militarised authority, showing how *Half of a Yellow Sun* functions as a *tool* against war, framing conflict as a political, humanitarian, gendered and, lastly, ecological catastrophe. The chapter will also highlight the evolution of the author's writing style, which is evident not only in her use of more complex language, but also in the way she uses meta-narrative devices to highlight the multiple nuances of war. Lastly, by combining ecofeminist ideas with critiques of militarism, motherhood and masculinities, the chapter shows how literature(s) can be an important way of thinking about decolonial futures and campaigning for gender equality.

The Nigerian Civil War in *Half of a Yellow Sun*: Historical Contextualization of the Novel

"I have often been asked why I chose to write about Biafra, and I like to say that I did not choose Biafra, it chose me."

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,
African "Authenticity" and the Biafran Experience (2008: 49)

"A state is a divided thing."

—Dipo Faloyin, *Africa Is Not a Country* (2023: 53)

Published in 2006, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is divided into four non-chronological sections of the late 1960s, covering the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and its atrocities. Also termed the Nigeria-Biafra War, the conflict killed an estimated 500,000 to 3,000,000 people, according to Encyclopædia Britannica. As Heerten Lasse and A. Dirk Moses explain, although British colonial rule in Nigeria had ended at that time, the country remained deeply affected by its colonial legacy—especially the ethnic divisions imposed by the British, which continued to shape the population's structure (2014: 172).⁵ Without

⁵ By dividing Nigeria into three large regions, the British colonial administration institutionalised the following ethnic divisions: Hausa-Fulani (the Northern region), Yoruba (in the West), and Igbo (Eastern region). The "indirect rule" system of the British functioned by governing through local rulers, such as emirs. This order elevated the political status of the Hausa-Fulani group, creating boundaries and social divisions

question, the Nigerian Civil War came as a result of this absurd and barbaric (post)colonial order and logic, highlighting the fact that colonialism continued to cause problems in the years that followed. Dipo Faloyin remembers in *Africa Is Not a Country* what the Nigerian prime minister Tafawa Balewa said in 1963 regarding this division:

It was unfortunate that the African States have been broken up into different groups by the Colonial powers [...] In some cases, a single tribe has been broken up into four different States. You might find a section in Guinea, a section in Mali, a section in Sierra Leone and perhaps a section in Liberia. That was not our fault. (2023: 58)

In a very insightful way, Dipo Faloyin also adds that:

Modern Africa was designed against its will to be a divided thing. A continent of fifty-four houses built on sand, poorly anchored to business deals written using Victorian definitions of civilisation. The irregular births of its nations, and the short time they've had to deal with the ramifications, underlie why so many are still fighting to overcome deep, foundational challenges. It is not because Africans are savagely ungovernable or too ignorant to lead a successful country. Even though most people would not say so out loud, such thoughts permeate our subconscious when we do not understand the context, the founding of the current configurations of states, and how their conflicts are fuelled and exploited by their foundational make-up. (65)

In her 2019 master's thesis *Reconceptualising Motherhood Beyond Essentialist Gender Norms in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun*, Barbara Jilek provides a concise summary of the historical events leading up to the Biafran War (37-39). According to her account, tensions between Nigeria's northern and southern regions escalated following a coup led by Igbo officers, which installed an Igbo-led military government. This was soon countered by a northern-organized military response, plunging the country

which naturally led to interethnic tensions. However, in her 2023 article, "The Nigerian Civil War and the Politics of Creative Remembrance: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*", Sadia Zulfiqar emphasises the importance of including other ethnic minorities in the Nigerian Civil War narratives, such as the Ogoni group of the Niger Delta. This peripheral group is often excluded from the historical realities of the conflict (as it is unfortunately the case of Adichie's novel), even though it was deeply affected by war and its aftermath. As Zulfiqar truthfully states, "focusing only upon Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa narratives will limit our understanding" (90).

into political unrest. Jilek, citing Heerten and Moses, notes that the southeastern region—largely inhabited by Igbos—resisted reintegration under northern control, particularly as violence against Igbos in the north increased, prompting mass displacement to the south. The push for independence was especially strong among what Falola calls the “Igbo intelligentsia,” (199: 126, as cited in Jilek) a group reflected in the academic circle of Odenigbo’s intellectual figure in Adichie’s novel. The formal declaration of the independent Republic of Biafra in May 1967 quickly led to open conflict with the Nigerian government.⁶ The civil war that ensued caused an estimated one to three million deaths, including many children that died of kawashiorkor, a disease of starvation and malnutrition that is starkly depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In the novel, Adichie both highlights the lack of meaningful international political intervention and critiques the oversimplified and occasionally inaccurate portrayal of the conflict in Western media (Jilek, 39). Although graphic images of starving children circulated globally, spurring humanitarian aid efforts (Heerten and Moses, 176, as cited in Jilek), the deeper structural causes, such as the arbitrary borders drawn during British colonial rule and the influence of national and international oil interests (Falola, 126 as cited in Jilek), were largely ignored. In this context, the epigraph from Dipo Faloyin’s aforementioned book becomes highly relevant. The author offers the following quote from Adichie: “If all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves.” (Adichie qtd. in Faloyin 1)

In “Genocide and Hubristic Masculinity in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*”, Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba emphasises an aspect that is often ignored by the scholastic readings of Adichie’s novel. The author claims that

it is important to recover Adichie’s novel from the discourse of war and treat it as genocide fiction. The narrative of war impelling the bulk of critical responses to *HYS* has not only distracted attention from the main pivot (that is, genocide) of Adichie’s novel, but also encouraged its misreading. (2019: 87)

⁶ Dipo Faloyin logically explains that “there wasn’t a strong bond between the rulers and the ruled, especially when the citizenry came from a different ethnic group.” (2023: 58) So this resulting conflict wasn’t much of a shock and it was definitely not a singular case of secessionist movement, as other examples include Uganda, Somalia, Chad, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Angola and the Central African Republic. (61)

Anyaduba considers that Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents the Biafran crisis as a genocide driven by the epistemic structures of postcolonial racism in Nigeria. However, the novel's feminist perspective on genocide appears to conflict with the very epistemic conditions it portrays as contributing to the violence. As a result, this perspective unintentionally shifts blame and responsibility for the genocide onto Igbo men. The massacres of Igbo people across Nigeria, which many Igbo survivors and scholars have identified as genocide – namely G. N. Uzoigwe and in his final book, *There Was a Country* (2012), Chinua Achebe as well –, involved mass killings, forced displacement, and a blockade that led to widespread starvation. Anyaduba highlights that the violence aligns with the UN definition of genocide, as it targeted the Igbo population based on identity and aimed at their partial or total destruction. The following definition of genocide is to be examined:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (Extracted from Article II of the UN Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of Genocide (UNCG), as cited in Anyaduba).

Indeed, the Nigerian Civil War must be understood as genocide because, as Anyaduba states, it “targets the corporeal manifestations of human groupness and seeks to destroy the essential foundations of group identity.” (88) Moreover, the author argues that the Biafran genocide has had big impact on critical and artistic engagement. Yet, much of the scholarly discourse, particularly from non-Igbo perspectives, has been inclined to minimise the genocidal nature of the conflict in favour of framing it as a civil war (2019: 89). It is noted that this emphasis on “war” has shaped the discourse surrounding literary texts addressing the period, frequently categorising them as “war fiction” even when they primarily focus on civilian suffering. In numerous instances, including works such as *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the genocidal violence perpetrated against the Igbo is often eclipsed within the narrative of

military conflict (Anyaduba also mentions here Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*). This framing fails to capture the real essence of the violence and misrepresents the intentions of writers who strive to unveil the realities of ethnic extermination.

This thesis aims to honour the memory of those killed in the genocide caused by the Nigerian Civil War, while respecting the historical integrity, testimonies and experiences of all those affected by the war, regardless of their ethnic group (including minority groups such as the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta). However, this chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive account or a monograph of the conflict in the late 1960s, but rather to offer a balanced contextualisation of the events that occurred, which will be useful for the literary analysis that follows in subsequent sections. Human suffering should never be placed on a hierarchy, but rather made visible so as to prevent its perpetuation. Making the suffering of peripheral characters visible—women and children in the case of war and genocide novels—renders the realities of the conflict transparent. The next part of the paper will propose an ecofeminist, decolonial reading of the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, focusing on the experiences of marginalised voices.⁷

⁷ It has been asserted by certain critics that Adichie's novel presents a monochrome account of the war, as it exclusively features the experiences of Igbo characters, thus ignoring the contributions and experiences of other ethnic groups involved in the conflict. For instance, Zulfiqar explicitly states: "Adichie's novel does not allow for any peripheral voices except those of Igbos. Moreover, the hope for a better future, in her work, does not lie with either women or marginalised Igbos, but instead with an elite Igbo male." (89) Indeed, this novel does depict the Igbo perspective, but it presents several different facets of the Igbo group. It showcases not only the intellectual elite (in this case, Odenigbo), but also the realities of women, who are often excluded altogether from war fiction (Olanna and Kainene). Furthermore, by appealing to polyphony, it succeeds in presenting the perspective of the lower class (Ugwu). The novel presents a multitude of perspectives and voices, making it unjust to criticise it for its lack of inclusivity. The novel is to be commended for its female perspective on war, a perspective which is otherwise lacking in literature of this genre.

Feminist Anti-Militarism and the Ecology of Feminism: An Ecofeminist Praxis for Reading the Genocidal War Novel

“For ecofeminists, military technology reflects a pervasive cultural and political situation. It is connected with rape, genocide, and imperialism, with starvation and homelessness, with the poisoning of the environment, and with the fearful lives of the world’s peoples—especially those of women. Military and state power hierarchies join and reinforce each other through military technology.”
—Ynestra King, *The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology*

In recent years, ecofeminism has gained more and more momentum as a framework, providing a counter-discourse to the increasingly worrying climate situation. Whether we are talking about the sugar industry forcing women into hysterectomies and child marriage⁸ or child labour in the fast fashion industry,⁹ the direction in which the climate is heading increasingly signals that environmental exploitation leads to the exploitation of the most vulnerable individuals: children and women. In this section, I will demonstrate the direct relationship between ecofeminism and decolonial thinking, which both operate on the principle of ending all forms of exploitation (direct or indirect) of the Earth’s resources. I argue that ecofeminism is highly relevant to the literary analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, providing an appropriate framework for examining war and genocide within the novel. To properly utilise this framework, this section of the thesis adopts and applies many of theorist Ynestra King’s ideas, which are clearly and emphatically articulated in her 1995 essay cited in the above epigraph. From the outset, it is important to note that

⁸ In this regard, the investigation by Megha Rajagopalan and Qadri Inzamam in *The New York Times* into the Indian state of Maharashtra is highly relevant:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/24/world/asia/india-sugar-cane-fields-child-labor-hysterectomies.html>

⁹ Relevant articles for this topic are listed below:

BBC News. (2024, August 23). *The hidden cost of cheap fashion: Child labour and exploitation in the industry*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4glzdd88lo>

BBC News. (2023, December 21). *Fast fashion under scrutiny as ethical concerns grow*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-67752413>

Walk Free. (2024, November 28). *How brands and consumers can fight modern slavery and child labour in fashion*. <https://www.walkfree.org/news/2024/how-brands-and-consumers-can-fight-modern-slavery-and-child-labour-in-fashion/>

Project Cece. (2023, January 25). *Child labour in the fashion industry*. <https://www.projectcece.com/blog/559/child-labour-in-the-fashion-industry/>

environmental crises fall into two clear categories: (hu)man-made crises, such as war and genocide, and climate crises, such as natural disasters. As Adichie's novel centres on a civil war and genocide, it is evident that the ecofeminist discussion will focus on (hu)man-made crises driven by militarism and the weapons industry. Moreover, King's four main ecofeminist principles align truthfully with the decolonial reading of the novel: (1) taking on the life-struggles of all nature as a shared responsibility; (2) understanding life on Earth as an interconnected web, not a hierarchy; (3) maintaining diversity and fighting against biological simplification and (4) challenging the nature-culture dualism. The following discussion will examine the application of each of these principles to Adichie's novel.

(1) Taking on the life-struggles of all nature as a shared responsibility

This principle resonates with the communal resistance to oppression and war in the novel and can be easily identified in Odenigbo's pan-African beliefs. The novel frequently employs Odenigbo's voice to critique Western imperialism and its disregard for local lives, echoing ecofeminism's call for collective responsibility toward all living beings across the continent and diaspora:

‘You refuse to see things as they truly are!’ Odenigbo shifted on his seat. ‘We are living in a time of great white evil. They are dehumanizing blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia, they fermented what happened in the Congo, they won’t let American blacks vote, they won’t let the Australian Aborigines vote, but the worst of all is what they are doing here. This defence pact is worse than apartheid and segregation, but we don’t realize it. They are controlling us from behind drawn curtains. It is very dangerous!’(110)

The decolonial struggle for autonomy depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is in alignment with the ecofeminist imperative to safeguard all life, irrespective of its status in relation to dominant or privileged groups. This phenomenon is indicative of the necessity for unity, as articulated by Professor Ezeka: “‘We should have a bigger pan-African response to what is happening in the American South really – ’” (20).

(2) Understanding life on Earth as an interconnected web, not a hierarchy

This principle is closely related to Sylvia Tamale's ideas about categorising humans in opposition to non-humans. She writes: “Western logic further hierarchizes dualisms, with one category always considered to be superior or dominant over the other. Thus, Whites

are privileged over non-Whites, men over women and humans over nature.” (2020: 84) It is exactly the logic of anthropocentrism, claims Tamale, that caused the degradation of nature.¹⁰ It is important to add here that many of the non-Western societies opposed this dualistic thinking via continuities and interconnectedness: “Under the nondualistic logic, which is also biocentric, humans are understood to be linked to nature, not in opposition to it.” (*Ibid.*) Quoting a Zulu expression, Tamale highlights that African ontologies view all elements of the universe as one: “I am river, I am mountain, I am tree, I am love, I am emotion, I am beauty, I am lake, I am cloud, I am sun, I am mind, I am one with one.” (Molefi Asante, 1990: 83, as cited in Tamale).¹¹ Of course, this also aligns with the ethical framework of *ubuntu*, which Minna Salami beautifully explained—“A person is a person through other people.” (2025: 134) In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, there is a strong sense of communitarianism and solidarity, especially among the Biafran community during wartime. Despite the initial clear delineation of class divisions in the novel, these segregations become less rigid and more fluid as war, death and famine transform the social dynamics. Even the most vulnerable characters, such as Ugwu or other women from the village, play crucial roles in sustaining life. The scene from Chapter 10 in which Ugwu is at a train station watching displaced, traumatized people arrive is very relevant. Looking for Olanna, he is unable to help or act because of the emotional weight of the situation: “He watched until the train emptied out. Olanna was not there. He gave the rest of the bread to the one-eyed man, then turned and ran. He did not stop until he got to Odim Street and past the bush with white flowers.” (Adichie, 2006: 145) Giving the last of his bread to the one-eyed man, Ugwu shows a shift from self-preservation to collective empathy, placing the narrative in a discussion about the ethics of care. Moreover, it is clearly not a charity gesture, but an expression of solidarity. Indeed, this shift facilitates the narrative’s dismantling of masculinist patriarchal conceptions of war.

¹⁰ Using the term “nature”, Tamale refers to the category of non-humans (animals, plants, bodies of water, inanimate entities).

¹¹ In building up this argument, Tamale also cites Mekada Graham’s “Expanding the Philosophical Base of Social Work,” where the theorist states: “Within the cosmological perspective of the African-centred worldviews, all elements of the universe—people, animals and inanimate objects—are viewed as interconnected. Since they are dependent upon each other, they are, in essence, considered as one.” (2011: 144, as cited in Tamale)

(3) Maintaining diversity and fighting against biological simplification

Like ecofeminism's defense of biodiversity, *Half of a Yellow* defends cultural and human diversity against simplification and homogenization, by portraying Igbo identities and the resistance against the genocide. Moreover, it also portrays Mohammed, Olanna's ex-partner, who is Hausa, as kind and morally grounded, undermining ethnic essentialism. The author's choice in portraying Mohammad shows an anti-reductionistic approach to relational ethics, mirroring through a certain type of representational diversity an ecofeminist and decolonial framework.

(4) Challenging the nature-culture dualism

This principle critiques the way patriarchy and colonialism separate "nature" (feminized, devalued) from "culture" (masculinised, privileged). As King observes, "in patriarchal thought, women are believed to be closer to nature than men. [...] They do not understand that a central reason for woman's oppression is her association with the despised nature they are so concerned about." (1995: 18) In the novel, women like Olanna and Kainene subvert these binaries, because they are intellectual, emotional, and political actors: they are neither reduced to "nature", nor excluded from "culture." Basically, they echo a type of social ecology which, according to King, "challenges the dualistic belief that nature and culture are separate and opposed." (19) It is in the intention of the novel to undermine such dualisms, showing how both colonisation and patriarchy rely on these false separations. *Half of a Yellow Sun* also permeates feminism to represent the "refusal of the original 'other' in patriarchal human society to remain silent or to be the 'other' any longer" (King, 20). For King, women used to be the "others", often silenced in public, but who now have chosen to speak up. Therefore, it is very refreshing to see how Olanna stands up for herself: "It was her right to be upset, her right to choose not to brush her humiliation aside in the name of an overexalted intellectualism, and she would claim that right." (Adichie, 2006: 102)

In Deirdre Cassandra Byrne's (2021) reading of Koleka Putuma's poem *Water*, the theorist establishes her ecofeminist methodology from the outset, explaining that the provision of water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning is a fundamental aspect of household and family socio-economic security. This responsibility is predominantly borne by women across cultures, reflecting the socially assigned nurturing duties and stereotypes that designate

household labor as “women’s work” (1). Placing the reader in the geological temporal context theorized by Donna Haraway as the “Anthropocene,”¹² Byrne explains that the impact of climate change is not distributed equally between men and women. Women bear a disproportionate responsibility for ensuring food and water security, making them more vulnerable to the adverse effects of environmental damage. This reality is clearly depicted in Adichie’s novel, particularly through the character of Olanna. During times of war and famine, it is women like her who are responsible for getting food by standing in endless queues, not men like Odenigbo. Despite being very frail and weak, she is forced to get food for her child alone:

Olanna was surprised, too, by the militia members flogging with long whips and shouting ‘Order! Order!’ and by the stern faces of the women at the tables, who bent and scooped into the bags and held out before them and then said, ‘Yes! Next!’.

‘Join that one!’ Mrs Muokelu said, when Olanna moved to stand some way behind her. ‘That is the egg-yolk queue! Join it! This one is stockfish.’

Olanna joined the queue and held herself from pushing back at the woman who tried to nudge her out. She let the woman stand in front of her. The incongruity of queuing to beg for food made her feel uncomfortable, blemished. She folded her arms, then let them lie by her sides, and then folded them again. She was close to the front when she noticed that the powder being scooped into bags and bowls was not yellow but white. Not egg yolk but cornmeal. The egg-yolk queue was the next one. Olanna hurried over to join it, but the woman who was dishing out the yolk stood up and said, ‘Egg yolk is finished! *O gwula!*’

Panic rose in Olanna’s chest. She ran after the woman. ‘Please,’ she said.

‘What is it?’ the woman asked. The supervisor, standing close by, turned to stare at Olanna.

‘My little child is sick – ’ Olanna said.

The woman cut her short. ‘Join that queue for milk.’

‘No, no, she has not been eating anything, but she ate egg yolk.’ Olanna held the woman’s arm. ‘*Biko*, please, I need the egg yolk.’ (Adichie, 2006: 268-69)¹³

¹² According to Donna Haraway, the Anthropocene represents the realization that human actions have caused climate change and environmental degradation. The National Geographic Society calls it “an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the most recent period in Earth’s history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet’s climate and ecosystems”.

<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/anthropocene/> Lastly accessed 17 July 2025.

¹³ It seems that this scene was deeply inspired by the author’s mother’s real life experiences. In her 2008 essay, Adichie confesses: “My mother has never spoken very much about losing her father in a refugee camp in Uke. She has, however, often spoken of the things she lost: her wig, the china she had brought back from the United States, how she went from making toast and scrambled eggs for her two little daughters to standing in line and fighting for dried egg yolk from the relief center.” (Adichie, 2008: 50)

Undoubtedly, women bear the brunt of war: as victims claimed by conquering forces, as displaced refugees, and as disabled individuals, older women, and single mothers reliant on shrinking social services (King, 26). And just like women who are dominated by patriarchal violent structures, the natural space also suffers. As Henri Lefebvre explains in *The Production of Space*, nature was completely reduced to material resources, and is exploited by humans to fulfill human needs which, King adds, are “defined in opposition to nature” (20). This underscores the symbiotic relationship between feminism and ecology, highlighting their mutual dependence and the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches to address global challenges. The environment suffers a lot from human-made crises, an aspect that is very realistically portrayed in Adichie’s novel. Here are a few examples:

teachers hacked down in Zaria, a full Catholic church in Sokoto set on fire, a pregnant woman split open in Kano. The newscaster paused. ‘Some of our people are coming back now. The lucky ones are coming back. The railway stations are full of our people. If you have tea and bread to spare, please take it to the stations. Help a brother in need.’ (Adichie, 2006: 144)

Mats and dirty wrappers were spread all over the platform and people were crumpled down on them, men and women and children crying and eating bread and tending wounds. Hawkers walked around with trays on their hands. Ugwu did not want to go into that ragged bazaar but he steeled himself and walked towards a man sitting on the ground with a red-stained rag wound around his head. Flies buzzed everywhere. (145)

Then she noticed Aunty Ifeka’s kiosk, or what remained of it: splinters of wood, packets of groundnuts lying in the dust. She opened the car door and climbed out. She paused for a moment because of how glaringly bright and hot it was, with flames billowing from the roof, with grit and ash floating in the air, before she began to run towards the house. She stopped when she saw the bodies. Uncle Mbaezi lay facedown in an ungainly twist, legs splayed. Something creamy-white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Aunty Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips. (147)

The presence of flies in the novel is reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre's 1943 play *Les Mouches*, which is known as a reinterpretation of the Greek myth of Orestes who returns to Argos after his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus, have killed Agamemnon. The metropolis is characterised by the pervasive presence of oversized, disoriented flies, which prove impossible to ignore. In accordance with the tradition of Greek mythology, flies were employed as a means of signalling impending plagues or problematic states within the city. The insects were interpreted as harbingers of either incest or unsolved murders, and were associated with the prospect of death. In the context of Sartre's theatrical work, the flies symbolise collective guilt and remorse, thus facilitating a comparative analogy with the flies depicted in the aforementioned scene from Adichie's novel. In existentialist terms, Sartre proposes that guilt is not something imposed by the gods, but rather something assumed by man through his choices and passive acceptance of authority.

Another contrasting visual image used by Adichie are the red lip-shaped wounds on Aunt Ifeka's lifeless body. Even if red lips are frequently linked to conventional notions of femininity, in this case, the images are distorted and situated within the context of a violent death, characterised by wounding, bleeding and forced nudity. In other words, the dehumanising process of transforming the female body from a symbol of life and beauty into an object marked by violence can be said to bring about a brutal inversion of symbols, which is a specific feature of genocide. The "slightly parted" expression conveys the image of an involuntary opening; the wounds become voiceless mouths, a form of mute "testimony" to the violence suffered. Furthermore, the image may also suggest a form of sexual abuse or extreme dehumanisation, albeit indirectly: the woman is depicted in a state of nudity and her wounds are rendered in an almost aesthetic form.

To sum, the novel makes it clear that "militarism and the death-courting weapons industry are the most immediate threat to continued life on the planet" (King, 26), and it is in profound alignment with the ecofeminist principles regarding an anti-militaristic praxis. The text challenges the conventional binaries and advocates for unity among the victims of war, irrespective of their gender. Growing up in the shadow of the war herself (she was born seven years after the conflict ended), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the profound impact of war, as a "man-made" phenomenon, on women, delving into the underlying reasons for its profound effect on them. The next part of the chapter will dive

into the narrative devices that Adichie uses in order to give voice to the peripheral individuals of the war.

Metafictionality and Polyphonic Narratives: “Feminizing” the Genocide Fiction

“I think that literature is one of the best ways to come closer to the idea of a common humanity, to see that we may be kind and unkind in different ways, but that we are all capable of kindness and unkindness.”

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *African “Authenticity” and the Biafran Experience* (46)

Adichie employs in *Half of a Yellow Sun* the literary technique of internal focalization, narrating the Biafran War from the perspectives of Ugwu, Olanna and Richard, adopting a heterodiegetic narrator which presents the events through the eyes of the characters. To be more specific, in analyzing the novel’s use of polyvocality and focalization, Aghogho Akpome argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* employs five internal focalizers: Olanna, Ugwu, and Richard as the primary ones, and Odenigbo and Kainene as “secondary focalizers” (2013: 27). Irrespective of the number, the author ensured that the novel would encapsulate a multitude of perspectives with regard to the narration of war and genocide. Adichie even stated: “I was particularly interested in class and race and gender, which I think affect everything about life in every part of the world—in some ways, the amount of humanity and dignity the world allows depends on what race and class and gender you are.” (2008: 51) According to Mieke Bal, the focalizer is the point from which the elements are viewed (2017: 135). If the subject of focalization coincides with the character(s), which is the case in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, that character has a clear advantage over the others, as the reader will be inclined to accept that particular vision. Therefore, it becomes essential for genocide narratives to encapsulate not only a singular voice, but a plurality of perspectives, in order to depict the events as objectively as possible. Undoubtedly, storytelling is “inevitably slanted or subjective in nature” (Bal, 132), yet it is possible to give an objective picture of factual reality, as Adichie successfully does. Through the use of multiple internal focalizations, the author refuses to romanticise the war or depict its “heroic” nature (a depiction often used in the masculinist narratives of war). By using multiple voices from different social classes and a fluid, non-chronological and anti-militaristic storytelling technique, Adichie is indeed “feminizing” the war novel.

Olanna and her twin sister, Kainene, are both members of the middle class, a social stratum in which they were born and raised. In contrast, Odenigbo, being born in the village, experienced significant challenges in his attempt to ascend to the middle class. Moreover, Ugwu is employed as a domestic servant by Odenigbo, thus indicating that he does not belong to the middle class, but rather aspires to it.¹⁴ Lastly, Richard is the white, UK-born male character who is an expatriate. This plurality of voices can only provide multiple perspectives within the novel.

The novel also contains a metatext, the book “The World Was Silent When We Died”, which is practically written during the reading of the novel, thereby rendering the reader both a spectator and participant in this act of metareferentiality. It is widely acknowledged among scholars that this insertion gives rise to questions regarding authorship and the prerogative to narrate. For instance, in her analysis, Julie A. Noringriis (2024) explores the critical debate surrounding Ugwu’s authorship of “The Book” in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, noting that his reclaiming of narrative authority from Richard (initially assumed to be the book’s author) has often been interpreted as an affirming move. As cited in Noringriis, Maya Ganapathy sees Ugwu’s authorship as a reclamation of the Biafran story by a Black African, pushing back against Western dominance over African narratives (102). Likewise, several critics draw comparisons between the novel’s ending and that of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, emphasizing the shift in narrative voice. Susan Z. Andrade, for instance, argues that the revelation of Ugwu as the author parallels the narrative pivot in Achebe’s novel, from the Igbo perspective to that of the British, but Adichie reverses this pattern by restoring narrative power to an African voice (as quoted in Noringriis, 92).

Michael A. Donnelly (2017) explains that Adichie tricks the reader to believe that Richard is the narratorial voice of the excerpts from *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The first metatext follows Richard’s introspective moment, when, after embracing Kainene, he claims that this is the first time he has truly felt a sense of belonging. This “somewhere” he refers to can be interpreted as the realm of documentary storytelling. Although Adichie only explicitly identifies Ugwu as the author at the end of the novel, readers used to the historical context of the war may recognise Richard as the likely writer, given his

¹⁴ There are numerous instances throughout the novel where the reader sees Ugwu idolizing Odenigbo and wanting to simulate his lifestyle: “Late at night, after Master was in bed, Ugwu would sit on the same chair and imagine himself speaking swift English, talking to rapt imaginary guests, using words like *decolonize* and *pan-African*, moulding his voice after Master’s, and he would shift and shift until he too was on the edge of the chair.” (Adichie, 2006: 20)

similarities to Western journalists who supported Biafra. Actually, in a 2006 interview, Adichie herself revealed that the character of Richard was inspired by Frederick Forsyth, the British journalist who spent time in Biafra during the war and authored the 1969 book *The Biafra Story* (Donnelly, 255). Richard claims that he can write as a Biafran voice and names the book “The World Was Silent When We Died,” a title that unsettles Kainene, arguing that he is not truly part of the conflict and should not speak on behalf of those who suffered: “*We?* The world was silent when *we* died?” (Adichie 2006: 174) By making this shift in the reader’s mind from a supposedly White narratorial voice to an Igbo voice, Adichie once again confirms the importance of allowing her people to tell their own stories. (BBC World Service, 2013, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—Half of a Yellow Sun*)

However, Noringriis points out that this turn may be complicated by Ugwu’s earlier participation in the gang rape of a Biafran bar girl (a scene that will be analysed in the next part of the chapter that focuses on notions of masculinity). This act problematises his position as the novel’s final narrator, raising questions about whether he is an appropriate voice to tell Biafra’s story. Some scholars argue that Ugwu’s authorship functions as a form of redemption. For example, Matthew Lecznar views it as a symbolic act of atonement (as quoted in Noringriis, 125), and Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba suggests that the act of writing redeems Ugwu (99). Brenna Munro, while more cautious, notes that the rape is quickly passed over in the narrative, as though the novel prioritizes Ugwu’s emergence as a writer over the violence he perpetrated (as quoted in Noringriis, 130).

On the other hand, Noringriis highlights critiques of this redemptive framing: Brenda Cooper argues that by transferring narrative control from Richard to Ugwu, Adichie risks undermining the feminist potential of the novel. While Cooper acknowledges Ugwu’s writing may be read as a form of atonement, she ultimately sees this move as problematic, because it minimises the victim’s trauma in favor of the perpetrator’s redemption (as quoted in Noringriis, 148). In the final section of the novel, Ugwu dedicates his text to Odenigbo, addressing him as “my good man” (Adichie, 2006: 541). This gesture suggests a sense of social mobility, implying that the narrator and Odenigbo have now attained a similar social standing, akin to that of Ugwu’s former “master.”¹⁵

¹⁵ It must be remembered that Zulfiqar considers that Adichie’s narrative centres almost exclusively on Igbo people, neglecting earlier civilisations that existed prior to Nigeria’s formation, as well as the perspectives of other ethnic minorities affected by the war, particularly the Ogoni. Zulfiqar highlights here the irony in Ugwu’s dedication of his book, written from a position of marginalisation, to a privileged Igbo figure, namely Odenigbo. In contrast, adds Zulfiqar, Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* offers a broader national identity

As noted by Zulfiqar (87), Adichie situates herself within the tradition of female writers like Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa by making women the focal point of war fiction.¹⁶ Similar to Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) and Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), which recount the Biafran experience through women's courage and their efforts to restore war-affected communities, Adichie highlights women's central role in her narratives. Moreover, Adichie also borrows from Buchi Emecheta the "book within book" technique (Zulfiqar, 87) or, in narratology terms, a metafictional device. However, Zulfiqar notes a difference:

Debbie hides the book, as she is not yet ready to share it. However, she is convinced that one day she will 'tell [...] the story of how a few ambitious soldiers from Sandhurst tried to make their dream a reality' (Emecheta 1982: 258). Adichie, on the other hand, does not give this role to any of her privileged female characters; rather, it is the houseboy Ugwu who is the writer of Adichie's book-within-a-book, a series of six instalments that all have the same title, 'The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died.' (87-88)

In choosing to do so, Adichie manages (1) to subvert the power dynamics, centralising a marginalised voice (regardless of Ugwu's gender, he is still a marginalised individual), (2) to flip the common hierarchy of who gets to narrate, and (3) to demonstrate the force of literacy as a means of resistance for the oppressed (Ugwu learnt to read and write in Odenigbo's house). According to Bryce, this metatext allows Adichie to "to relinquish her position as a narrative authority, in favour of a spokesperson for the voiceless, which she does not claim to be" (2008: 62). Donnelly also considers that Adichie aligns the

through her protagonist, Debbie Ogedemgbe, who is described as "neither Ibo nor Yoruba nor Hausa, but simply a Nigerian" (1982: viii, as cited in Zulfiqar), thereby challenging the ethnic dominance that Adichie's work is said at times to reinforce.

¹⁶ Michael A. Donnelly mentions in the article "The Bildungsroman and Biafran Sovereignty in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (2017) that Eleni Coundouriotis argues in *The People's Right to the Novel* (2014) that *Half of a Yellow Sun* follows in the path of Buchi Emecheta's reshaping of the war novel, particularly through what she calls its "feminization" and "domestication." According to Coundouriotis, this aligns the narrative with the submission of women's moral and political authority, rooted in their roles within the family. Donnelly notes that for Coundouriotis, Adichie's focus on the domestic sphere weakens the novel's potential to act as a vehicle for "people's history." The scholars believe that by centering personal and familial experiences over collective portrayals of suffering, Adichie is seen to compromise the war novel's function as a device of expression for violence and conflict. It is the contention of the present study that these ideas are erroneous, as they neglect to acknowledge the fact that, through these micro, "domestic" perspectives, an intimate and personal monograph of war is being realised. War is understood and felt in the novel not just as a personal suffering, but also from what ecofeminism calls ethics of care.

development or the “bildung” of Ugwu with the evolution of the Biafran state, continuing the bildungsroman tradition inherited from Achebe. The theorist suggests that this genre is a privileged form of literature, promoting not only ideas about community and belonging, but also the concept of nationhood (as described by Benedict Anderson, 2012). Rather than offering Ugwu’s character a post-war identity rooted in authorship, as some interpretations suggest, Adichie instead emphasises his war-time actions, particularly his involvement in a gang rape. This complicates any symbolic link between Ugwu’s personal growth and Biafra’s claim to sovereign legitimacy, suggesting that both are marked by ambiguity and trauma (Donnelly, 247).

Ugwu writes in order to forget the traumas of the genocide, “in which he suffered both as a civilian and as a child soldier.” (88) He himself becomes both a victim of the war and an aggressor as he participates in the gang rape under pressure from fellow soldiers. The subsequent section of the chapter will address the manner in which warfare engenders a state of complicity among its victims, rendering them complicit in their own suffering, by looking at how the notions of masculinity and motherhood are modified.

Notions of Masculinity and Motherhood: The Gendered Aftermath of War

Half of a Yellow Sun is largely concerned with the development of two male characters: Richard and Ugwu. Donnelly argues that while both of them experience growth in the novel, their paths diverge: Richard’s journey reflects a colonial dynamic, whereas Ugwu’s aligns with a nationalist one. Richard’s decision to leave England for Nigeria is framed as an artistic interest in Igbo roped pots, but beneath that, it reveals a desire for personal transformation, something he felt he couldn’t achieve in his home country, which links his narrative to a colonial adventure story, echoing the European bildungsroman. In this contrast, Adichie represents Richard as a figure of colonial authority, while Ugwu emerges as a symbol of (post)colonial identity (2017: 255). Describing Richard as an “English-man who became more Biafran than Biafrans themselves” (Birnbaum, 2006), Adichie highlights that the character has the privilege of not dealing with the consequences of statelessness: as Donnelly suggest, Richards is “free” to romanticise Biafra without jeopardizing his legal or political standing (255). Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s idea that the loss of citizenship strips individuals of their basic human recognition, Donnelly

suggests that Richard's privileged position allows him to adopt a Biafran persona without sacrificing his "humanity." Donnelly also highlights that, when Richard is forced to confront his privileged position, the events around him begin to feel unreal (255-56). At one point, he is the direct observer of a brutal execution of an Igbo man by soldiers at the airport. Despite witnessing this act of brutal violence, Richard doesn't feel endangered. As Donnelly further notes, his security as a foreigner allows the horrors of the war to remain external to him.

Ugwu's ability to represent Biafra is also complicated, particularly by his participation in wartime atrocities, such as the murder and rape of civilians. The gang rape scene is realistically described by Adichie:

'Target Destroyer, Aren't you a man? *I bukwa nwoke?*' [...] Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. [...] He didn't look at her face, or at the man pinning her down, or at anything at all as he moved quickly and felt his own climax [...] a self-loathing release. Finally he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a calm hate. (Adichie 2006: 365)

As Zulfiqar observes, Ugwu attempts to cope with guilt through writing: "The more he wrote the less he dreamed" (Adichie, 398). The calm hatred in the girl's eyes and the shame of his actions as a child soldier become a recurring nightmare. He dreads how Kainene, Olanna, and Eberechi would respond if they knew what he had done: "She would loathe him. So would Olanna. So would Eberechi" (398-9). As Zulfiqar further points out, Ugwu's fear of adult judgment reflects the broader reality that child soldiers are often denied autonomy and a full understanding of their actions (Rushton, 2014: 190, as cited in Zulfiqar). This makes Ugwu both a victim and a perpetrator, resisting any simplistic categorization as purely evil. There are other interpretations that have seen Ugwu as misogynistic and predatory since before the war. For example, Donnelly recalls Ugwu's adolescent fantasies of drugging Nnesinachi with tear gas and raping her:

The tear gas fascinated Ugwu. If it made people pass out, he wanted to get it. He wanted to use it on Nnesinachi when he went home with Mr. Richard for the ori-okpa festival. He

would lead her to the grove by the stream and tell her the tear gas was a magic spray that would keep her healthy. She would believe him. She would be so impressed to see him arrive in a white man's car that she would believe anything he said. (Adichie, 2006: 263, as cited in Donnelly)

As Ugwu realizes the horrors of his actions, when he returns home he will be deeply moved to learn that his sister was also the victim of a brutal rape and beating that mutilated her eyesight. Adichie uses this scene to emphasize the cyclical nature of (masculinist) violence and to recall resonant feminist messages like: “She’s someone’s ~~sister/mother/daughter/wife~~”—a visual critique of how the patriarchal society frames women’s worth only in relation to others rather than as individuals in their own right.

Through this contrast between Richard and Ugwu, Adichie presents both male characters as flawed storytellers, using their compromised perspectives to question the nationalist ideals associated with Biafra’s struggle. If the narrative can no longer align with these two voices, it becomes evident that it must belong to the pure and innocent characters, namely the women from the novel which are portrayed as the real victims. Whilst numerous critics designate Ugwu as the primary narrator and the main character of the novel, it is this author’s opinion that the genuine and worthy storyteller is Olanna (and, to a certain degree, Kainene), due to the fact that her hands are not sullied by colonial complicity or by complicity in war. These two female characters also distance themselves from what Fanon calls “intellectual laziness,” a category into which both Odenigbo and Ugwu seem to fall. Mohammed Ghazi Alghamdi (2024: 203) provides a very eloquent analysis when discussing how “Adichie’s middle-class female characters do not exemplify Fanon’s [...] assumption regarding the crisis of the decolonized nation, which he sees as being produced by ‘the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, [...] its spiritual penury, and [...] the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in.’” (Fanon 1991: 147, as cited in Alghamdi) According to Alghamdi, Fanon does not provide an exact definition of “intellectual laziness”, but does associate it with the national consciousness of the middle class (204). Hence, Fanon criticises a certain intellectualism among some middle-class individuals who, unwilling to critically engage with Western ideologies, passively adopt them—thereby undermining the struggle of their post-colonial nations. For Alghamdi, Odenigbo’s intellectual figure from *Half of a Yellow Sun* may indeed represent the dilemma

faced by segments of the middle class who wrestle with defining a national consciousness. This struggle can affect the formation of a renewed identity—understood here as a confident self-conception dedicated to rebuilding the nation without remaining fixated on colonial exploitation. This tension surfaces in Odenigbo’s statement that the

only authentic identity for the African is the tribe... I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed *black* to be as different as possible from his *white*. But I was Igbo before the white man came (Adichie 2006: 25, as cited in Alghamdi).

By providing this example, Alghamdi considers that Odenigbo prioritises tribal identity over national unity and remains preoccupied with colonial history rather than engaging in constructive nation-building. Therefore, Odenigbo’s difficulty in situating himself within a (post)colonial context reflects Fanon’s notion of “intellectual laziness,” where some intellectuals fail to challenge inherited colonial ideologies (Alghamdi, 2024: 206). Alghamdi also sees in Odenigbo’s infidelity with Amala more than just a personal betrayal of Olanna. For the theorist, his infidelity signifies a deeper disruption of domestic stability and the integrity of the home, which translates to a symbolic betrayal of the nation: “If Odenigbo cannot maintain an intact household, how can we expect him to uphold a nation?” (207) At the opposite side of the spectrum, Olanna is considered to have a very stark sense of nationhood from the beginning of the narrative and is not perceived as “intellectually lazy.” Adopting the child that results from Odenigbo’s infidelity, Olanna chooses unity instead of division: “she is able to forgive and include others who wrong her, just as she is able to include other Nigerians in her concept of Nigeria as a nation” (208). Olanna is a progressive middle-class woman that realizes the importance of ethnic diversity and wishes to be more involved in local cultures: “She wished she were fluent in Hausa and Yoruba, like her uncle and aunt and cousins were, something she would gladly exchange her French and Latin for.” (Adichie, 2006: 50, as cited in Alghamdi) Alghamdi believes that Olanna’s wish to learn Hausa and Yoruba plays a pivotal role in her efforts to shape a sense of national identity. Her commitment reflects a certain drive toward national unity, setting her apart from Odenigbo’s perspective. By prioritising native tongues over colonial ones like French and Latin, Olanna deepens her connection to the idea of

nationhood. Assuming this role, Alghamdi considers that Olanna also comes to embody the concept of national motherhood (212).

In the aftermath of the war, Odenigbo still remains entrenched in a rigid and narrow intellectual stance, resisting any broader conception of nationhood. This becomes especially evident when Olanna receives a letter from Mohammed, which includes emergency contact information for her safety. Rather than acknowledging Mohammed's concern, Odenigbo responds with hostility and ethnic prejudice:

What's the matter is that you are saying that a bloody Muslim Hausa man is upset! He is complicit, absolutely complicit, in everything that happened to our people, so how can you say he is upset? [...] How can you sound this way after seeing what they did in Kano? Can you imagine what must have happened to Arize? They raped pregnant women on a stone before they cut them up. (Adichie, 2006: 238)

For Alghamdi, Odenigbo's reaction still places him in the "intellectual laziness" of his political consciousness, proving that after all this time he is not able to separate individuals from broader ethnic categories. Alghamdi also claims that Olanna's sense of nationhood is grounded in her desire for inclusivity; she is disappointed by Odenigbo's response and she refuses to speak to him for days after this confrontation. Alghamdi's analysis argues that this act of silence must be understood as an act of resistance, leading the novel to suggest that national unity will be hard to obtain as long as members of the middle class continue to define themselves primarily through their ethnicity. (218) As President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania stated in 1967, "unity can only be based on the general consent of people involved." (Faloyin, 61)

Kainene is also said to exemplify Fanon's theory of "intellectual laziness" and the struggle for national consciousness, but only at the beginning of the narrative, because her character goes through an undeniable evolution: "Kainene's national consciousness changes from passive to active after the war." (Alghamdi, 213) In a way, she reminds of the female characters from *Purple Hibiscus* (Kambili and Beatrice) that evolve from their "passive phase" to being "hybrid women" (Yerima-Avazi and Opoku-Agyemang, 2021: 131. See Chapter 2). However, Kainene is not "passive" in a powerless meaning, but in a political

one. She needs time to make the shift from “inert to dynamic” (Alghamdi, 213). If she would humiliate Ikejide, her houseboy, at the beginning of the novel, as the war evolves the reader sees her becoming more inclusive instead of exclusive with other Nigerians (Alghamdi, 214). She even comes to the point of regretting her past behaviour towards Ikejide: “There were evenings when Kainene was distant, immersed in herself. Once she said, ‘I never really noticed Ikejide’ and Olanna placed an arm on her sister’s shoulder and said nothing.” (Adichie 2006, 489, as cited in Alghamdi) Kainene also rescues a soldier without knowing his ethnicity, as she intervenes to stop a group of refugees from beating the young soldier accused of stealing food. While the crowd views him as a thief and a threat, Kainene insists he is not stealing but simply starving. The soldier, visibly injured, quietly thanks her before leaving with a small bag of garri (Adichie 2006: 505-6). Shortly after the soldier scene, Kainene departs on a mission to procure food and never returns. In questioning how the reader should understand her disappearance, Alghamdi reminds that, at the beginning of the narrative, Adichie presents Kainene as someone who might fit Fanon’s notion of “intellectual laziness.” Yet, by the novel’s final pages, she has undergone a “metamorphosis,” probably giving her life in service of the collective and communal good. Her vanishing, might Alghamdi add, could also be interpreted as a symbolic gesture toward solidarity with other ethnic groups (215).

Thus, by portraying (1) Olanna as politically active and possessing a strong sense of nationhood, and (2) Kainene as evolving from an inert political consciousness to the supreme gesture of disappearing—and possibly dying—in the name of the community, Adichie signals that her female characters are more willing to emancipate themselves and contribute to the decolonisation of their own minds. With this choice, Adichie does not intend to place these characters on a pedestal, but rather to show that not only men, but also women, possess an active, critical, and open political consciousness for change.

A final issue to be discussed in relation to Adichie’s novel and the portrayal of the female characters is motherhood. As Juliana Daniels writes, Olanna and Kainene, who come from an emancipated and privileged background, choose to live with their partners outside of marriage. They also decide not to have children, as Olanna explains that they lacked the so-called natural desire to become mothers:

She once told him that she did not have that fabled female longing to give birth, and her mother had called her *abnormal* until Kainene said she didn't have it either. He laughed and said that to bring a child into this unjust world was an act of blasé bourgeoisie – how funny, how untrue it was. Just as she had never seriously thought of having a child until now; (Adichie, 2006: 104)

This choice clashes with the expectations of the fictional Igbo community in which they live. Moreover, as Jilek observes in their thesis, it also proves that Olanna and Kainene have had access to contraceptive methods, “a fact that further illustrates the relevance of a generational gap to gender conceptualisations.” (2019: 44) Taking into consideration that the novel is set in the late sixties, it is important to add that women like Mrs. Ozobia (Olanna's and Kainene's mother) and even Odenigbo's Mama did not have access to contraception, being exposed to different narratives about motherhood, as Jilek highlights. As a result, Olanna's relationship with Odenigbo faces opposition from his mother, who disapproves of their living arrangement and Olanna's childlessness. She even considers Olanna a witch and orchestrates in response a situation where Odenigbo sleeps with and impregnates Amala. Before the infidelity scene, Odenigbo tries to excuse his mother's behaviour when it comes to offending Olanna:

‘Why is your mother's behaviour acceptable because she's a village woman? I know village women who do not behave this way.’

‘*Nkem*, my mother's entire life is in Abba. Do you know what a small bush village that is? Of course she will feel threatened by an educated woman living with her son. Of course you have to be a witch. That is the only way she can understand it.’ (Adichie 2006: 101)

After Odenigbo sleeps with the village girl, Mama and Amala hope for a male child, but when a daughter is born instead, they leave the little girl, Chiamaka, with Olanna, reinforcing a patriarchal discourse about how only the birth of male children is truly important and validating for a woman. Although Olanna becomes an adoptive mother for

Chiamaka and will eventually marry Odenigbo,¹⁷ she remains unable to conceive even after trying multiple times. She will even go to London to consult a doctor in infertility, finding out that there is nothing wrong with her body from a medical point of view. Daniels sees in Olanna's decision to travel to England for a medical evaluation a critique of how infertility is pathologized and deemed unacceptable in patriarchal cultures (62). The medical conclusion that Olanna has no reproductive issues redirects the focus, implying that the cause of the couple's inability to conceive may lie elsewhere, rather than solely with the woman (Tabong & Adongo, 2013, as cited in Daniels). However, Daniels adds that

the social scrutiny of female infertility, especially when Odenigbo successfully impregnates Amala, inflicts a lot of pain on Olanna. In her own words, it also “reminded her of how useless her body was” (232). Olanna's failure to conceive opens the gap for interrogation into the feminist alternatives for African women who want to but are unable to experience childbearing. (62)

In contrast, Kainene and Richard never formalise their relationship through marriage and do not have children; instead, Kainene dedicates herself to helping those affected by the war, which Daniels understands as a decision “to mother the community.” (2022: 56) Even if Kainene's story offers no indication that she is infertile, nor is there any suggestion that she ever attempted to have children, which implies that her childlessness is a personal choice. Daniels argues that through Kainene, Adichie advances a radical feminist perspective, advocating for the societal acceptance of African women who choose not to have biological children (63). Instead of traditional motherhood, Adichie introduces an ecofeminist concept of “community mothering”—where women care for and support others, particularly children, without a biological link and without being defined by childbirth.

¹⁷ Olanna refused many times to get married to Odenigbo, fearing that formalizing their relationship might affect the passion they shared for each other: “Each time he suggested they get married, she said no. They were so happy [...] and she wanted to guard that bond; she feared that marriage would flatten it to a prosaic partnership. (Adichie, 2006: 52)

Conclusion

This chapter offered an ecofeminist and decolonial reading of the 2006 *Half of a Yellow Sun* novel. The first part of the chapter concentrated on a concise depiction of the chronology of the genocide that transpired during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). This segment sought to highlight the significance of presenting the facts from all perspectives, including those that may be considered peripheral. In addition, the chapter analysed the novel from the perspective of material ecofeminism, as outlined in Ynestra King's seminal essay, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology." This approach emphasised the hardships endured by women during wartime, such as the challenges of procuring food and caring for children. Furthermore, it highlighted the detrimental impact of militarism on both the environment and the most vulnerable populations. The next section of the chapter transitioned from a theoretical to a stylistic register, analysing how Adichie, as an author, employs the plurality of voices to re-enact the war from multiple perspectives of class, gender and race. The analysis further examined the function of metatextual elements within the novel, thereby giving rise to a series of profound questions concerning authorial authority and the moral right to narrate. Finally, the chapter explored how militarism alters notions of masculinity and motherhood, emphasising the importance of moving beyond the "intellectual laziness" Franz Fanon speaks of in order to achieve the ideal of unity and equality between individuals. Lastly, the chapter was written in accordance with the following statement made by Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Black and Female*: "To be a feminist while black and female [...] is to live at the epicentre of structural racism and a brutal militarised patriarchy that has co-opted significant state institutions either in part or in their entirety." (2022: 96)

CHAPTER 4: MIGRATION, IDENTITY, AND FEMINISM IN *AMERICANAH*

“with *Americanah* I thought . . . ‘I’m going to write the book I want to write.’”

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in an interview with Zadie Smith,

Schomburg Centre 2014

This final chapter of the thesis analyzes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2013 transatlantic novel *Americanah* through close reading, decolonial feminism and critical race theory, bringing migration, racial identity, and beauty politics to the fore. The chapter will analyse the “American dream” from a Lacanian perspective, using the interpretation of Chibuzo Onunkwo and Chigbu Andrew Chigbu (2024) to highlight the phantasmagoria proposed by the American hypercapitalist system. In addition, the analysis will examine the repeated depiction of the figures of Barack Obama and Michelle Obama in the novel.

The experience of the novel’s protagonist, Ifemelu, assumes significant importance as it evokes themes of transgression and bodily experience, influenced by the phenomenon of migration and the alternation of spatiality. The discussion will also encompass a thorough examination of Fanon’s (1968) seminal concept that individuals of African descent attain a heightened awareness of their racial identity primarily within the context of predominantly White societies. This chapter focuses on the politics of hair, a recurring metaphor in the novel and a literal space of resistance. As Adichie has often said in interviews, “Hair is always political,” (SVT, 2013) and Ifemelu’s decision to go natural reflects her feminist awakening and her refusal to assimilate. Her journey to finding a proper hair care ritual in America, where she is forced to conform to Eurocentric standards of hairstyling, expresses not only all the compromises women and displaced Black bodies like Ifemelu have to make, but also the discriminatory culture of White society. Moreover, the figures of female characters such as Auntie Uju, Obinze’s mother and the salon women will be analyzed in order to reopen the topic of “passive” versus “hybrid” women figures, echoing the discussions in the previous chapters.

The chapter will also discuss in a comparative manner other novels written by Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*, *Swallow*, and *A Bit of Difference*), with the intention of

finding differences and overlaps in how feminist ideas take shape across diasporic contexts.

The Politics of Migration: Barack Obama and the Shattered American Dream in *Americanah*

According to Ángela Suárez-Rodríguez, *Americanah* provides a very solid example of the “Afrodiasporic novel,” (2024: 143) as it contains its key-features: diaspora and global mobility, marginalisation, Otherness and liminality, gendered experiences of intersectionality and an ambivalent return to the home country. *Americanah* occurs at the time of Barack Obama’s first election, in 2008, and follows the displacement story of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman whose character embodies the novel’s title. She moves to the United States for her education and is confronted for the first time with racism, echoing Fanon’s idea that Black people only become aware of their Blackness when living in a White society. (Fanon, 2008: 104–140, as cited in Adeyélure and & Roux, 2023: 1) When living in the U.S.A., Ifemelu’s race starts affecting her adjustment to American life, her romantic relationships, and her sense of self. Meanwhile, her Nigerian ex-lover, Obinze, travels to the United Kingdom using his mother’s visa and lives there as an undocumented immigrant, where he too faces racial discrimination. Eventually, he is detained and deported back to Nigeria. After thirteen years in the U.S.A., Ifemelu returns to Lagos and reconnects with Obinze, who will divorce his wife, Kosi, to reunite with her. In a 2023 blog entry, Eleanor Franzen argues that *Americanah* should now be read with an awareness of the political environments of both its setting and its time of publication. As the novel partly takes place during Obama’s first election in 2008, a moment portrayed as deeply meaningful for protagonist Ifemelu and her partner at that time, Blaine, Adichie conveys through her characters the global political and emotional impact of a Black man becoming President—not just for African Americans but for the wider Black diaspora, including non-American Blacks. Reading *Americanah* in 2023 (and implicitly 2025) may indeed feel emotionally charged. As Franzen highlights, the novel’s approach to race and identity was shaped by a different era—before events like Donald Trump’s election, George Floyd’s murder, and the January 6 Capitol insurrection. If the novel were written now, it would likely have to engage with those developments as well. This shift in context can make some of its themes feel provocative today. For example, the novel explores

tensions between African immigrants and African Americans, including perceptions of victimhood and debates about the use of the n-word—topics that might be received differently in today’s post-2020 climate of heightened awareness around systemic racism and violence:

Ifemelu and other Nigerian expats often cite what they see as a victim mentality on the part of African-Americans; in one of her college classes, another African woman defends the use of the n-word in a text. Is that a possibility that a novel could contemplate holding out, now that the violent, lethal targeting of Black people by law enforcement and other institutional powers has been so thoroughly, so publicly documented and disseminated? (Franzen 2023, *The Great Reread*, #4: *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)

Chibuzo Onunkwo and Chigbu Andrew Chigbu argue in “Lacan’s perspective on American Dream in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*” (2024) that, in order to understand the disillusionment that Ifemelu faces as a Nigerian immigrant in America, it is fundamental to analyse the text through the lens of Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory concerning the imaginary order. As the Nigerian theorists explain, Jacques Lacan identified the “imaginary order” as one of the key stages in human psychological development. This phase is closely tied to what he termed the “mirror stage,” which typically occurs in infants between the ages of six and eighteen months. At this point in development, the child has not yet developed a coherent sense of self. Lacan uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe how the child, upon seeing its reflection, begins to associate itself with this external image. This moment of recognition is foundational, which is why Lacan refers to it as the mirror stage (Onunkwo and Chigbu, 45).

Onunkwo and Chigbu continue to explain that in his work *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience* (2001), Lacan claims that this recognition should be understood as a form of identification—a psychological transformation where the subject internalises the image. He refers to this internalised image as the “*imago*,” a term rooted in psychoanalytic theory, highlighting its predetermined role in shaping the self (46). At this stage, the child cannot yet separate its own identity from that of the Other, leading to a misrecognition that creates illusions. The reflected image appears flawless and whole, giving rise to what Lacan calls the “*ideal ego*”—an idealised version of the self that the child aspires to become. This

misidentification forms the basis of the child's self-image, though it is built on illusion rather than reality. The image, while external, significantly influences the child's developing imagination and sense of identity. In a broader sense, would Onunkwo and Chigbu explain, Lacan's theory can be applied to cultural ideals like the American Dream, which represents an imagined, ever-elusive and phantasmagoric state of perfection. Much like the mirror image in the child's development, the American Dream is embedded in the realm of fantasy.

Furthermore, Onunkwo and Chigbu argue that this imaginative aspect of human consciousness does not end in childhood: "it is something that man experiences all through his life, the imaginative faculty to dream of a better future in his reveries and daydreams." (46) Moreover, for Herbert Marcuse, fantasy holds onto repressed memories and archetypes, while also reflecting the individual longing for freedom and self-fulfillment (1987: 140–141, as cited in Onunkwo and Chigbu), both ideas that stay behind the concept of the American Dream.

When providing a theoretical perspective on the American Dream, Onunkwo and Chigbu emphasise that the concept is tied to the pursuit of a new and better life and quote James Truslow Adams, who describes it as the hope for a land where life is richer, fuller, and offers opportunity based on one's abilities and efforts (1831: 415, as cited in Onunkwo and Chigbu).

Historically, would Onunkwo and Chigbu highlight, the roots of the American Dream go back to the early English Puritans. In 1630, driven by dissatisfaction with the Anglican Church's lack of reform, the Puritans went to the so-called New World. Seeking religious liberty, they journeyed to America, which they viewed as a land of promise, hope that is captured in Captain Edward's 1654 proclamation calling on oppressed Christians to migrate to the New World, a place he describes as where God would create a new Heaven, Earth, Church, and society (1654: 2, as cited in Onunkwo and Chigbu). It is very important to add here that the arrival of the Puritans—frequently regarded as pioneers of religious freedom— was concomitant with a surge in widespread violence, land theft, and the systematic displacement and killing of Indigenous peoples. This fundamental contradiction, characterised by the pursuit of personal liberty whilst simultaneously denying it to others, unveils a seminal paradox of the American Dream: namely, that the

ideals of freedom and prosperity were established alongside practices of exclusion, domination, and settler colonialism.

However, by 1776, the American Dream had become a core part of the nation's founding ideals (Onunkwo and Chigbu, 47). In the Declaration of Independence it is written that all people are created equal and are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. James Adam also emphasised that the American Dream encapsulates upward mobility, success being possible regardless of one's origins (1931: 404, as cited in Onunkwo and Chigbu). Over time, this idea has also been used in political discourse to rally support. Onunkwo and Chigbu provide as example President Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006), where he links the American Dream to freedom, personal responsibility, and self-reliance (47).

But what happens when a young Nigerian woman migrates to the U.S.A. in order to fulfil this exact American Dream? Ifemelu's experience that is depicted in *Americanah* shows once again that this idealised concept is nothing but an illusion shaped by fantasy or, in simpler terms, a construct of human imagination. Moreover, being originally based on violence and exclusion, as it can be understood above from the coming of the Puritans, this concept can only generate the same things.

Adichie employs once again the internal focalisation technique in *Americanah*, a narrative strategy that advantages her and can be particularly effective in capturing the initial experiences of cultural dissonance and subsequent disillusionment. While still maintaining a heterodiegetic narrative voice, the author positions herself equidistant from Ifemelu, probably also out of a desire to protect herself from certain voices that have often analogized her life experiences with her literary characters: "I've had to spend a lot of time convincing people that she[Ifemelu]'s not me, but in some ways she is" (Adichie in an interview with David Pilling for the Financial Times, 2016). Onunkwo and Chigbu argue that the first thing that immediately throws Ifemelu off when she arrives in America is the heat (47):

Each heat wave reminded Ifemelu of her first, the summer she arrived. It was summer in America, she knew this, but all her life she had thought of 'overseas' as a cold place of wool coats and snow [...] she bought the thickest sweater she could find in Tejuosho market for her trip. She wore it for the journey [...] The sweltering heat alarmed her, as did Aunt

Uju hatchback, with a patch of rust on its side and peeling fabric on the seats. (Adichie, 2013: 103-104)

The weather is not just hot, it's harsh and unrelenting, completely at odds with the *image* she had built in her mind or, as Adichie herself writes, "in the landscape of her imagination" (104), echoing again the fantasy dimension of the American Dream. A deeper sense of disappointment can be felt as she takes in more of her new reality: "She stared at buildings and cars and signboards, all of them matt, disappointingly matt" (*ibid.*), a reality so different than what she pictured as being "covered in a high-shine gloss" (*ibid.*). Indeed, the new life that Ifemelu is about to start is far from glamorous, an aspect that she starts to realise very soon, as she boards "Aunty Uju's old, beat-up Toyota, rusting at the sides and with fabric peeling off the seats." (103-104) The state of the car suggests that Aunty Uju may not be in the best financial situation. Yet, Ifemelu doesn't have time to process this as she is shocked to see a young boy urinating on the highway. Taken aback, she points it out, genuinely surprised that this could happen in a place she thought of as "clean" and "orderly." Aunty Uju responds with a shrug, explaining that things aren't always as polished as they seem, and not everyone follows the rules. For Ifemelu, it's another small crack in the glossy picture of America she once held. Onunkwo and Chigbu also point out that Ifemelu's first night in America brings a supplementary wave of disillusionment as her reality clashes with the idealised image of the American Dream she had imagined (48). Sleeping on a blanket on the floor while Aunty Uju and her son share the bed makes her question whether she is truly in the America she had dreamed about, a place she once pictured like scenes from *The Cosby Show* (Adichie, 2013: 106). Instead, she is faced with dim streets, demure living conditions, and a stark confusion state entangled with disappointment, realising that the America she imagined may not exist at all. There are many other things that shock Ifemelu along the way: the fact that there are also armed robberies in America, not just in her home country, the almost impossible situation of finding a decent job, the fact that she has to pretend to be someone else in order to get employment (she has to commit identity theft), and the daily racism she faces in interactions with other people, such as Cristina Tomas, the racist receptionist on Ifemelu's first day of university. These aspects will be discussed in detail in the following sections of the thesis regarding transgression.

When she needs to find a job, Ifemelu finds herself in the position of what Omotola T. Adeyelu and Alwyn P. Roux call a “liminal migrant,” (2023: 4) and experiences downward mobility (opposed to the James Adam’s so-called “social mobility” that the American Dream promises) as her three years of university education in Nigeria become irrelevant in America: “American employers did not like lower-level employees to be too educated” (Adichie, 2013: 139, as cited in Adeyelu and Roux) said Mwombeki to Ifemelu, trying to help her write a proper resume in order to get employed as quickly as possible. As Adeyelu and Roux suggest,

This [...] portrays how career advancement for black people is marred by colour. Because the racialised environment favours the dominant colour as ‘natural occupants’ of some professional sectors, nonwhite people found in the same environment are presumably occupying an undesirable space. (5)

It is important therefore to link this “undesirable space” that Adeyelu and Roux talk about to the political context in which the novel is set; it must be added here that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie holds a favourable opinion of Barack Obama. Furthermore, she even stated in the aforementioned interview with David Pilling for The Financial Times: “I adore him.” Obama’s 2018 summer reading list, as reported by Emmie Martin (2018, CNBC), included Adichie’s novel, adding that: “*Americanah* raises universal questions of race and belonging, the overseas experience for the African diaspora, and the search for identity and a home.” The figure of Obama is a recurrent presence in the novel, manifesting in general at moments of dilemma. For Ifemelu, who has endured numerous setbacks, the election of Obama as the 44th President of the United States is surrounded by great hope. This also applies to Blaine (Ifemelu’s partner at that time) and his friends. The prevailing sentiment is one of optimism regarding Obama, albeit with divergent underlying motivations. As Ifemelu writes in her widely read blog, Obama can also be regarded as a figure who has the potential to effect a change in stereotypes about Black women and men, as well as to inspire hope for addressing systemic racism: “they had survived that fight, mostly because of Barack Obama, bonding anew over their shared passion. On election night, before Blaine kissed her, his face wet with tears, he held her tightly as though Obama’s victory was also their personal victory.” (Adichie, 2013: 7)

Onunkwo and Chigbu explain that, after trying without success to find a proper job, Ifemelu starts facing a lot of financial problems, including unpaid bills, rent, and tuition fees, which lead her to respond to a City Paper advertisement seeking a female personal assistant for a busy sports coach. The table tennis coach explains to Ifemelu that there are two positions: an office job, which has already been filled, and another role meant to help him “relax,” which is still available. However, the second position implies a sexual relationship in exchange for money. Though Ifemelu never actually engages in sexual intercourse with the coach (even though many have read the scene as if, including Onunkwo and Chigbu), she is pressured into a deeply uncomfortable encounter that amounts to a form of sexual violation (Onunkwo and Chigbu, 49). Back at her apartment, she washes her hands with scalding water, an act that Onunkwo and Chigbu believe to be symbolising her desperate wish to cleanse herself of guilt and trauma (*ibid.*). In my own interpretation, the scalding water reminds of the scene from *Purple Hibiscus* in which Eugene punishes Kambili for disobedience, pouring boiling water on her feet in order to “wash away” her allegedly sinful actions.

Ifemelu gets rid of the clothes that she was wearing, unwilling to wear or even touch them again. A hundred-dollar bill given by the coach rests statically on her bedside table, just like in a still life painting. Because of the enormous guilt that Ifemelu faces after this scene, she stops keeping in touch with Obinze, her boyfriend that was still in Nigeria at that time. The next time they talk will be in 15 years, when she returns home. Undoubtedly, “precarious work, characterized by low pay, lack of job security, and limited access to social benefits, can significantly impact personal autonomy and interpersonal relationships.” (Jaseel and Rashmi Gaur, 2023: 741) and this is more than evident in Ifemelu’s story. The aforementioned scholars see it as a “deeply gendered phenomenon,” (Vosko et al. 14, as cited in Jaseel and Rashmi Gaur) reflecting not only systemic discrepancies but a scarcity of social protections as well.

It is therefore obvious that significant disparities emerge between the American Dream that Ifemelu conceptualised in the realm of her imagination, influenced by the glossy discourse of Western media, and the harsh reality of displacement. The subsequent section of the chapter will provide a comprehensive examination of transgressions experienced by displaced bodies.

Transgression, Body and Space: Racial Othering in *Americanah*

This section will explore the novel through the lenses of three main theoretical frameworks that are in constant dialogue with each other: critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and decolonial feminism. All of these frameworks share and explore “issues of race and resistance to oppression” (Adeyelure and Roux, 1) and intersectionality. While critical race theory examines how racial identities are socially constructed, with whiteness positioning itself as dominant while marginalising Blackness, postcolonial theory analyses the lasting effects and consequences of colonialism on colonised peoples and societies. Lastly, decolonial feminism has been explained throughout this thesis as a tool for analysing the intersection of colonialism, race and gender, thereby unifying the aforementioned frameworks.

When it comes to the displacement of bodies, there are three major points that need to be taken in consideration when it comes to a proper analysis: race, gender and class. In *Americanah*, the intersection of all these categories makes Ifemelu’s migration story very hard to bear. While she belonged to the middle class back home in Lagos, when she arrives in America she quickly realises that because of her race (which she became aware of just after her migration), she is now part of the lower class, with no social and financial security. To use a term constructed around critical race theory, it can be said that Ifemelu is “Othered.” According to Adeyelure and Roux, the notion of the “Other” arises from the perception that a particular group of people is distinct from the majority based on characteristics such as skin color, physical traits, and cultural differences (Civila, Romero Rodríguez & Aguaded, 2020, as cited in Adeyelure and Roux, 2) and is built on a binary classification of “them” versus “us” or “the others” versus “ourselves” (it wouldn’t be the first time when a term meant to exclude *others* from the narrative functions after a binary logic). As Adeyelure and Roux explain by referencing Nyongesa, Gaita, and Makokha (2021), these perceived differences often imply a sense of superiority for one group, leading to the subordination and marginalisation of the other within society. Adeyelure and Roux consider in their article three broad aspects of the novel *Americanah* that function as “identity markers” in the case of what I have specifically termed “displaced bodies”: race, accent, and hair. These will also be discussed here, with the exception of hair, which has its own dedicated section under the name of Hair Politics.

Adeyelure and Roux consider that *Americanah* exemplifies “the negative perception of Africa and how its migrants are excluded from the mainstream by a socio-economic system that privileges whiteness.” (4) The scholars draw on Puwar’s argument in *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (2004) to highlight how institutional norms often fail to accommodate Black identities. According to Adeyelure and Roux, Puwar suggests that certain bodies are implicitly viewed as the rightful inhabitants of specific institutional spaces, while others—particularly Black bodies—are perceived as intruders or “space invaders.” This shows how whiteness defines belonging in these environments, rendering Black individuals as outsiders. As a result, Black people may often experience a sense of exclusion and displacement within spaces that prioritise and normalise white presence, making them feel unwelcome or invisible, an idea that can indeed be easily observed in *Americanah*, through both Ifemelu’s and Obinze’s stories. As we saw in the previous section of the chapter, Ifemelu quickly realises that all her preconceptions about America are illusory. However, alongside her own experiences, which readers can consider to be the most important aspect of the story due to Adichie’s use of internal focalization, it is also important to consider the experiences of peripheral characters such as Auntie Uju and her son Dike, being the first characters to welcome Ifemelu and give her shelter until she can settle in.

Auntie Uju has already been living in America for several years and can be considered a “passive” female character, reminiscent of other characters in Adichie’s previous novels (such as Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*). As Dina Yerima-Avazi and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang argue, “it is the absence of financial power in collaboration with indigenous practices that discourage the woman from achieving liberation” (128) At certain points in their lives, these passive characters relinquish control to the men they are involved with. For example, prior to her migration, Uju surrenders control over her life to the General, a high-ranking military officer who maintains a relationship with her as his mistress.

Much like Beatrice from the debut novel, she becomes financially dependent on a romantic partner who provides her only with immediate financial support, limiting her financial independence and her freedom. According to Dina Yerima-Avazi and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, Uju is aware of the instability of this relationship, and cautions Ifemelu saying, “I would not even advise you to do what I’m doing” (Adichie, 2013: 78, as cited in

Dina Yerima-Avazi and Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang). Her situation worsens when she becomes pregnant with Dike and has to migrate after the General's death, as his family turns against her. However, despite relocating to the United States, she continues to operate under the same patriarchal assumptions formed back home:

she relies still on men and the structure of marriage for her picture of life to be complete. She begins a relationship with Bartholomew, who, in spite of the fact that he does not support her financially, treats her as his maid and demands she submit her income to him. It is at this point that changes begin to occur for her, and she leaves him. Her financial stability is what enables her to ignore her old ideological constructs from society's norms and leave Bartholomew, as she crosses over from a state of passivity into the active, hybrid stage of self-realization where she is empowered to pursue her overall well-being. (Yerima-Avazi and Opoku-Agyemang, 129)

As the scholars put it, even if she is now in a different country, she still imitates a “framing [...] that she carried over from Nigeria into America.” (*Ibid.*) However, she does not remain passive forever. As proven in the above quote, after another toxic relationship with Bartholomew, she begins to “awaken.” As Adichie suggests, her real emancipation has nothing to do with moving to the West, but rather with her regaining control over her finances and personal choices. This is all the more admirable given that Uju was and is a victim of systemic racism. A clear example of “racial Othering” is seen in Uju's career as a medical doctor. Adeyelu and Roux recall in their article the scene in which Uju shares with Ifemelu a moment during a consultation. The white patient, feeling racially superior, refused to accept treatment from Uju solely because of her skin colour, reflecting the patient's perception of Uju as not only inferior but also professionally unqualified:

This signifies that the Othering of black immigrants constantly challenges their good living, societally and career-wise. For someone such as Auntie Uju, her professional status does not spare her from racial blows. Her patients evaluate her based on her colour rather than her expertise. (Adeyelu and Roux , 4)

“You people never do anything right” (Adichie, 2013: 182)—these words from a security guard to Auntie Uju during a visit to the public library expose a deeper, racially charged

attitude that targets not only Uju but an entire group she is perceived to represent. Adeyelure and Roux would argue that, in this scenario, her simple mistake of forgetting to show an unreturned book becomes grounds for collective judgment. (4) “You people” is both a generalisation and an accusation, casting Black people as inherently flawed. Undoubtedly, Adichie wrote this scene in order to highlight how displaced Black bodies like Uju are often subjected to racial profiling and negative stereotyping, reinforcing “Otherness” within diasporic spaces.

Dike, Uju’s child, is also a victim of Othering and racial discrimination. When the school’s computer system is hacked, the principal immediately suspects Dike (Onunkwo and Chigbu, 50). However, Dike and his mother were visiting Uncle Ozavisa in Hartford on the very day of the incident, and, on top of everything, Dike also lacks any knowledge when it comes to computer systems. When Uju questions why her son is singled out, she becomes aware that in such situations, “you have to blame the black kids first” (Adichie, 2013: 349). Recurrent moments like this affect Dike, ultimately leading him to attempt suicide at a very early age. Onunkwo and Chigbu mention that some individuals in Nigeria, such as Ranyinudo, struggle to understand how or why would “a fine boy like Dike [...] want to kill himself” (Adichie, 2013: 425). This inability to comprehend Dike’s depression comes from a place of limited exposure to racial discrimination (Onunkwo and Chigbu, 50). “A boy living in America [has] everything”, would Ranyinudo falsely believe (Adichie, 425). Adichie is probably using these types of brief comments to highlight the mental health issues faced by displaced bodies.

When it comes to young adult mental health literature, there’s a very big gap for young people and teens who don’t belong to the privileged White middle class. As Brandy Colbert said in an interview,

we’re severely lacking when it comes to those stories about black teens and other teens of color. Mental health looks different when it’s shaped through the lifelong lens of discrimination and oppression, and we need more stories on the shelves that dig into those experiences—especially books written by people who are part of those communities. (Colbert, Lord, Shusterman, Sones, & Whaley, 2018: 109)

This lack of representation, even in literature, contributes to this “racial othering.” When the literary environment does not provide enough space for people like Dike, they not only

feel isolated, but also cornered by a system of exclusion. No matter how hard Dike tries to adapt through language—he speaks with an impeccable American accent—he is still “othered.” Uju believes that a good accent will help Dike integrate more easily into American society, so she stops speaking Igbo to her son and even stops Ifemelu from doing so. Adeyelure and Roux believe that, by doing this, “Aunty Uju denies Dike his African heritage.” (7) Aunty Uju also changes her name pronunciation in a phone call that Ifemelu listens to: ‘Yes, this is Uju’. She pronounces it “you-joo” instead of “oo-joo” (Adichie 2013: 104, as cited in Adeyelure and Roux). Moreover, while shopping with Dike, she once again alters her accent when asking him to return an item she does not intend to buy:

‘Dike, put it back’, Aunty Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. Pooh-reet-back. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing. (Adichie 2013: 108, as cited in Adeyelure and Roux)

Indeed, navigating a racialized environment often requires adapting to and aligning with Western norms. For Ifemelu, the impact is significant when she engages with Cristina Tomas, the receptionist:

‘Good afternoon. Is this the right place for registration?’ Ifemelu asked Cristina Toma, whose name she did not then know.
‘Yes. Now. Are. You. An. International. Student?’
‘Yes.’
‘You. Will. First. Need. To. Get. A. Letter. From. The. International. Students. Office.’
[...]
‘I speak English,’ she said.
‘I bet you do,’ Cristina Tomas said. ‘I just don’t know how *well*.’ (Adichie, 2013: 133)

Adeyelure and Roux highlight that at first Ifemelu assumes that Cristina speaks slowly due to a speech impediment. However, she soon realises that the receptionist is deliberately slowing down her speech, because of Ifemelu’s race. The scholars cite Dovchin’s article, “The psychological damages of linguistic racism and international students in Australia” (2020) when explaining that individuals who are not native English speakers are frequently

perceived as using “poor” or “inadequate” English, regardless of their competence. The receptionist’s choice of the word “well” in her response—which Adichie chooses to italicise—subtly strengthens these assumptions (Adeyelure and Roux, 5). After this and other similar experiences, Ifemelu quickly adopts an American accent. Through such moments, Adichie highlights the emotional and psychological toll of “Otherness,” while bringing attention to the impact of linguistic racism as a mechanism for establishing social hierarchies (*ibid.*). However, the accent is not the only element undergoing change or modification. The subsequent section of this chapter will provide an analysis on the important function of hair in the context of racial identification and exclusionary politics.

Hair Politics and Racial Identification

“Hair [...] is the perfect metaphor for race in America.”
—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (2013: 297)

If we read *Purple Hibiscus* as a coming-of-age novel and *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a war novel, then it’s now the time to read Adichie’s third novel, *Americanah*, as a novel about race. As Adeyelure and Roux explain when talking about how the politics of hair in America have long been criticised by many theorists, they include Cooper’s ideas that hair plays a crucial role in racial classification, highlighting its political significance and frequent association with racism (1971: 181, as cited in Adeyelure and Roux). As the scholars mention, hair is a pivotal element in how Adichie represents the racialised “Othering” in her novel. Okolie, Obayi, and Ik-Nwobodo consider the motif of hair in *Americanah* an “umbilical object” (2025: 10), representing a tangible link to one’s cultural roots, and familial bonds. Using this metaphor, they suggest that, in the context of an ultranormative predominantly White American society, Ifemelu utilizes her hair to assert her identity and reconnect with her origins. However, I believe the symbol of hair is much more than that, as Ifemelu will become an important voice in representing African-Black hair when she starts writing her viral blog, “Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black.”

Julie Iromuanya (2018: 169) sees in Ifemelu’s blog the character’s own growth in gaining a strong political consciousness and associates it with other forms of social media that were

part of the Natural Hair Movement or the “Le mouvement nappy” of the Black hair industry. Iromuanya traces the movement back to the cultural and political activism of the 1960s and ’70s, arguing that today’s resurgence is more of a revival than a novel phenomenon. According to the scholar, the Black Arts and Black Power movements were instrumental in linking personal appearance—particularly hair—with political consciousness and self-affirmation. During that era, rejecting chemical hair treatments and embracing natural textures, especially the Afro, was an act of resistance against Eurocentric beauty ideals and the lingering effects of racial hierarchies rooted in slavery: “This black nationalist, proletariat, anti-elitist movement likened the chemical processing of naturally coily hair to self-denial and self-hate, a continuation of the slave-era hierarchy that positioned whites at the top and blacks at the bottom” (2018: 167) Iromuanya also highlights in her article that the embrace of natural hair was tied to slogans like “Black Is Beautiful” and “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,” which reinforced the Afro as a marker of Black pride. She also emphasises that, as the movement gained popularity, commercial interests quickly stepped in (*ibid.*). Both Black-owned and mainstream companies commodified the aesthetic by producing Afro-specific products and media and by using the idea of “natural hair” for masking a lot of treatments and methods of styling: “from braids and twists to heat styling, air drying, texturizers, chemical blowouts, and other low-lye chemical methods of processing” (168) Drawing on the ideas of Zimitri Erasmus, Iromuanya reinforces the idea that no hair is ever truly “natural” in a pure sense and that all hair is shaped by cultural practices. This extends to the digital-era comeback of the Natural Hair movement, which, according to Iromuanya, includes a broad spectrum of styles such as “Senegalese twists, faux locs, Marley locs, kinky twists, and Afro extensions” (*ibid.*). These styles, while not always “natural” in the strict sense, still express a diasporic Black aesthetic and are part of a huge cultural movement.

Hair salons play a very important role in the novel, with the narrative actually opening with Ifemelu going to a salon to have her hair braided before returning to Nigeria:

“it [the salon] would look, she was sure, like all the other African hair braiding salons she had known: they were in the part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people, they displayed bright signboards with names like Aisha and Fatima African Hair Braiding, they had radiators that were too hot in the winter and air conditioners that did not

cool in the summer, they were full of Francophone West African women braiders, one of whom would be the owner and speak the best English and answer the phone and be deferred to by the others.” (Adichie, 2013: 9)

As Iromuanya writes, “Mariama African Hair Braiding, like many salons, is presented as a gynocentric space” (176): it is a place concerned exclusively with women, where women work, get paid and are not exposed to sexual harassment or the need to involve in unwanted sexual interactions in order to financially support themselves. It is, at the same time, a place where a different type of feminism occurs: if Ifemelu is now, after almost 15 years spent in America, a middle-class English-speaking woman with access to online resources like hair tutorials and self-care routines, therefore promoting a type of feminism that is more liberal and that aligns perfectly with Adichie’s *We Should All Be Feminists*, the reader can identify in the women from the hair salon a peripheral type of feminism: they are in control of their finances, are allowed to bring their children to work and to look after them while being there (which reminds again of the ecofeminist ethics of care) and have their own ways of gaining autonomy. Iromuanya ties Mariama’s character (the owner of the hair salon that Ifemelu goes to) to the historical figure of Madame C. J. Walker because owning such a business not only helps her gain a lot of social and financial capital, but at the same time gives her the opportunity to protect her works who are usually recent immigrants that do not have any protection from the state (177). The hair salon becomes, therefore, a space for womanhood and exemplifies the memories written by bell hooks in *Bone Black* on hair and community:

It is a sign of our desire to be women. It is a gesture that says we are approaching womanhood—a rite of passage. [...] There is a deeper intimacy in the kitchen on Sunday when hair is pressed, when fish is fried, when sodas are passed around, when soul music drifts over the talk. We are women together. This is our ritual and our time. It is a time without men. It is a time when we work to meet each other’s needs, to make each other beautiful in whatever way we can. (1996/2024: 98)

In the hair salon from *Americanah* the reader meets Aisha, the Senegalese girl who will braid Ifemelu’s hair and who is involved with two Nigerian men who hold green cards, hoping that marrying one of them will secure her permanent residency in the U.S. She

repeatedly begs Ifemelu to convince one of the men, Chijioke, to agree to the marriage, believing that their shared Igbo heritage might encourage him to help her. Although Ifemelu understands Aisha's situation (being herself a victim of financial and social struggle when she moved to America), she resists the request and views it as irrational or desperate (Adeyelure and Roux, 8). It is this scene that places Ifemelu and Aisha in two different social classes: the middle class and the working class. Iromuanya illustrates how Ifemelu, who is accustomed to the privileges associated with proximity to Whiteness (via her White partner, Curt), Western consumer culture, and linguistic fluency in English, feels uneasy in the Francophone salon where Aisha works. She even considered Aisha unclean or unhealthy, fixating on physical traits like skin discoloration (Iromuanya, 171). Undoubtedly, there is a big class and cultural divide between Ifemelu, this middle-class anglophone Nigerian, and the working-class francophone African women in the salon. Iromuanya compares this divide to the generational split between second- and third-wave feminisms: showing how Ifemelu's identity—shaped by American, English-speaking, and middle-class norms—is displaced in this Afro-diasporic environment. She suddenly feels like an outsider in the salon. Similar to how third-wave feminism called out second-wave feminism for ignoring non-White and non-middle-class experiences, the salon indirectly calls out Ifemelu's reactions from a place of class and cultural bigotry. This behaviour also brings forward the meaning behind the title of the novel: "Americanah" is a Nigerian slang word for a person who, after the migration to the U.S.A., returns home with an American accent, mannerism and mentality. The cultural clash between Ifemelu and Aisha is evident when they argue about hair texture, braid tightness, and color choices, with Aisha prioritising aesthetics over comfort or hair health—indirectly suggesting that Ifemelu is "more liberated" for choosing differently. However, Iromuanya notes that Ifemelu will eventually reframe Aisha's actions by drawing on a broader pan-African sensibility. She imagines Aisha not as a rude or unsanitary worker, but as a skilled "market woman" from Dakar, likening her to Lagos braiders back home. (172)

It is acknowledged by many scholars that Ifemelu's feminist perspective in *Americanah* comes from a middle-class worldview, one that looks outward toward Western modernity as a site of aspiration and belonging (Iromuanya, 2018: 169), aligning with what Taiye Selasi (2005) refers to as the "Afropolitan" identity—a term she uses to describe a generation of globally mobile Africans who are culturally and geographically fluid (it is

also the case of Sefi Atta's protagonists that I will discuss in the next section of the chapter).

Even if Adichie herself rejects the "Afropolitan" term,¹⁸ Ifemelu may seem to fit into this category of highly educated, cosmopolitan African immigrants.¹⁹ Despite initial struggles, she is able to earn a college degree in the U.S. and to achieve success through the blog in which she describes her own transnational perspective. However, as proved in the previous sections, this does not come without suffering.

As Adeyelu and Roux emphasise, in Nigeria, Ifemelu never has to worry about her Afro (6). Yet, once she moves to the United States, her natural hair becomes a barrier in professional settings, symbolising subtle forms of discrimination. In the American context, hair becomes a marker of professionalism and even a measure of success, so Ruth's advice to Ifemelu comes with no surprise: "lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job." (Adichie, 2013: 202)

There seems to be an unspoken rule that favours women who wear their hair straightened over those with natural styles like braids or Afros. Characters like Auntie Uju and Ruth are already aware of the unwritten rules governing hair in the American job market, and they advise Ifemelu accordingly as she prepares for an interview. Reluctantly, she straightens her hair to improve her chances but, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she cannot recognise herself:

'Just a little burn,' the hairdresser said. 'But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!'

Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should have not died, had made her feel a sense of loss. (Adichie, 2013: 203)

¹⁸ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie stated the following: "I am tired of this word. I am African. [...] [H]istory (sadly not well known) shows that cosmopolitanism doesn't date from yesterday: many African kings from the West coast sent their children to study in Europe. And much later, the generation of my father travelled a lot, there have been numerous waves of people coming back in the 1960s, and who have not stopped moving. They define themselves as Africans." (cit. in Santana 2016, 122, as cited in Pucherová)

¹⁹ To a certain extent, Ifemelu's behaviour reflects that of Obinze's mother. Although she remains unnamed until the end of the book, she represents an emancipated, free and globally mobile woman who raises her child according to a feminist way of thinking. When Ifemelu and Obinze start having sex, she immediately advises them to use contraception so as to avoid the risk of an unwanted pregnancy at such a young age. This is the first example of female emancipation that Ifemelu adopts.

Okolie, Obayi, and Ik-Nwobodo see in Ifemelu's sense of psychological disorientation and her struggle to recognize herself a profound rupture (2025: 7). Because hair plays a crucial role in her identity, altering its natural state symbolises a break from her cultural heritage and a detachment from home (hence the metaphor of the "umbilical object"). Though she has successfully crossed geographical borders, Ifemelu continues to navigate the invisible ones which are shaped by race and culture, making her a perpetual border crosser (*ibid.*). However, before returning to Nigeria, Ifemelu chooses to wear her hair in its natural state again, rejecting therefore Western beauty ideals and reclaiming a fundamental element of her identity. Adeyelu and Roux interpret this shift from chemically straightened to natural hair among Black women as a move away from Eurocentric beauty norms and a re-centring of Afrocentric identity (6).

Michelle Obama appears several times in Ifemelu's blog posts and, just as the author has repeatedly expressed her appreciation for Barack Obama, she has done the same for his wife, listing her among the women who inspire her (for example, in her 2016 interview for *The Cut*). After a conversation with a White friend who turns out not to know that Michelle Obama's hair "doesn't grow like that" (Adichie, 2013: 266), Ifemelu writes the following lines:

Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of all the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of woolly hair, or tight spirally curls. (There is no knowing what her texture will be. It is not unusual for a black woman to have three different textures on her head.) She would totally rock but poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote. (267)

Indeed, even after the election, for eight consecutive years, the public saw the First Lady consistently presented with flawlessly straightened hair, meticulously styled to meet the expectations of a constantly scrutinizing audience. In the above mentioned 2016 interview with *The Cut*, when asked about the meaning behind Ifemelu's statement that "[hair] is the perfect metaphor for race in America," (*ibid.*) Adichie explained that, although hair is outwardly visible, the deeper cultural and social meanings behind it often go unnoticed, in a similar way to how race operates in society. For example, would Adichie add, a person may not realise that a White woman's hair highlights are a way of hiding ageing, or that a

Black woman's natural hair texture is sometimes considered not "professional" by those who are unfamiliar with it. She adds: "I don't think people are malicious; I just think some people don't know what hair that grows from the heads of Black women actually looks like." (Adichie, 2016, in an interview with Ashley Weatherford for *The Cut*) In this interview, Adichie also addresses the issue of inclusivity in the beauty industry. While there has been some progress in this area since the 2000s, it is still not inclusive enough: "The definition of what is beautiful shouldn't be so narrow. We should have different kinds of women—different body sizes, different shades of skin, and in a way that is consistent, not only occasional." (*Ibid.*) This passage from the interview recalls a scene in the novel where Ifemelu expresses her frustration with fashion magazines that present only a standardised and normative model of beauty, namely the White woman. All the "tips and tricks" that promise to work for *everyone* are actually only effective for White women:

Not one of them looks like me, so I can't get clues for make-up from these magazines. [...] This tells you about different hair products for *everyone*—and 'everyone' means blondes, brunettes and redheads. I am none of those. [...] This tells you about matching your eye colour and eyeshadow—blue, green and hazel eyes. But my eyes are black so I can't know what shadow works for me. They say that this pink lipstick is universal, but they mean universal if you are white because I would look like a golliwog if I tried that shade of pink. (Adichie, 2013: 295)

It is important to consider here the implications of the golliwog reference. This racist term refers to a toy for children with black faces, white eyes, red lips and short black hair, made to look like a tiny monster. It was frequently used by the writer Enid Blyton (rightly accused of racism) in her children's stories written for a middle-class young and White audience, an author that Adichie also used to read in her childhood. Indirectly, this lack of representation of Black femininity in the beauty industry that Ifemelu talks about in the novel has its counterpart in the lack of appropriate toys for Black children as well as in the young adult literature. Both are evidence of systemic violence affecting individuals of all ages.

This section of the chapter has demonstrated through a critical reading of the novel *Americanah* that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's statement that "hair is always political" is

more than valid. In the subsequent and ultimate section, a comparative analysis will be conducted of the novel in question and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2008) and *A Bit of Difference* (2012), in order to provide a continuation of the discussion of Afropolitanism, feminism, identity, and migration.

***Americanah* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2008), and *A Bit of Difference* (2012): A Comparative Study of Nigerian Diasporic Literatures**

Despite the obvious and sometimes superficial similarities between them, given their shared origins in Nigeria and subsequent emigration for academic pursuits in the West, the literary works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta exhibit notable distinctions. As previously discussed and shown in the thesis, Adichie's protagonists are predominantly individuals situated within the middle class of society. Despite encountering numerous challenges due to their intersection of gender and race, Adichie's protagonists come, to a certain extent, from a privileged background. Nevertheless, the feminism espoused by these individuals is unmistakably evident, characterised by a decolonial approach and a focus on personal evolution. In the case of Sefi Atta's protagonists, however, a feminism that is much more grounded in class issues is observed, one that is particularly concerned with working class women. This last section of the thesis aims to provide a comparative analysis of the novel *Americanah* and the three novels written by Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2008), and *A Bit of Difference* (2012), in order to observe how these works communicate with Adichie's transatlantic novel.

According to Dobrota Pucherová, Sefi Atta identifies herself as a "cosmopolitan who feels at home in several places" (70) and whose feminism is transnational, liminal and even "unhomed" (*ibid.*). Being herself a globally mobile individual, the author writes from a very inclusive point of view. If Adichie's *Americanah* is notable for its exploration of the intersectionality between gender and race, Sefi Atta's novels are characterised by a focus on the intersectionality between gender and class. Pucherová also argues that the author's feminism is not merely class-oriented, but also "aware of how feminism can be complicit in validating capitalist institutions." (71) This resurfaces the ideas of Françoise Vergès, as discussed in the initial chapter, in which it was cautioned that feminism might be appropriating a neoliberal form of discourse, thereby serving to perpetuate the hypercapitalist, profit-oriented system, characterised by its tendency to mislead individuals

through the promise of upward mobility. Atta's feminist practice is firmly grounded in the realities of women in Nigeria and the diaspora, a position that acknowledges the multifaceted challenges and nuances inherent in these contexts:

I'm a black woman in America, so I can't separate feminism from racism. In Nigeria, which is extremely divided economically, I can't separate it from classism. [...] Nowadays, I hear about young Nigerian women holding feminist forums sponsored by banks and other corporations. Dialogue is a step forward, but they must address the fact that the institutions that fund their forums disregard the majority of Nigerian women. They must acknowledge that they belong to an exclusive class that does the same; otherwise, they are complicit. (Sefi Atta in a 2019 interview with Ashley Okwuosa, as cited in Pucherová)

Most of Atta's protagonists are also members of the middle class, yet are very conscious of the division between them and poor individuals, highlighting the "importance of solidarity of the more educated women towards the less privileged." (Pucherová, 72) This is actually the fundamental difference between *Everything Good Will Come* and *Americanah*: the class struggle. The novel's protagonist, Enitan, is a young female character who exhibits characteristics of a rebellious spirit, as she is not inclined to acquiesce to the prevailing patriarchal norms that dictate the expected trajectory of a woman's life. In her childhood, she repeatedly said that she would refuse to cook for her future husband, indicating her willingness to divorce if the husband would force her. She also expressed her desire to become president (Atta, 2005: 22). In numerous ways, she evokes a striking resemblance to Adichie's Ifemelu in her youth, prior to her departure for the United States: "Ifemelu is a fine babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agrees" (Adichie, 2013: 60). Both Ifemelu and Enitan embody what Sara Ahmed describes as the figure of the troublemaker or feminist killjoy—someone who disrupts the illusion of harmony by speaking out against injustice and oppression, often provoking discomfort or social unease (Ahmed 2010: 60–61, as cited in Felix Mutunga Ndaka, 2020: 210). Ifemelu, in particular, challenges dominant ideals of femininity through her outspoken and assertive character, which defies conventional expectations of feminine "virtues." (Ndaka, 210) Enitan also fits in the category of the "hybrid woman" as she challenges the conservative and patriarchal culture in which she lives, being politically active and vocal about women

rights. When cornered by her father about the lack of female representation in a political protest, she instantly replies:

‘No husband, bad husband, husband’s girlfriend, husband’s mother. Human rights were never an issue till the rights of men were threatened. There’s nothing in our constitution for kindness at home. And even if the army goes, we still have our men to answer to. So, what is it you want women to say?’ (Atta 2005: 137)

Enitan highlights here that women cannot be politically vocal if there is no solidarity between men and women or until this form of domestic oppression stops. She also really speaks from a place of trauma, as she has witnessed and been the victim of countless abuses. Perhaps the most striking of them all was the gang-rape of her childhood friend Sheri, which she also witnessed. As Pucherová suggests, *Everything Good Will Come* insists that “until people are interested in others and feel their pain, Nigeria will not become a functioning society.” (72) This refers not only to solidarity between men and women, but also between rich and poor. Enitan very often criticizes the behavior of the middle class in Lagos towards poorer people. If in the novel *Americanah* we discussed the so-called “racialized Othering,” in *Everything Good Will Come* we can observe a case of “classist Othering.” Pucherová also identifies how poverty is seen “as deviant by the middle class” that is depicted in the novel (74). In Atta’s words, “there was a feeling that if people were at a disadvantage, it was because they somehow deserved it. They were poor, illiterate, they were radical, subversive, and *they were not us.*” (2005: 162, *italics added*) This recalls the logic of “Othering” I previously discussed in relation to racialised identities: individuals are positioned as fundamentally different based on physical appearance, cultural practices, or perceived group affiliation (Civila, Romero Rodríguez, and Aguaded, 2020, as cited in Adeyélure and Roux). This construction of the “Other” continues to rely here on binary oppositions of “us” (the rich) versus “them,” (the poor) reinforcing exclusionary narratives.

There are two other characters who are strikingly similar and worth commenting on: Auntie Uju from *Americanah* and Sherifat Bakare or Sheri from *Everything Good Will Come*. These figures are similar in three key aspects that are analysed in Ndaka’s article (2020): dependence, transactionality and materialism. According to the scholar, because of their involvement with powerful military men, the narratives could be read as “national

romances.” This type of relationship places them in a so-called “national space” (207) where private intimacy intersects with public power, and where gendered national institutions exert influence on personal relationships.

Ndaka’s interpretation is shaped by Susan Strehle’s theories that the home does not function as a retreat from political life but instead reproduces the same ideological structures present within the nation. As Strehle puts it, the home “does the business of nation and carries its agendas forward.” (2008: 1, as cited in Ndaka) This can definitely be seen in *Purple Hibiscus* as well, especially in the portrayal of Eugene as the authoritarian figure that reminded of Sani Abacha. However, the reader can also identify these ideas in the case of Auntie Uju and Sheri, both being romantically involved with high-ranking, married military men—The General and Brigadier Hassan respectively. Ndaka argues therefore that novels explore the figure of the “kept woman” or the “other woman” (207), a recurring trope that entangles dominant forms of masculinity with the economic precariousness of female characters, clearly suggesting the transactional and dependent nature of these ties. As the scholar continues,

Their linkage to highly ranked military officers serves as a pointer to the political and historical context of the novels’ setting in Nigeria, and it also serves to make a connection between national masculinities, power and violence, and the interrelationship between the public and personal. (*Ibid.*)

Indeed, the relationships between Uju and The General, and Sheri and Brigadier Hassan, allow readers to observe how gender roles are constructed and produced across domestic and public spaces. While the women are confined to homes provided by their male partners—spaces that symbolise their lack of independence, hence the expression of the “kept woman”—these men can move freely within the public sphere and only occasionally return to the domestic zone, limiting the women’s access to personal and economic autonomy and situating them within a system of dependence and material exchange. Both Uju and Sheri are commodified, portrayed as objects of desire and status symbols, whose roles reinforce the gendered power structures embedded in both the home and the nation.

When we compare the relationships of Auntie Uju with The General and Sheri with Brigadier Hassan to those of Ifemelu with Obinze (middle-class characters) and Enitan’s romantic dynamics, Ndaka considers that economic dependence and social class play a

huge role. Analysing these connections through the prism of class reveals how women, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds, are vulnerable to being objectified and commodified within patriarchal and capitalist systems. Both of these novels highlight how not being able to manage one's finances and spending habits affect women's ability to fully "become," (as Simone de Beauvoir would put it) while also exposing the role of exploitative male "support" and "generosity" in sustaining such dynamics. (*ibid.*) By illustrating Uju and Sheri's toxic relationships with military men, both Adichie and Atta highlight how hegemonic forms of masculinity exert power in ways that disrupt the meaning of "home." (Ndaka, 2008). These masculinities damage the domestic space, echoing patterns of violence and marginalisation in the national system. The result is often a sense of displacement or alienation—what Ndaka describes as "unhomeliness" (*ibid.*). The displaced and "unhomed" female bodies (recalling here that Pucherová called Atta's feminism "unhomed") in both narratives seem less preoccupied with defending the nation and more concerned with the female body as a site of trauma and the need for healing (Eze 2015: 317, as cited in Ndaka). In this way, the two novels reject a national/home ideal shaped by elite male dominance. Yet, it must be added that not every portrayal of masculinity contributes to this alienation and that Adichie also offers an example of an anti-patriarchal masculine figure through Obinze's character. He was raised by his emancipated mother to contribute to domestic chores, to cook and to treat women as equals. That is the reason why the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu offers a counterpoint to the other romantic ties in the novels, presenting healthy gender dynamics that reclaim the concept of home from its estranged meanings. In this sense, the return of Ifemelu from America is more of a return to Obinze, to a safe home in which she does not have to perform any other roles in order to be loved and respected.

We witness another case of toxic relationship and financial dependence in Sefi Atta's novel *Swallow* (2008), through the character Rose, Tolani's roommate. Both Rose and Tolani had to work in an abusive work environment at the Federal Community Bank in Lagos and have been the victims of the sexual assault by their boss, Mr. Salako, highlighting once again that "the relationship between patriarchal and class oppression comes into sharp relief for [...] women" (Pucherová, 76). This also recalls the abuse Ifemelu suffered when she came to America with his tennis coach.

Even though they are the victims of the abuse, both of them are being blamed by the others for the sexual harassment they suffered, and they will eventually lose their jobs and their already extremely fragile financial stability. Poverty affects them deeply: Rose begins drinking during the day and watching television, while Tolani struggles to find food. They become extremely vulnerable and the perfect targets for people like OC, a drug dealer who persuades both women to swallow condoms filled with drugs and fly overseas to sell them. Rose also becomes romantically involved with OC, who bribes her into drug dealing by giving her gifts and money. Although Tolani is initially reluctant, she eventually starts swallowing drugs with Rose. Atta realistically describes the pain and torments of this activity, and we see Tolani give up and refuse to fly overseas in the end. Rose, however, becomes a drug courier. Once she arrives at Gatwick Airport, she tragically dies as the condom filled with cocaine bursts inside of her, making her a fatal victim of patriarchy and the very divided and unequal economic system: "I am tired of being poor", said Rose before her death (Atta, 2008: 150)

When Tolani confronts OC after Rose's death, we see in the man not a single sign of regret: "She was a bad investment, a liability" (Atta, 2008: 268). For men like OC, women like Rose are commodified and treated as "investments," as objects that are meant to be used in order to generate profit. It also becomes clear that he never loved or cared for her, but only used her as a means of transport for drugs. Moreover, by naming Rose a "liability," OC proves his miserable behaviour and reinforces the patriarchal logic of commodifying women. It is the same logic that fuels the marriage dynamics in which women are exchanged within the patriarchal system. This can be seen in Arike's experiences as a young girl (Tolani's mother) whose father had to "marry her off because he covets the bride price as well as the family connection with the chief that her marriage will bring. His reaction to her refusal reflects a system in which women are no more than a commodity to be exchanged between men." (Pucherová, 76) Pucherová brings to discussion the ideas of Gayle Rubin who considers that seeing marriage as a transactional thing between men and only viewing female bodies as able to perform domestic labour and to reproduce was always at the basis of female oppression. Tolani was desperate to get married because she wanted to move out of the apartment she shared with Rose and improve her social status. However, her boyfriend at the time, Sanwo, could not provide

her with financial stability, and even spent all of her savings, which made her consider becoming a drug mule.

Apart from all of the topics of class and gender struggle, sexual harassment and drug dealing, the novel also shows what Pucherová terms “the limits of cosmopolitanism” (77). The scholar considers that the novel paints a vivid portrait of Lagos as a city marked by exploitation, abuse, and opportunism. While Adichie’s *Americanah* briefly touches on this fragmented social landscape, often observed distantly from the backstage of the upper-middle class, Atta offers a more unflinching depiction of the metropolis. (*Ibid.*) One could even say that the isolation and decay of Atta’s figures are reminiscent of the German Expressionist novel, in which the characters are isolated and estranged from each other. The scene with the naked mad woman, which Pucherová also discusses, is powerful because of how vividly it is depicted and even more disturbing because no one in the narrative seems moved by it. This lack of reaction shows how the violence of the capitalist system against vulnerable bodies has been normalised and institutionalised. As Pucherová suggests, the mad woman becomes a symbol of Nigerian femininity, marked by exposure and dispossession under neo-colonial structures that continue to oppress women (77).

Tolani is very similar to Enitan and, to a certain extent, to Adichie’s Ifemelu, as she also represents the idea of the hybrid woman that challenges patriarchal norms and expectations. After her failed relationship with Sanwo, she starts rejecting ideas of marriage and motherhood, viewing them as nothing more than social transactions. The reader can also identify in her refusal to become a drug mule a refusal to be commodified. She also reflects her mother’s attitudes towards marriage, choosing in the end to become her own source of financial stability. As Umarani and Kumaran claim, “Tolani’s journey to empowerment begins after she understands the stark reality of life and realizes her real worth as a human.” (2019: 446)

The third and last novel that deserves a comparative analysis with Adichie’s *Americanah* is *A Bit of Difference* (2013). Deola is Sefi Atta’s most mobile protagonist who is portrayed as a well-educated professional residing in England and as someone whose autonomy and ability to make independent decisions are central to her character (Olufunwa, 2022: 27). According to Olufunwa, the novel opens with a scene that introduces from the beginning central themes of identity and the politics of representation: Deola has just arrived in Atlanta from London and notices an image in the airport, a magnified photograph of an

African woman with a caption that reads “I Am Powerful.” Though it appears to celebrate African femininity, its placement in a modern Western airport raises concerns about whether the woman is being genuinely represented or simply used to serve an external narrative of inclusivity.

This juxtaposition between the subject in the photo and the elite travelers passing by highlights the contrast between different experiences of Black womanhood. Deola, herself a cosmopolitan Nigerian, relates to the image on some level but is also distanced from it by her lifestyle and context. As Olufunwa shows, Deola questions whether the power the caption claims is real or performative, and whether such portrayals contribute to empowerment or merely mask structural inequalities. (25-26)

Deola represents the archetype of a modern, career-driven woman who seems to embody full and intentional agency. Pucherová sees many similarities between Deola and Ifemelu, calling Atta’s protagonist “the epitome of Afropolitanism [...] a high-achieving, successful, cosmopolitan African woman who knows ‘the ways of the world.’” (78) Free from the constraints of traditional Nigerian patriarchal norms, she is financially self-sufficient and committed to her work, similar to Auntie Ifeoma from *Purple Hibiscus*. Her autonomy, would Olufunwa suggest, is reflected especially in her constant movement between spaces. Deola can be considered a nomad by choice (not by necessity), as her perpetual motion suggests a woman who is in full control of her life. Deola navigates her identity differently depending on where she is, expressing a guarded sense of her Nigerian identity in England, while adopting elements of Englishness when in Nigeria (Olufunwa: 28). Although she considers herself more connected to Lagos than London, she modifies her accent in Nigeria to avoid being perceived as unintelligent or poor. The motif of the modified accent appears in *Americanah* as well: if in Adichie’s novel the reader experienced a form of “linguistic racism,” (the scene with Cristina Tomas and Ifemelu, but also Uju’s efforts to imitate an American accent in order to be better integrated) in *A Bit of a Difference* the reader encounters a case of “linguistic classism”: in the Lagos depicted by Atta’s novel, the British accent can propel characters, influencing social dynamics and deepening class differences between those who have had the privilege of an education abroad and those who have stayed at home. Within this context, Pucherová adds:

having a Western education and English accent deepens class divides. “Been-to’s” with British degrees who “speak phonetics” (171, as cited in Pucherová) see themselves as the elite of the nation, or “oyinbo” (white), while uneducated Nigerians are called “bush.” Such education-based class hierarchies reflect the “colonial hangovers” (171, as cited in Pucherová) of the Nigerian bourgeoisie. (79)

Abroad, she struggles to connect with non-Nigerians due to what she perceives as a huge cultural divide, fearing that others might exoticise her perspective as merely that of an “African woman.” Yet when back in Nigeria, she also feels alienated, as her outsider status leads others to question the rightfulness of her opinions. Olufunwa argues therefore that what appears to be self-assurance on Deola’s part masks in reality a deeper experience of not fully belonging, something that Anna-Leena Toivanen names “sense of diasporic unbelonging.” (2017: 3, as cited in Olufunwa) Pucherová highlights that Deola is so “unhomed” (79), that when she visits Lagos she won’t even sleep over at her parents house, but in a fancy hotel with unlimited access to electricity and internet. Although Deola is part of the Nigerian upper-middle class, she can see through the snobbery of many other wealthy Nigerians. In a way, she is similar to Ifemelu and Obinze, as she also recognises the transactional nature of Lagos and how the working class is seen as a tool to help the rich lead the most comfortable lives:

It was normal to send them [the servants] on errands and yell at them. Beating them was also acceptable, but sleeping with them was not. If ever she heard about a master sleeping with his housegirl, the question was not how he could do that to another human being, but why he would do that with someone who was not really considered human (Atta, 2013: 146)

This passage is strikingly reminiscent of the scene from *Americanah* when Obinze’s housekeeper comes to work and Kosi (Obinze’s traditionalist wife) finds condoms in her bag and starts humiliating her for bringing contraception at work, insinuating that she would want to engage in a sexual relationship with Obinze. In reality, the young girl was a victim of sexual abuse from her previous employer and “has learned, like many women in the novel, to expect sexual exploitation as a nonnegotiable aspect of the services rendered in her trade as a domestic worker.” (Iromuanya, 180) As Julie Iromuanya notes, regardless

of whether she could be seen as a “Beyoncé feminist,” accepting the job with full awareness of its expectations and taking steps like using contraception does not negate the troubling power imbalance at play (180). As a young domestic worker lacking wealth, influence, or status, the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection could be awful. Moreover, adds Iromuanya, due to Obinze’s elevated socio-economic position, there is no guarantee that he—or any employer in a similar position—would respect her decision to use contraception.

This treatment of domestic workers as subhuman is similar to slavery and racism and it is a recurring theme in Atta’s novels. As Pucherová emphasizes, “Deola’s independence is enabled by her money, which insulates her from the fates of poor women—such as housegirls raped by their employers.” (81) This distinguishes Deola from Ifemelu, as Adichie does not suggest that her protagonist’s emancipation is related to money or class. Furthermore, in Atta’s debut novel we see Enitan concerned with this kind of violence:

Night watchmen, washmen, cooks and gardeners. The general help we called house boys and house girls. [...] If they had friends over, we worried that they might steal. If they looked too hard at our possessions, we called them greedy, and whenever they fought we were amused. We used separate cups for them, sent them to wash their hands and allowed our children to boss them around. (Atta, 2005: 148)

The way in which Sefi Atta problematizes the realities of the Nigerian working class reopens the discussion that Françoise Vergès launched in the introduction to her book, *A Decolonial Feminism*, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis: “Who cleans the world?” (2021: vi) This question demands a reckoning with the radicalised and gendered hierarchies that structure the global care economy, a system built on the continued exploitation of displaced female bodies from the Global South whose labor is essential yet invisibilised and marginalised. This structural and systemic violence is a cornerstone of ultracapitalist modernity, a legacy of colonial logics repackaged through neoliberal demand. In Sefi Atta’s works, we see how the lives of working-class women are rendered precarious not just by poverty, but by the social and political disregard for their labor. Sefi Atta, next to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, depicts not only the struggles but the necessity of solidarity between women across class divides as well. Supportive relationships between women from different social classes may indeed clarify a radical feminist possibility: that

real emancipation depends on recognising shared oppression and building coalitions across differences. Solidarity is not optional—it is imperative.

This section of the final chapter provided a comparative analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013) and three novels written by Sefi Atta: *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2008), and *A Bit of Difference* (2012). This reading highlighted the similarities and differences between the two authors, who might at first seem very similar. Atta's protagonists (Enitan, Tolani, and Deola) differ from Adichie's Ifemelu primarily in terms of the class issues they represent in contemporary Nigerian society. Most of them are part of the working class and encounter various forms of abuse in the workplace, which further highlights the issue of gender and class intersectionality. While Ifemelu is a victim of systemic racism in America, Atta's protagonists (with the exception of Deola) are victims of classism and national patriarchy. I also analyzed how secondary characters form abusive relationships with men in military positions, such as Auntie Uju from *Americanah*, Sheri from *Everything Good Will Come*, and Rose from *Swallow*. I observed how these relationships curtail women's economic freedom and make them vulnerable, constantly dependent on a violent form of patriarchal masculinity. The commodification of women and the transactional nature of marriages were also frequently discussed topics, once again highlighting that the objectification of women as solely domestic and reproductive workers has always been at the root of gender oppression.

However, despite the different types of feminism evident in the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta respectively, the two authors' work is united by their exploration of decolonial feminism. Both authors address the ways in which (post)colonial societies still operate according to the colonial logic of exclusion. While Adichie's Ifemelu experiences this in the diaspora, Atta's characters encounter the consequences of colonialism in their homeland, navigating challenging social inequalities and fighting against patriarchy.

CONCLUSION: Toward a Decolonial Feminist Imagination – Literature as Praxis

Reimagining Resistance in *Purple Hibiscus*

The feminist analysis of *Purple Hibiscus* focused on the “home-away-home” structure of the Bildungsroman (borrowed by Adichie from Achebe) to illustrate the development of the 15 year old protagonist, Kambili, from a silenced character to a free, autonomous figure. It explained how domestic space, religion and silence operate as sites of both oppression and transformation, centring Aunt Ifemelu as a decolonial character whose approach to education and relational ethics provides an example of the nego-feminism that Kambili also learns to practise. I have demonstrated how the novel critiques a neocolonial religious patriarchy through the dictatorial figure of Eugene Achike, who is reminiscent of other authoritarian individuals in Nigeria’s recent history, such as Sani Abacha. I have also shown how women’s emancipation can be achieved through community-based roles rather than through Western individualistic ideals, practising a form of *ubuntu*, a traditional African ethical framework explained by Sylvia Tamale as being grounded in principles of collective humanity, mutual care, and interconnectedness. This nuance is central to decolonial feminist thought, which critiques the imposition of Western feminist ideals on non-Western contexts.

Furthermore, the analysis positioned Aunt Ifemelu as a “hybrid woman,” a term coined by Yerima-Avazi and Opoku-Agyemang and an alternative to the “passive” or “powerless” woman. I explained how Ifeoma’s hybridity is linked to the nego-feminism postulated by Obioma Nnaemeka, representing the development of new identities that women create in environments shaped by patriarchy and misogyny. The respect and care that Ifeoma shows towards her traditionalist father express her deeper understanding of how contemporary Nigerian society works and show Kambili an alternative way of relating with her grandfather. The analysis also proved that, although passive at the beginning of the novel, Kambili and Beatrice also experienced an awakening, claiming independence and liberating themselves from the violence they endured.

Gendered Violence and Genocide in *Half of a Yellow Sun* – An Ecofeminist Approach

Through her “dutiful and deferential” novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Ndaka, 2005), Adichie establishes herself as part of the literary tradition of war novels, alongside authors such as

Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, and Flora Nwapa. She deepens her exploration of structural violence and Nigerian history, interweaving ecofeminist themes with the historical trauma of the Biafran War. My ecofeminist reading focused on how the female characters in the novel are affected more by war and genocide than men because they are responsible for domestic chores and providing vital food and water for their families. The survival narratives of Olanna and Kainene (as well as other episodic characters) confront the gendered cost of war, drawing attention to how militarism and nationalism often rely on the silencing or marginalisation of women.

Using an ecofeminist lens in the analysis, I highlighted the novel's concern with the interconnected degradation of bodies and land—an insight that positions Adichie within a decolonial ecofeminist tradition. Drawing on Ynestra King's key ideas about the fundamental ecofeminist principles, I demonstrated how feminist resistance in such contexts must consider not only political structures, but also environmental forms of harm. Through the use of multiple narrative voices, polyphony, and internal focalisation (via Olanna, Ugwu, and Richard), Adichie's narrative provides an alternative to traditional war narratives by emphasising the importance of care, labour, and memory preservation. Furthermore, by having Ugwu write "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died," Adichie raises concerns about authorship and the ethics of storytelling. By depicting Ugwu as committing war crimes and participating in a brutal gang rape, Adichie also raises questions about the consequences of sending children to war and the extent to which war can corrupt individuals.

Half of a Yellow Sun thus challenges patriarchal violence at every level, as well as the frameworks through which history is recorded and remembered.

Diasporic Embodiment and Feminist Praxis in *Americanah*

A critical reading of *Americanah* situated the thesis within the context of the diaspora, where questions of race, identity and belonging intersect with the concept of feminist self-fashioning. Ifemelu's journey, marked by migration, displacement, and political awakening, illustrates how Nigerian women must navigate racialised gender politics in the West while maintaining their connection to home. Ifemelu's natural hair becomes a potent symbol of feminist resistance, closely tied to Black embodiment and visibility, both metaphorically and materially. The chapter provided an overview of the reemergence of the

Natural Hair Movement in the digital era, once again demonstrating how the politics of the body can form the basis of decolonial African feminist movements. The analysis also emphasised that, alongside the central middle-class feminism practised by Ifemelu, the novel encapsulates a peripheral feminism through its depiction of working-class women whom Ifemelu meets at the hair salon. Through this portrayal, *Americanah* contributes to a decolonial feminist vision by asserting the multiplicity of African female identities and rejecting static or externally imposed definitions.

The characters of Auntie Uju and Dike have been analysed in order to illustrate the experiences of Black displaced bodies attempting to adapt and integrate into a White-dominated society. Uju's encounters with racism at work, Dike's suicide attempt, and mental health issues related to displacement are discussed in detail. The lack of representation of Black children in young adult literature and the toy industry is tied to the lack of representation of Black femininity in the beauty industry. These issues have been explored to demonstrate systemic racism and violence at every level of American society.

The comparative dimension of the chapter was introduced through an analysis of Sefi Atta's literary works: *Everything Good Will Come*, *Swallow*, and *A Bit of Difference*. This served to emphasise that African diasporic feminisms are not uniform, particularly with regard to the portrayal of social class. Although Adichie and Atta both address similar themes, such as gender, migration, patriarchy and femininity, their narrative voices and character constructions reflect different perspectives within the broader conversation about postcolonial Nigerian womanhood. This plurality reinforces the argument that African feminist literatures must be read through flexible, locally grounded and dialogical frameworks—an essential premise of decolonial feminist analysis.

Adichie's Fiction as Decolonial Feminist Praxis

One of the central arguments of this thesis has been that Adichie's fiction does not only represent decolonial feminism, but it also *enacts* it. Her novels serve as living texts of feminist theory, mirroring what Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi called theorised fiction. Adichie's characters always reflect the conflicts, contradictions, and negotiations that define the (post)colonial condition for many Nigerian women, regardless of their age, social class, and positionality.

By situating Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie alongside theorists such as Françoise Vergès, Minna Salami, and Sylvia Tamale, this thesis has highlighted the potential of literary fiction to intervene in, expand, and reshape decolonial feminist theory itself. It was not in the intention of the thesis to prove that Adichie's narratives are illustrative of preexisting frameworks, but rather I wanted to explain how they can contribute to an evolving and organic body of African feminist thought that challenges Eurocentric and patriarchal systems and affirms alternative visions of embodiment, resistance and solidarity.

Through characters like Ifeoma, Olanna, and Ifemelu, Adichie offers a feminist praxis that is rooted in lived Nigerian and diasporic realities, one that embraces contradiction, values community and all lives, and resists "colonial hangovers" (using Atta's term from *A Bit of Difference*). By creating these subversive female characters, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie aligns with Françoise Vergès's theory of a decolonial feminism that does not look for assimilation into the systems of power but for a remapping of the conditions through which gendered power operates.

Future Directions and Final Reflections

This study has focused only on three of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's most influential novels, but her short fiction, essays, and public talks also contribute to the body of Nigerian decolonial feminist knowledge and deserve further scholarly attention. Future research might expand the comparative scope by including francophone or lusophone African women writers, examining how language can further diversify African decolonial feminist perspectives. Moreover, there is fertile ground for exploring how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction intersects with queer and transgender African feminist thought—a dimension not addressed in this thesis but increasingly central in African gender discourses. Examples could include the authors Koleka Putuma, Akwaeke Emezi, Frieda Ekotto, and Olumide Popoola.

More broadly, this thesis suggested that decolonial feminism must remain attuned to narratives, to the stories women tell about themselves, their communities, and their pasts. In Adichie's case, storytelling becomes a mode of survival in case of war and genocide, resistance in case of systematic racism, and theorizing in case of being isolated from other women.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction invites readers to challenge the mainstream discourse on gender roles and feminism and to reimagine this framework not as an imported ideology but as a relational set of practices grounded in local realities. By reading her work through the lens of decolonial feminism, this thesis has contributed to a growing scholarly movement that centres African voices in feminist theory. It has also been my intention to reaffirm literature's role as a critical space where narratives do not simply reflect the world but also help reshape it or reflect multiple nuances.

In the words of Minna Salami, "what is important about the explorer's hidden view is that it disrupts one-dimensional thinking and contributes to a more vibrant understanding of the world" (2020: 3)—and this is exactly what Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's fiction does.

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Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit untersucht den dekolonialen Feminismus in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies Romanen „Purple Hibiscus“ (2003), „Half of a Yellow Sun“ (2006) und „Americanah“ (2013) und ordnet ihr Werk in die nigerianische Literatur und die Literatur der nigerianischen Diaspora ein. Aufbauend auf den dekolonialen feministischen Rahmenkonzepten von Minna Salami, Françoise Vergès und Sylvia Tamale befasst sich die Forschung mit afrikanisch geprägten Diskursen, die westliche feministische Paradigmen hinterfragen und die spezifischen Lebenserfahrungen afrikanischer Frauen in den Vordergrund stellen. Jeder Roman wird anhand eines qualitativen textuellen Ansatzes analysiert, der wichtige thematische Aspekte untersucht. „Purple Hibiscus“ behandelt häusliche Gewalt und religiöses Patriarchat und zeigt, wie strukturelle und zwischenmenschliche Gewalt die Unterdrückung der Geschlechter verstärken. „Half of a Yellow Sun“ beschäftigt sich mit dem Trauma von Krieg, Völkermord und Antimilitarismus und hebt hervor, wie bewaffnete Konflikte die Verletzlichkeit von Frauen verschärfen, zeigt aber auch ihre Rolle im Widerstand und Überleben auf. In „Americanah“ setzt sich Adichie mit Fragen der Rasse, Migration und Identität anhand der Politik des schwarzen Haares auseinander und nutzt diese als Ausgangspunkt für eine breitere Diskussion über Schönheitsideale, Assimilation und systemischen Rassismus, die durch die Linse der Critical Race Theory betrachtet wird. Die Studie zeigt, wie Adichies Figuren ihre Handlungsfähigkeit behaupten und sich an der Schnittstelle von (Post-)Kolonialismus, Geschlechternormen und diasporischer Entwurzelung zurechtfinden. Ein vergleichender Ansatz mit ausgewählten Werken von Sefi Atta vertieft die Untersuchung darüber, wie zeitgenössische nigerianische Schriftstellerinnen sich aus unterschiedlichen Klassenperspektiven mit dem dekolonialen feministischen Diskurs auseinandersetzen. Diese Arbeit zeigt, wie Adichies Literatur die Stimmen nigerianischer Frauen wieder in den Mittelpunkt rückt, unterdrückerische Machtstrukturen kritisiert und verschiedene Nuancen von Geschlecht und Identität in (post-)kolonialen und transnationalen Kontexten aufzeigt.

Schlüsselwörter: Dekolonialer Feminismus, Ökofeminismus, Haarpolitik, Afrikanischer Feministischer Diskurs, Postkoloniale Studien, Critical Race Theory

Abstract

This thesis examines decolonial feminism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013), situating her work within Nigerian and Nigerian diasporic literatures. Drawing on the decolonial feminist frameworks of Minna Salami, Françoise Vergès, and Sylvia Tamale, the research engages with African-centred discourses that challenge Western feminist paradigms and foreground the specific lived experiences of African women. Each novel is analyzed through a qualitative textual approach that explores key thematic concerns. *Purple Hibiscus* addresses domestic violence and religious patriarchy, showing how structural and interpersonal violence reinforce gender oppression. *Half of a Yellow Sun* engages with the trauma of war, genocide, and anti-militarism, highlighting how armed conflict exacerbates the vulnerabilities of women while also demonstrating their roles in resistance and survival. In *Americanah*, Adichie confronts issues of race, migration, and identity through the politics of Black hair, using it as an entry point into broader discussions of beauty standards, assimilation, and systemic racism, framed through the lens of critical race theory. The study reveals how Adichie's characters assert agency and navigate the intersection of (post)colonialism, gender norms, and diasporic displacement. A comparative approach with selected works by Sefi Atta deepens the investigation into how contemporary Nigerian women writers engage with decolonial feminist discourse from different perspectives on class. This thesis demonstrates how Adichie's literature re-centres Nigerian women's voices, critiques oppressive power structures, and reveals different nuances of gender and identity in (post)colonial and transnational contexts.

Key Words: *Decolonial feminism, Ecofeminism, Hair Politics, African Feminist Discourse, Postcolonial Studies, Critical Race Theory*