AGAINST THE “SINGLE STORY”: LITERARY, VIRTUAL, AND PHYSICAL SPACE IN THE WORK OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

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Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize.

--Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her 2009 TEDtalk, "The danger of a single story," presents a call for multiplicity. She finds the location of humanity within the multiple, the complex, and her literary work strives toward this ideal in its scope, prolificacy, narration, and treatment of spaces. An important theoretical figure in postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha presents his theory of cultural hybridity in his much acclaimed work *The Location of Culture*, published in 1994. He writes of

an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.

Bhabha’s work has provided the foundation for later theorists who move beyond this notion of hybridity, by suggesting that in a new of age of mobility and multiplicity, culture does not reside simply in the liminal. Adichie, in her treatment of transnationalism, seems to create work that is not simply a kind of "hybrid." In his article "Suturing Two Worlds: Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love,*" Kenneth Harrow presents a new theoretical view of space in Forna's novel, which also applies to Adichie's work. He writes

that notion of hybridity, of what so many . . . have called an in-betweenness, needs to be revised. . . . Rather, the sensibility generated in the novel by characters who participate in two worlds . . . can be better understood as that of someone who simultaneously occupies both places, while inhabiting at times the one location and at times the other. (14)
Adichie's work, especially her most recent novel *Americanah* (2013), embodies this simultaneity in its treatment of space within a contemporary context. The prevalence of physical, literary, and cyber space in her work creates the multiplicity she speaks for in her TEDtalk. As an author, Adichie layers space in a way that suggests literature is not self-encapsulated even at the most basic level of publication, that it can extend into real, current space. For Adichie, literature is not a hybrid of fact and fiction, but it is both, crossing between the two. This can be seen clearly in the blog Adichie writes, connected with her website, that is an extension of her protagonist's blog *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* in *Americanah*. She blurs the lines between author and character, character and world. In cyberspace, Adichie crosses between forms; she writes essays, short stories, blog posts, and even appears on a Beyoncé track. In her work, she references pop culture, and she does so with respect. She writes of Fela and Goodluck Jonathan; she writes equally fervently about fashion jargon and political events. Further, she presents a deep awareness of the Nigerian literary canon, and especially Chinua Achebe, and indeed, has been deemed by literary critics to be his "literary granddaughter." While Adichie deeply respects Achebe, she does not merely repeat him; rather, she inserts herself into a rich literary canon of both male and female writers in Nigeria. She asserts the validity of her own work in a historical context. In his essay "The Novelist As Teacher," Achebe writes of the ills of society and the acceptance of racial inferiority, "What we need to do is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us." Adichie, however, seems to be looking forward. She does write historically, as in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, but not with the intention to teach, rather to tell a story, to bring, instead, rains of cleansing and newness.

In addition to cyber and literary space, Adichie is acutely aware of and interested in the ways that bodies inhabit physical and geographic space. Adichie is an outspoken feminist,
particularly interested in the experience of black women in geographic space, and she writes from within this framework. Again, Adichie writes within the historical space, of what Florence Stratton deems, "the existence of a widespread female [African] literary tradition," a tradition often undervalued, one that Stratton exemplifies with a study of authors like Mariama Ba and Buchi Emecheta (Stratton 166). Stratton further discusses the critical limitations in writing about their work as literature, suggesting a broader approach, one that extends outside of the "shallow grave" of patriarchal polities. In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler writes, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (45). And, in her constructions of feminism and nationalism, Adichie embraces this concept of performance and stylization. For example, she advocates black women wearing their hair naturally. Hair styling is, by its nature, a kind of aesthetic performance, one that over time becomes a signifier and part of identity. The gendering of space and an awareness of the body relate back even to more conceptual space, such as cyber and literary space, in that, though concrete, they are still platforms of performance.

In addition to her deft use of space, unflinching, eloquent honesty makes the performance of Adichie's fiction striking. Adichie writes, "Of course, not all fiction is honest, but fiction, by its very nature, creates the possibility of a certain kind of radical honesty . . . When I write fiction, I am free. I am free of thinking of an audience, free of self-censorship" ("Facts are stranger than fiction"). Her three published novels, collection of short stories, and online essays and stories all coalesce into one conversation, something more than singular achievements—a contemporary, self-aware, and intertextual literary space. To understand Adichie’s innovative importance within contemporary “third generation” Nigerian literature, it is important to read all
of Adichie’s published works, both literary and online, in this discursive framework.


Adichie began writing her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* while she was an undergraduate senior at Eastern Connecticut State University in the United States. This novel begins on a Palm Sunday in the 1990s, during the military regime of Sani Abacha. Adichie writes as the opening line of the novel, “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” (*Purple Hibiscus* 3). Already, in the beginning of the novel, Adichie uses form to further her themes, and in her latest work *Americanah*, *Purple Hibiscus* does not begin chronologically; it begins with the turning point of *Purple Hibiscus*, the fateful Palm Sunday, and the final two sections of the novel fall under the subheadings “Before Palm Sunday” and “After Palm Sunday.”

An example of her technical skill, Adichie's opening line sets up the most important themes, motifs, and relationships in the novel from its very outset: Papa as central masculine figure and perpetrator of violence, the centrality of family and private space to the novel, Jaja as a subversive figure, lingering colonialism and Eugene's rigid Catholicism, and the figurines of Kambili’s mother that display her fragile strength. Historically, this first line also appropriates Achebe’s title line from *Things Fall Apart*, his most famous novel internationally, and probably *the* most globally well-known Nigerian novel to date. Because she uses this particular line, "Things began to fall apart," so widely associated with Achebe, it is curious, then, that she says the appropriation was not intentional or calculated. It was, quite simply, the beginning that fit the novel, which suggests a textual relationship both more powerful and more complex than one-dimensional imitation. In an interview after *Purple Hibiscus* was published, in response to a
question about her use of this Achebean line, she said, “It was unintentional, really, but yes, I think it was my unconscious tribute. He is the writer whose work has been most important to me.”

Even though unconscious, the appropriation of this line as the inception of her first work firmly places Adichie in the same literary space as prominent male Nigerian writers in the canon, especially the canon that Achebe sought to create with the project of the internationally-marketed Heinemann African Writers Series of which he was both editor and first represented author. In addition to title and first line, thematically, both Things Fall Apart and Purple Hibiscus have rigid, masculine Igbo fathers--Okonkwo and Eugene respectively--as central figures. In the article "Daughters of Sentiment, Genealogies, and Conversations Between Things Fall Apart and Purple Hibiscus," Christopher E.W. Ouma provides a valuable way to understand patrilineal heritage in the two novels both singularly and comparatively, and then extends this view of patrilineal heritage to the "real" world of the authors. Ouma describes both Adichie in the role of literary "daughter" and fictional literary "daughters" as subversive figures "problematiz[ing] the linearity of genealogy as well as its gendered formation in history" by "using the sentimental disposition found in their relationships with their fathers" (Ouma 102). Unlike traditional, rigid masculinity and patriarchal power, the power of these daughters comes from their very sentimentality and willingness to examine and use vulnerability.

In Things Fall Apart and Purple Hibiscus, both the main father figures, Okonkwo and Eugene, identify as self-created men, but as Simon Gikandi writes of Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart, this autonomy is only an illusion. Okonkwo's consciousness "will still continue to be dominated by Unoka [his father] because he can only define himself against the negative forces represented by his dead father" (Gikandi 40). In addition, both Eugene's extreme violence for the
sake of his colonial moral structure and his lack of human compassion toward his family stems partly from his vehement rejection of his father, Papa Nnukwu's, traditional Igbo values and disdain for colonial Christianity. Eugene perpetrates his violence on his own children and wife out of his lack of control over the society that surrounds him and even seeps into his own home. His exercise of control is a kind of performance, an illusion. These fathers’ inability to fluidly inhabit multiple spaces as characters contrast starkly against the literary worlds that both Achebe and Adichie build, which are very much aware of a transnational space and filled with multiplicity, though the ways that Adichie and Achebe approach the representation of multiple spaces are very different.

In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Things Fall Apart*, daughters represent and display a complexity of character that their fathers, in their singularity and rigid authority, do not. Ezinma, Okonkwo's daughter, "stands out because of her egalitarian relationship with her mother Ekwefi" (Ouma 98). Ezinma is born an *ogbanje*, a child both of the physical and spiritual, who enters her mother's womb again and again and brings special knowledge from the spirit world. Through the character of Ezinma and her embodiment of the Igbo traditional belief in *ogbanje*, Adichie shows a kind of simultaneous multiplicity, which she adapts into different narrative forms across her work, through the use of contemporary realms like cyberspace in *Americanah*. Within this multiplicity is the crossing between two spaces that are inherently separate and yet coexist and the knowledge this mobility brings. Ouma writes, "Ezinma reveals Okonkwo in a different light; she functions as a form of conscience and reveals an ambivalent dimension to Okonkwo, while probing his fear of effeminacy" (98). In her multiplicity of character, Ezinma brings to the surface Okonkwo's facets, the complexity of feeling he denies, for example, in that he states often he wishes Ezinma were a boy, rather than fully favoring her for who she is.
In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene holds onto Eurocentric Catholic ideas and practices, even though the religion has become decentered in space by this time; though it still very much holds a colonial power structure, it has become a majority religion outside of Europe. Eugene enforces his limited view of this version of Catholicism in his own home, violently, for it is falling apart outside the home. Within this enforcement, for Kambili, the "troubling scenes [of violent punishment] are also ironically definitive moments of connection . . . with her father--moments of self-abnegation for the sake of understanding him" (Ouma 100). She is a careful narrator, and even in her pain, she notices his tears as he pours scalding water over her feet in "punishment." Her sentiment and careful observations of Eugene "tell a story different [of Eugene] from the rationale of his actions" (Ouma 100). But Kambili, of course, is not a static character; she chooses, ultimately, her own path. Unlike Okonkwo and Eugene, in the end, her father does not rule her mind. Papa Eugene's final violent outburst occurs after he finds a painting of Papa Nnukwu that Amaka, Kambili's older cousin, makes for her. When Papa Eugene finds the painting in his house and asks whom it belongs to, Jaja claims it first. Kambili, however, is quick to say that it is not her brother's painting; it belongs to her. In a fit, Papa Eugene tears the painting into pieces. Kambili, in this moment, chooses. She runs to collect the pieces and lies holding them like a fetus on the ground. She does not obey when Papa Eugene tells her to get up, just lies on the floor with the destroyed painting. As her father kicks her, she "thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with a calm saxophone and then whirled into lusty singing . . . curled around [herself] tighter" (211). What she chooses in this moment is to occupy another space. She chooses her own genealogy. When Eugene, in the end of the novel, dies, Kambili eulogizes him in her own way, acknowledges that she cannot imagine him dead, had not ever thought to imagine him dead. She lays him to rest in her own
mind. Ouma concludes, in his article, that this "representation of the father--daughter relationship becomes a template for extending and problematizing historical constructions of literary genealogies in the family of modern African literature," and so he once again connects the character of daughter to author as daughter (91).

In this intertextual reading of *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus*, one must note that *Nigerian* women’s writing does not have a lineage separate from the evolution of canonical Nigerian men’s writing. There are not "writers" and "women writers." Though she has been called his "literary granddaughter," Adichie’s allusions to Achebe are apparent but not original. Even *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, the first published novel by a Nigerian and Igbo woman and published less than a decade after *Things Fall Apart*, speaks to Achebe and seems to try to “write…what Achebe left out of *Things Fall Apart*” (Stratton 87). Nwapa, in her portrayal of one of her characters in the novel, Ogene, as gaining his wealth and power within the patriarchal colonial system, refutes the “Okonkwo-type hero” in Nigerian fiction (88). An intertextual dialogue between male and female writers is essential to the formal innovations that make Adichie’s later work so striking. In writing by Nigerian women, it tends to be discourse, not static claims or isolated didacticism, which provides the theoretical foundation. These women do not ignore masculinity nor marginalize it but put the feminine subjects in direct discourse with the idea of national masculinity and create a more egalitarian Nigerian metanarrative. When Adichie refers to or refutes Achebe, she also in doing so refers to the work of other Nigerian women writers who preceded her, like Nwapa.

As a defining part of this group of third-generation contemporary writers, Adichie participates in a reconfiguration of national realities in which the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central to the realist
representation of a recognizable social world, [which] constitutes a shifting of . . . identity construction in Nigerian fiction away from the fully-consituted masculine self, to a notion of selfhood as split or multiple. (Bryce 50)

Generally, in one sense, the novel Purple Hibiscus may be classified as a "Bildungsroman in which the classic hero(ine)’s journey of self-discovery from the country to the town is now internalized and contracted around the private space of the family” (Adesokan 7). Through Kambili’s perspective in her own home and across Enugu and Nsukka, Adichie “represents a gendered critique of the kind of anti-colonial nationalism framed as the narrative of the public man” (Adesokan 8). By writing this “public man,” Eugene, in the private space, Adichie shows his hypocrisy. Eugene is a contradictory “nationalist” figure. He is a “newspaper magnate . . . a champion of the Nigerian people who encourages his editor to use the newspaper, The Standard, to challenge the military tyranny” (Adesokan 9). And yet, this is the same man who, Kambili notes, “hardly spoke Igbo, and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English” (Purple Hibiscus 13). He contains his own tyranny, which requires a public and private that are decidedly separate. Though he champions national causes with The Standard, his idea of the “civilized,” especially within the space of his own home, is hauntingly colonial and violent, a stark, though complex, counterpoint to his traditionalist father, Papa-Nnukwu.

Throughout most of the novel, unlike many of Adichie's protagonists, Kambili is a quiet, almost voiceless, narrator attentive to details of plot but removed, even from herself; she has grown up with Jaja and Mama speaking “more with [their] spirits than with [their] lips” (Purple Hibiscus 16), occupying a discursive place that is necessarily separate from the physical like the ogbanje. She resembles her mother, because her mother, even under the abuse of Eugene and after his inducement of her miscarriages, is quiet and maintains an air of fragility like her
figurines. She continues to polish her figurines on the mantel, attached to them, until they are broken.

One space that changes the novel’s dynamic, both ideologically and geographically, is Nsukka. There, Jaja and Kambili visit their Aunty Ifeoma (coincidentally the name of Adichie's own mother) and their cousins Amaka and Obiora. Aunty Ifeoma's household is full of discussion and livelihood, a contrast to the household of Eugene’s strict institution and quiet tension. Though he allows them to visit, Eugene tries to hold on to his control; he gives Jaja and Kambili schedules for what they will do in Nsukka, but his hold is not the same there. Kambili notices a change first in Jaja’s conversations with their cousins, his comfort in them. She wonders, “How did Jaja do it? How could he speak so easily?” (145) Amaka, questioning and loud, like her mother Ifeoma, serves as a contrast to Kambili's reservation. Also unexpectedly in Nsukka, Kambili falls in love with a priest, Father Amadi, who presents her with a kind of religion much different from her papa’s, gentler. Love stories frequently enter into Adichie’s work, but they do not undermine the heft of her novels. Instead, the love stories often offer Adichie’s female characters an intimate space of agency, against the rationale of patriarchal or nationalistic social structures. By the end of the novel, Kambili does not renounce her faith or seek to become a foil to her father. Her faith changes into something that is hers. In a very different way, Kambili’s mother also finds agency in intimate, relational space. Though Jaja takes the blame for the murder of Papa Eugene in the public space without hesitation and goes to jail, it is Beatrice, Kambili and Jaja’s mother, who actually has killed Eugene by poisoning his tea. The way she kills him is important; it is steady, almost undetectable, and perversely loving, unlike Eugene’s sudden, violent “punishments.” Beatrice says, “I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor” (290). It is
this tea, in the delicate china from which Papa used to give Jaja and Kambili “love sips” of his tea, one of the few displays of his love for his children. Thus, it is this that Kambili finds most horrifying: why the tea? Serving Eugene the poison in his tea is such an intimate act for Beatrice, the kind of violence that is hers alone: what other way if not the tea? Nsukka is the space where Jaja and Kambili discover, upon the arrival of their mother, their father’s death.

Beyond being the space where Jaja and Kambili spend time with Aunty Ifeoma and their cousins, Nsukka is also a university space. Aunty Ifeoma lives on the campus of the University of Nigeria, where she is a professor. As they enter, under the archway of the University sign carved into metal, Kambili sees “a lawn the color of spinach” and Jaja points out a statue of a lion bearing the university’s motto, "'To restore the dignity of man'" (Purple Hibiscus 112).

Aunty Ifeoma lives on Marguerite Cartwright Avenue, named after an American sociologist, a street bearing the house where both Adichie and Achebe lived (“The Writing Life”). A house “graveled, landscaped” with a large, airy upstairs bathroom and “Nwando Achebe” “on a window ledge in the dining room, scratch written in the childish hand of his [Chinua Achebe’s] daughter” (“The Writing Life”). The university is a place of startling convergences.

Architecturally European, it is in some ways colonial, and yet remains a site for revolutionary change in thought. In the novel, Kambili observes,

Jaja’s defiance [of Papa] 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 crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. (Purple Hibiscus 16)

It makes sense that this experimental flower would be present in a university setting, a space of discovery and experiment; however, the purple hibiscus does not stay only there. Jaja brings it home to Enugu and plants it outside the family home. These symbolic flowers have mobility,
through Jaja and through Kambili's telling, crossing over between different places and their associated ideologies in the novel. The university is a place Adichie knows well and one that features largely in all her major works, whether transnational in subject or otherwise.

Also in this setting, Adichie first shows her deft incorporation of pop culture, which she uses quite fluently in most of her literary spaces. The novel demonstrates pop culture's importance to and influence on that space. In her room in Nsukka, Amaka tells Kambili, “‘I listen mostly to indigenous musicians. They’re culturally conscious; they have something real to say. Fela and Osadebe and Onyeka are my favorites. Oh, I’m sure you probably don’t know who they are, I’m sure you’re into American pop like other teenagers’” (Purple Hibiscus 118).

Kambili has never heard any of these kinds of music, but gradually in the company of Amaka she learns to “distinguish the pure tones of Onyeka Onwenu, the brash power of Fela, the soothing wisdom of Osadebe” (151). This is part of her awakening. Again, she uses this as a shield, as comfort, when Eugene hurts her for the last time after finding the painting. As Kambili and her mother drive to the prison compound to see Jaja at the end of the novel, Kambili laughs above the Fela playing in the car and says she laughs “because Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song” (299).

Through this use of Fela, Adichie shows an artistic continuation that is not new, a continuation she continues throughout her work and into Americanah. Adichie is not the first prominent Nigerian artist to focus on the multiplicity within nationalism, the importance of a rejection of the single story. Of Fela, Tejumola Olaniyan writes, "his musical practice is too textured to gloss and discipline into a univocal narrative" (76). Olaniyan writes of Fela's antimonies: his "cultural nationalism" against his intellectual reliance on Walter Rodney and Kwame Nkrumah; his campaigns against tyranny and his own hierarchical household (Olaniyan
Olaniyan defines antinomy as "a contradiction between conclusions or inferences drawn from equally warranted or necessary principles" (77). Like Fela whom she refers to, this necessary contradiction is a concept that Adichie seems to embrace in her life and her work, especially as it relates to her transnational status. Olaniyan explores contradictions between Fela's political "nativism" and his embrace of his transnationalism, especially in regard to the production of his music. Olaniyan claims that "Fela's nativism is not an atavistic return to roots but a reclaiming of 'authentic subjectivity': a subjectivity that expresses, that is, subjects, itself 'freely' without the element of a crudely obvious compulsion" (85). It is in this oxymoronic quest for "authentic subjectivity" that Adichie follows historically public transnational figures like Fela. Her "cosmopolitanism" is not unfettered by time and space; it is not how she self-identifies; it is a part of the Nigerian nationalism she claims, rather than an alternative to it.

_Purple Hibiscus_ is grounded by place and variety of place: university, private home, public and political. It hints at a transnational space, with Aunty Ifeoma leaving for America and the inclusion of transnational artists, though it does not contain the transnational scope of Adichie’s later works.

But like much of Adichie’s later work, _Purple Hibiscus_ ends on a hopeful note with Jaja’s impending release from prison, and Kambili, with a newfound voice, speaking of what they will do in the future. Kambili notes, “Clouds like dyed wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. The new rains will come down soon” (308). This rain is different from the rain in the Igbo proverb Achebe quotes when explaining his reason for writing _Things Fall Apart_. In an op-ed for _The New York Times_, he writes, “We are like the man in the Igbo proverb who does not know where the rain began to beat him and so cannot say where he dried his body.” For Achebe, the writer can tell the story of this rain, the past. Adichie, moving
forward, speaks of new rains, cleansing rains, and she gives her narrator the agency to think of causing such rains and making her own way, healing herself.

II. *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Adichie’s second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, published three years after *Purple Hibiscus* in 2006, takes place before the 1990s military regime of *Purple Hibiscus*; in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie writes of the Biafran War of the 1960s. In the novel, she writes, "At Independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp" (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 195). In his essay from the *Location of Culture* "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," Homi Bhabha "propos[es]...cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation." And, Nwakanma suggests, "the mode of the novel is useful...because of its unique capacity to carry the burden of the modern national epic" (11). Across the body of Adichie's work, as in *Purple Hibiscus*, it is useful to look for this creation of a textual modern nationality that encompasses multiple spaces and modes of interaction. In part, her work, in a contemporary and transnational context, as Nwakanma says of Nigeria's political history reflects, "a deep search for the coherent meaning of nation...characterized by the demands to construct a coherent narrative to reflect this aspiration" (2). But, simultaneously, her work is straightforward realism, which seeks to tell stories of individuals: their loves, hopes, and fears.

In the essay "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience," Adichie writes, "I grew up in the shadow of Biafra" (50). She knew before she even began to write *Half of a Yellow Sun* "it would be a book concerned with the ordinary person, a book with unapologetic Biafran sympathies," but "would absolutely refuse to romanticise the war" ("African 'Authenticity'" 50).

As in *Purple Hibiscus*, temporal construction is integral to the formal construction of
Half of a Yellow Sun. The Biafran War was a Nigerian event that created a mindset of historical “before” and “after,” albeit a history that, still fresh, often remains hushed and unspoken in Nigerian schools and public discourse. Adichie divides the novel into sections: “The Early Sixties” and “The Late Sixties” and alternates between the two sections in the order: early, late, early, then late.

Half of a Yellow Sun has three carefully chosen narrators: Ugwu, the houseboy of Odenigbo, who is a mathematics professor at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka; Olanna, the lover of Odenigbo and Kainene's twin sister; and Richard, the white British man who goes to Nigeria, after falling in love with the Igbo-Ukwu roped pots, to write a book, and then falls in love with the strong-willed business woman, Kainene. Olanna and Kainene are from a privileged business class Nigerian family with international mobility, and Adichie's use of twins as a narrative device, like other "3rd generation" women novelists have done, shows a means of "exploring the repressed feminine in relation to a socially conditioned version of femininity” (Bryce 50). They are a kind of physical multiplicity. In traditional Igbo culture, twins were unclean, a bad omen, and as Achebe shows in Things Fall Apart "were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest" (61). Half of a Yellow Sun, a national story, sympathetic toward the Igbo cause and yet full of the senselessness of war, is an interesting space for these two very different women who share the same DNA. Though in the end, Kainene is lost to the war, by using twins as main characters, Adichie shows the way that some old Igbo customs, like throwing away twins, are senseless to continue. She gives an idea of the Igbo that is complex.

In Half of a Yellow Sun, Olanna loves the zealous and charismatic Odenigbo, whom her sister Kainene deems "the [Biafran] revolutionary" and goes to live with him in Nsukka. Kainene falls in love with Richard, a white Englishman who is writing a book about Nigeria with the
working title *The Basket of Hands*. Again, the university space in Nsukka is important to the landscape of the novel, a place of discussion and convergence and sometimes elitism, though a space that must be abandoned during the war, something to return to.

In an article comparing Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* to Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Zoe Norridge seeks to understand the authors' apparent link between sexual and romantic relationships and the fiction of violence. She writes, "For Adichie, the reader must become familiar with the passions of her characters' daily lives if they are ever to intimate the negative impacts of the civil war and begin to appreciate the privations of conflict" (20). It is only after the war has begun that Olanna will agree to Odenigbo's many marriage proposals. This narrative element marks Adichie among the other members of her third generation of Nigerian writers: the private intimacy of conflict, as demonstrated by Kambili’s perception of her father in *Purple Hibiscus*.

As Adichie's most recent novel *Americanah* extends into cyberspace with its use of blog posts, *Half of a Yellow Sun* also contains another formal layered level of text within it: Ugwu’s book. Ugwu is one of Adichie’s more interesting, complex narrators, and the one with whom she chooses to begin and end her novel. Ugwu is a houseboy, not in the same class as Odenigbo, his master, or Olanna. When the war starts, he goes to fight. He almost dies in the fighting, and at one point, under pressure from his fellow soldiers, participates in the gang rape of girl, which continues to haunt him long after the war. He is a multi-faceted character; by the end of the novel, he is neither innocent and blameless nor evil. Through Adichie, Ugwu has a voice that he might not otherwise have. After the war he goes back to Nsukka and finishes Richard’s book, and it becomes his book. Of the character of Richard, Amy Novak points to the fact that "Despite his effort to shed his European identity, Richard functions as a marker for how colonial
epistemology constructs and shapes Africa as an object for consumption" (40). Richard loves Kainene. He later sleeps also with Olanna, after she finds out that Odenigbo is going to have a child with a woman his mother brought to him from their village. However, Olanna forgives Odenigbo and raises the child, "Baby" as her own, and Kainene eventually forgives Olanna. Richard does not have the authority. As the novel progresses, "Ugwu becomes the chronicler of trauma as the colonial voice that Richard represents fades into the background, marking the exit of the Western subject from narrative control" (Novak 40). In addition to the fluid chronology of Adichie's novel, Ugwu claims his space as literary voice in the eight fragmented pieces of The World Was Silent When We Died, the name he gives to his book, that appear throughout Half of a Yellow Sun in a different font and format and disrupt, even further, the narrative structurally. Ugwu “writes his dedication last: For Master, my good man” (Half of a Yellow Sun 541). And in Adichie's novel, he has the last word. Once, Odenigbo called him his “good man” and now he, permanent in writing, uses this to address Odenigbo.

In addition to her use of this textually layered form, Adichie also introduces a strong sense of transnationalism in Half of a Yellow Sun. Olanna and Kainene’s family has transnational mobility, even more so a marker of privilege in the 1960s than in a contemporary setting. The first time Olanna goes to Odenigbo’s house in Nsukka “she’s just come back from London” (27). Both Kainene and Olanna received their advanced degrees in London, and Kainene takes over her father’s international business. Smaller details in the text highlight this transnationality that is always present. Olanna teaches Baby to sing “London Bridge is Falling Down,” and it is while Olanna is away in London that Mama encourages the relations between Odenigbo and Amala that conceive Baby. When the war begins, Olanna and Kainene’s parents buy them tickets to London, though both of them refuse to go, and there is something important in this staying.
Despite their transnational fluidity, they stay, for love and for their sense of nationalism.

III. The Thing Around Your Neck

After Half of a Yellow Sun, Adichie's next published work, The Thing Around Your Neck, functions as a kind of transition into Americanah. A collection of twelve short stories, as a whole it is fundamentally different from both of her long previously published works, though it speaks intertextually with her novels. The Thing Around Your Neck is the first of Adichie's books to really introduce the U.S. as a physical and literary space. She begins the title story of the collection, "The Thing Around Your Neck," with the line "You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so, too. Right after you won the American visa lottery" (115). In her TEDtalk "The danger of a single story," Adichie articulates the concept of the single story of a nation or a people, the ways a one-dimensional narrative are destructive to productive global interaction and contemporary literary work. Right in this beginning line of her title story, Adichie introduces that idea of the single story in her character's conceptualization of the U.S. Her use of second person aids the direct blunt force of the assumption, and as a literary device, it is simultaneously singular and vague, and certainly implicates the reader in the story. The main character of this story wins the visa lottery to go live in America, and so she goes to stay with an "uncle" (really a "brother of [her] father's sister's husband") in Maine ("The Thing Around Your Neck" 116).

While living at her uncle's house, she begins community college. Life goes well until her uncle comes down to the basement where she sleeps, presses his body against hers, and when she protests against his touch, he tells her all the material things he can do for her, if she will sleep with him. He says that all women, whether in New York or Lagos, get ahead this way. She leaves the next day and immediately gets a job at a restaurant because she says she will accept
two dollars less pay than the other wait staff. Her new roommates ask her "where [she] learned to speak English and if [she] had real houses back in Africa and if [she'd] seen a car before [she] came to America. They gawped at her hair" (116). Here, Adichie introduces the single story that the Americans Akunna interacts with see when they look at her. In doing so, she introduces multiple "single stories": ideas about Americans, about "Africans", about black women's hair. By including multiple one-dimensional stories in a short story, within the context of a complex story of individuals, Adichie creates a literary space that invites multiplicity. In her TEDtalk she says, "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize" ("The danger of the single story").

When Akunna works at the restaurant in "The Thing Around Your Neck," she meets a white man who knows about Nigeria and doesn't present his knowledge with condescension or superiority, a man who is romantically interested in her. He asks if she is Igbo or Yoruba. He wants to take her on a date. He comes back to the restaurant day after day and talks with her; she notices that "his eyes were the color of extra-virgin olive oil, a greenish gold" and extra-virgin olive oil is the only thing Akunna claims to truly love about America (121). In the relationship that follows, there is both love and tension. There is his silence when the waiter does not seem to even consider they could be a couple; there's a suspicion that he is collecting foreign lovers when he only smiles at a suggestion that he left behind a girl when he was in Shanghai. After these incidents, these problematic insinuations, "that night, you didn't moan when he was inside you, you bit your lips and pretended that you didn't come because you knew he would worry" (123-124). In this consciousness of the space of her own feminine body in intimacy, she gains emotional power and control over the narrative. Though they continue, lovingly, in their relationship for a while, this is a turning point. Akunna soon decides to write home, and quickly
receives a reply from her mother that "[her] father was dead; he had slumped over the wheel of his company car. Five months now" ("The Thing Around Your Neck" 126-127). She wants to go back, alone. When he asks if she will return, she says that she will, because her green card will expire if she doesn't, but this isn't what he meant, he says. Adichie writes, "when he drove you to the airport, you hugged him tight for a long, long moment, and then you let go" (127). The use of "let go" in this instance mirrors Akunna observing the thing around her neck letting go, but here, she is the linguistic agent; she lets go. Return is an important concept in Adichie's work. Return to Nigeria not only physically but also textually. Return is interesting because it implies a previous departure and continuous return implies a kind of linguistic and physical mobility, both of which Adichie as author and many of her characters have.

In an essay entitled "Suturing Two Worlds: Aminatta Forna's The Memory of Love," Kenneth Harrow uses Adichie as an example as one of the new generation of contemporary African women writers who are doing similar things to Aminatta Forna. He uses the story "Imitation" from The Thing Around Your Neck, the story of Nigerian wife Nkem who lives in New Jersey while her husband Obiora goes often back to their home in Lagos. Her "world becomes divided, split into two homes she can't not occupy" (Harrow 28). Harrow uses this story to show that

Adichie is sensitive to the registers of accent, culture, food, language, gender relations, taste, contemporary styles, etc., all of which constitute the American presence, and her language records them in her double consciousness, at times in ironic tones, but more often in chic postures and idiomatic turnings of the phrase that render the portrait so perfectly as to suture the native born reader into the perspective—occluding the non-native position of the speaker's subjectivity. (29)

He goes on to say that this is the ultimate goal of the "suture" he writes of, "its act of violence in accomplishing the act of identification for those who take themselves to be American, Nigerian .
. . while occluding the presence of the camera that captures the eye of the spectator and ear of the reader" (Harrow 29). It is from this place, the suture, that Adichie's voice often comes.

In The Thing Around Your Neck, return, a double consciousness of past and present, is very blatant in the last story of the collection, "The Headstrong Historian," where most blatantly of all her work, Adichie appropriates and rewrites Achebe. The story, which takes place in Igbo territory near the end of the 19th century and recounts the arrival of Christian missionaries, also spans three generations like Achebe's Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, and Arrow of God (Tunca 238). Adichie's main character Nwamgba has a husband called Obierika, the name of Okonkwo's wise friend in Things Fall Apart. Minor characters from Things Fall Apart resurface. The protagonist's granddaughter Afamefuna, or Grace, has a textbook with the chapter called "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Southern Nigeria,' by an administrator from Worcestershire who had lived among them for seven years" ("The Headstrong Historian" 215). This refers to the title the District Commissioner in Things Fall Apart chooses for his book: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger (Achebe), "a work also read by one of the white characters in Arrow of God" (Tunca 238). These complex layers of intertextuality, which are common to Adichie's work, show the prominence of the literary aspect of Adichie's nationalism. Her return, not just to Nigerian geographic space, but to Nigerian texts, in some ways creates an entirely different Nigerian space.

Of course, an obvious departure that Adichie takes from Achebe is in her use of the female narrator; "The Headstrong Historian" begins with Nwamgba memorializing her husband, Obierika, after he has died. Tunca suggests that this transfocalization is not necessarily indicative of Adichie's offering a counterpoint to Achebe, but pushing further into a feminist space through his work. In her introduction to an edition of Achebe's The African Trilogy, she writes that more
interesting than the equating of femininity with weakness in *Things Fall Apart* "are the subtle ways in which Achebe interrogates this patriarchy: Okonkwo denigrates women and yet the child he most respects is his daughter Ezinma, the only character who dares to answer back to him and who happens to be confident and forthright in a way that his male children are not" (50). Ezinma, it seems, has a lot in common with Adichie herself. Tunca argues that Adichie's "qualms . . . do not lie so much with Achebe's novel as with the abusive exploitation of historiographical blanks" (239). In this way, she implicates the reader and the canon, continuing to promote her idea of the necessity of multiplicity.

In a sense, she remaps the masculinity from *Things Fall Apart* in "The Headstrong Historian." She makes Obierika, the loyal and wise husband, a flute player, like Okonkwo's father Unoka, whom Okonkwo despises and finds effeminate. Nwamgba believes Obierika is reincarnated in her granddaughter rather than her grandson Anikwenwa, as expected. Okonkwo, however, "is relegated to the margins of the story: his family name is mentioned only twice . . . both times in relation to his daughter" (Tunca 240; "The Headstrong Historian" 201 and 202). Furthermore, in her extension of the feminist focus, Adichie portrays a subtle textual awareness of the contemporary reader in the details of her text. When Nwamgba decides to send her son to school and goes the Anglican mission she is at first impressed, but "when the girls were separated and a woman teacher came to teach them how to sew, Nwamgba found this silly; in her clan girls learned to make pottery and a man sewed cloth" ("The Headstrong Historian" 208). In contemporary society, it is often women who are thought to sew; so, Adichie draws attention to the artificial, "silly" nature of gender roles. In the end of the story, an adult Grace goes to the courthouse to legally change her name to Afamefuna, and "on that day as she sat at her grandmother’s bedside in the fading evening light . . . She simply held her grandmother’s hand,
the palm thickened from years of making pottery" ("The Headstrong Historian" 220). Again, she demonstrates a kind of return to simplicity and an older generation, an acknowledgement of the women from whom she came.

Adichie’s innovative intertextual narrative forms within this collection illustrate her occupation with multiple stories and complexity. One metafictional story, "Jumping Monkey Hill," provides a particularly useful way to begin to understand the layers of narrative Adichie uses in her most recent text Americanah and gives insight to the relationship between author and text that is so important to understanding Adichie's work. In the story “Jumping Monkey Hill,” the protagonist Ujunwa is a Nigerian writer who wins a contest to attend an African Writers Workshop put on by a British Arts Commission and hosted by Edward Campbell, an Oxford-educated British white man. The workshop is a hodgepodge of writers of various African nationalities in a posh resort outside of Cape Town in South Africa. While at the workshop, Adichie's character, Ujunwa, must complete a brand new short story for critique. In her workshop story, Ujunwa writes of Chioma, a woman who much mirrors Ujunwa and her experience. In this way, Ujunwa is like Adichie, who often infuses exact surface-level details of her own life into her fiction. In Ujunwa's story, the character Chioma refuses to take a job in a Nigerian bank when it means the exploitation of her sexuality, much in the way Ujunwa rejects Edward’s sexual objectification in "Jumping Monkey Hill," though he remains an oblivious, and married, character throughout the story, never acknowledging his ogling or its impropriety. During the workshop of Ujunwa’s short story, Edward says, “This is agenda writing, it isn’t a real story of real people” ("Jumping Monkey Hill" 114). But, in fact, the story Ujunwa has written is a fictionalized story from her own life; it as real as fiction can be. The ending lines of “Jumping Monkey Hill” read, “she wondered, as she walked back to her cabin, whether this
ending, in a story, would be considered plausible” (114). With this, Adichie asserts her authority as writer of her own stories and creates an awareness of the story itself as something to be examined and questioned. That is, she leaves room for something outside of the story to exist even within the story and does not present it as a cohesive hole.

This story is a writer writing about a writer writing. It calls into question a post-colonial, contemporary literary prize culture, the branding of so-called “authentic African” writing as a literary commodity. In the story, each individual layer of narrative refers within itself to the other layers of narrative: Ujunwa's story to Chioma's, Adichie's story to Ujunwa's, and so on. In many ways, the short story within “Jumping Monkey Hill” is more authentic than the story itself with its artificial resort setting populated by writers plucked from various nationalities and schools of thought. While a story, like, as I will suggest, a blog post, exists only in tandem with physical space, it can also be thought of as its own metaphorical space. Chioma's story exists in the metaphorical space of Ujunwa's story, also in its own metaphorical literary space, and in the physical space of Adichie's Nigeria. Even more than that, it connects author to text very closely.

This highly layered narrative is a curious construction within a short story and calls into question the authenticity of space within literature, especially transnational literature. We can ask, whether, at times, metaphorical places and visibly constructed and contained narratives, for example, the story within the story, can hold more truth than representations of actual places and events. They call attention to their own artificial nature. Like in "Jumping Monkey Hill," the narrative structure of Americanah furthers its themes, which include love, race, feminism and nationality, rather than functioning as a mere avenue for expressing already fully developed ideas surrounding these themes. Although she consistently writes with realistic prose, Adichie rejects a completely linear narrative.
IV. Americanah

A. Multiplicity through Virtual Space in Americanah

In 2013, the Journal of Postcolonial and Commonwealth Studies published two side-by-side versions of the same essay by blogger Keguro Macharia entitled "Blogging Queer Kenya." The first version of this essay begins, "On February 1, 2009, a new blogger entered the Kenyan blogosphere: Tamaku" and its second sentence includes such elevated phraseology as "homosocial networks" and "heteronormativity," quite different than the diction a blog post on a similar subject might be (Macharia 103). The essay appears in an academic journal, after all, a space that, at times, seems to require the obscuration of simple declaration and interpretation. Macharia's second article published in the journal, however, "Blogging Queer Kenya: A Reflection" begins bluntly, "The first version of this article was a failure" (Macharia 119). Not so much, he means, a failure in function or subject but a failure in form: the stodginess of an academic form sucked dry of both the dynamism that propels his blogs and the urgency possessed by those blogs which he writes about. He writes blogs because he wants to write blogs, not out of a dull, didactic duty. Macharia values the blog form for "the freedom of the careless claim, the daring of imagining worlds, the desire to be right and wrong, an experimental, recursive form" (Macharia 119). This relates to Adichie, as a writer, who resides both fully in an academic space and outside of it, and embraces this kind of blogger sentiment, especially in Americanah where she utilizes the form of blogging itself.

Adichie displays a willingness to produce work that is daring but also recursive, that makes claims and takes full responsibility them without equivocation. Macharia, in the reflective revision of his essay, goes on to say, "Learning from blogging, I want form to be as important, if not more important, than blogging. Form as performance. Performance as form" (120). This
academic duality, publishing an essay as two juxtaposed forms, is a kind of innovative, contemporary performance that creates something perhaps more complete than two essays in a journal: Multiple stories. And form, for Adichie, is a performance, as she fluidly moves between structures and mediums. Like a blogger, she approaches the political from the personal, the anecdotal. Her fiction connects closely to her persona and status as a public figure, to her own worldviews.

Adichie's use of her protagonist Ifemelu's blogs within *Americanah* is, again, an important element of innovation in the formal literary context. Like a short story, a blog post is brief; it has a sense of immediacy that longer forms don't innately hold. Also like most short stories, a blog post becomes necessarily a part of a larger body of work, the blogroll, which helps to build readership, and subsequently, social power. There are no one-hit-wonder bloggers; blog posts are, by their nature, a text form of multiplicity. They are both linear and non-linear in cyberspace. In relation to this nonlinear space, in an article entitled "Singing at the Digital Well: Blogs as Cyberfeminist Sites of Resistance," Tess Pierce incorporates a theoretical lens taken from Deleuze and Guattari in the context of cyber theory and states,

Rhizome theory and nomadic subjectivity complement the network nature of the Internet, where connective processes travel in all directions and exist simultaneously in synchronous and asynchronous time to provide spaces for the development of multiple relationships, identities, and connections. (196) Unlike a published story, a blog post has the ability to reach a large number of people across geographies in a matter of seconds. In *Americanah*, the Internet becomes a part of the metaphorical landscape of the narrative.

Within this prioritizing of the blog in *Americanah*, it is important to acknowledge that, in the present, the Internet still remains a site of privilege. According to World Bank statistics, in
2013, 84 in 100 Americans in the U.S. had access to the Internet, while 38 in 100 Nigerians in Nigeria had access to the Internet. Even this Nigerian figure, however, has climbed more than ten percent since 2010 and most likely will continue to do so. And, with access to the Internet and digital media, comes access to free texts, articles, and social forums, allowing a greater flow and exchange beyond traditional print media. Furthermore, it is especially important to figures, like Adichie, with transnational mobility. Adichie is transparent in presenting her characters’ and her own relative privilege in society. She in no way attempts to present a single story of what it means to be Nigerian or even someone with transnational residency, just her story.

*Americanah* begins with Ifemelu having already decided to return to Nigeria, her home. She notes of her homesickness:

> It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living . . . She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. *(Americanah 7)*

Her "borderlessness" seems to consume her, and she searches in the space of the Internet for something that will make her feel connected, encompassed once again by Nigeria, but instead she sees her loss more clearly, with faces. She finds images of men and women who have returned to Nigeria, and she see the other life she might have and still could have. And so, it is in the space of the Internet, that she sees the necessity of returning, physically, to Nigeria, to regain the life she feels she has lost or might lose.
In "The New Dawn: Black Agency in Cyberspace," Mary F. E. Ebeling writes, "No other medium or information technology developed during the twentieth century mirrors the transnationalism of the black world much like the internet" (96). This statement is interesting both in the context of Adichie's use of the Internet as a transnational device and her lack of identification with a larger "black" community. In issues of feminism, including issues surrounding black women's bodies, Adichie does seem to create and identify with a black community of women in cyberspace. Foremost, however, Adichie considers herself Nigerian, and in a way, her "blackness," and Ifemelu's, resides in America.

The designation "cyberspace" as a conceptual form of actual space stems itself from a literary context. The term originates in a "work of fiction by novelist William Gibson. . .[his 1984] proto-cyberpunk novel Neuromancer" (Gunkel and Gunkel 125). He "assembled the word 'cyberspace' from cybernetics, a neologism devised by Norbert Weiber to name the science of communication and control, and space" (Gunkel and Gunkel 125). While Neuromancer may not be especially comparable in subject to Americanah, it is nevertheless important that the conceptualization of "cyberspace" was, at its inception, within literary space, and in many ways, similar to literary space. In an article on the conceptual construction of cyberspace, geographer Paul Adams reminds us that this type of space metaphor, as in the term "cyberspace," and metaphor more generally does not intrinsically “contain meaning; it provides a starting point for the construction of meaning” (156). Thus, metaphor allows for cyberspace to be compared meaningfully to other manifestations of physical space. In Americanah, the way that the two distinct blogs the Ifemelu writes mirror the two physical geographies of the novel, the U.S. and Nigeria, helps to construct a new type of meaning in transnational narrative that goes beyond the concept of a hybrid national identity and further into a realm of simultaneity. Cyberspace,
necessarily, coexists with geographic space. A person can be both in a specific geographic locale and within cyberspace simultaneously. Ifemelu’s blogs are forums not just of her own expression but, including their comment sections, places of community building. Blogs and their comments and the communication they prompt harken—relevant to Adichie's consistent feminist lens—the consciousness-raising groups bell hooks writes of in *Feminism is for everybody: passionate politics.* Of one of these groups, bell hooks says, "It was the site where they [the women in the group] uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds" (8). And of his Internet interactions, Macharia writes, "The conversations we pursued on blogs, in comments, in private emails . . . were practical attempts at world-building, even if those worlds were only populated by two or three of us" (121). In *Americanah,* Ifemelu first begins her blog *Raceteenth* when her Kenyan friend Wambui, from the African Students Association, suggests she write one after Wambui receives Ifemelu's long email rant about an incident with her at the time soon-to-be-ex rich, white boyfriend Curt, in which he calls *Essence* "racially skewed." After he says this, Ifemelu then makes sure they spend the day looking at magazines in a bookstore and their glaring lack of featured black women, trying to show him the necessity of a magazine like *Essence,* but there are still things left unsaid between them. Things that maybe cannot be said to him. After she does decides to start her blog, Adichie writes,

> Blogs were new, unfamiliar to her. But telling Wambui what happened was not satisfying enough; she longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others. How many other people chose silence? How many other people had become black in America? (*Americanah* 336)

> This kind of cyberspace space allows intimate, ideological community without the constriction of the necessity of physical proximity. *Americanah* is perhaps most known for Adichie's trenchant critical examination of racial discourse in the United States. An important
physical symbol of and metonym for race throughout the novel is black women's hair. In the novel, hair not only furthers Adichie's consistent feminist and racial themes, but it creates even more relevance in Adichie's rhetorical use of cyberspace. When Ifemelu struggles to appreciate her newly natural Afro, her friend Wambui, from the African Students Union at her university, sends her a text message that says, “Go online. HappilyKinkyNappy.com. It’s this natural hair community. You’ll find inspiration” (*Americanah* 259). And she does find real comfort in this virtual community. Throughout *Americanah*, Adichie plays with an intersection of private and public space, and the Internet allows space to be both private and public simultaneously in a unique, pervasive way. One can be geographically in a private space but also in the public space of cyberspace at the same time. This allows for multiple perspectives on the same themes and a certain level of honesty and frankness, as illustrated by Ifemelu's blog on Americans' perceptions of race.

In her TEDtalk "The Danger of a Single Story," Adichie says that if one “show[s] a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again…that is what they become." She goes on to discuss power structures within storytelling using the Igbo word *nkali*, which she says “loosely translates to ‘to be greater than another’” and says, “stories…are defined by the principle of *nkali*: How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.”

And so, in addition to the blog form itself being a more egalitarian storytelling platform than perhaps literature, by having two blogs within Ifemelu’s narrative and presenting a slightly nonlinear narrative structure, Adichie disrupts the authorial power of a more traditional realistic literary text. Because Ifemelu write blogs that are extremely polarizing and opinionated, she actually invites discussion, rather than presenting the idea that a literary work should create the
illusion of having some kind of opaque seamlessness, even just within itself. Instead of being defined by physical, spatial attributes, virtual space is, as Paul Adams says, “interaction-defined” space (Adams 164). However, virtual space within *Americanah* also functions in close conjunction to geographic space and national identity. Ifemelu’s two blogs, *Raceteenth* and *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, while separate from physical space, both correlate to a specific, significant geographic national locations in Ifemelu’s life: *Raceteenth* to the United States and *Redemptions* to Nigeria. Ifemelu’s trans-nationalism, and, subsequently, Adichie’s, as represented by the duality of her two blogs, allows her to articulate insightful perceptions of society within both the United States and Nigeria that she might not otherwise be able to articulate. It is important to note, however, when looking at how *Americanah* goes beyond the notion of hybridity, that Ifemelu (and Adichie, though she splits her time between the U.S. and Nigeria) considers herself wholly Nigerian. Not half American, half Nigerian, not an Afropolitan or citizen of the world, but a Nigerian, albeit one who feels comfortable in the world. As stated previously, *Americanah* begins after Ifemelu has already decided to stop writing her popular blog in the United States. It begins with her returning home.

In the context of Adichie’s use of virtual space, Kenneth Harrow, in his article on Aminatta Forna’s *The Memory of Love*, a similarly transnational novel, offers a useful way to move beyond the Bhabha-esque notion of the in-between. In his essay, Harrow writes that “the sensibility generated…by characters who participate in two worlds…can be better understood as that of someone who simultaneously occupies both places, while inhabiting at times the one location and at times the other” (14). In contemporary society, we are able to be in one world and then another, over and over again, due to the mobility of society both physically and technologically. In this same essay, Harrow refers to a story by Adichie from *The Thing Around...*
Your Neck, to which he notes,

Adichie is sensitive to the registers of accent, culture, food, language, gender relations, taste, [and] contemporary styles . . . which constitute the American presence, and her language records them in her double consciousness, at times in ironic tones, but more often in chic postures and idiomatic turnings of the phrase that render the portrait so perfectly as to suture the native born reader into the perspective—occluding the non-native position of the speaker's subjectivity. (17)

As in "Jumping Monkey Hill," through her multilayered narrative in Americanah, Adichie maintains a kind of “double consciousness” and fluidly “crosses over” between Nigeria and America and virtual and non-virtual space. At one point, after she has been back in Lagos for a bit, her friend Ranyinudo tells Ifemelu that “[she is] no longer behaving like an Americanah!” (Americanah 488). This remark pleases Ifemelu, for the label "Americanah," a Nigerian with the affectations of an American, is not a positive one in her view. Though it is an identifier or label, the way that her friend Ranyinudo suggests that one can behave or not behave like an “Americanah,” shows fluidity in the term, the possibility of crossing-over in and out of it. It is not an immutable identity, for Ifemelu, in the same way that her being "Nigerian" is. It is interesting, then, though not puzzling, that Adichie would choose this as the title for the entire novel. It suggests the paradox of simultaneously claiming to be both wholly Nigerian and having the status of a transnational writer writing the transnational experiences of her characters.

In the novel, Ifemelu’s first blog, Raceteenth, is the most singular in subject. It sports post titles like “Not All Dreadlocked White American Guys Are Down” (Americanah 5) and “Job Vacancy in America—National Arbiter in Chief of ‘Who Is Racist’” (390). Ifemelu writes in that latter post, “Somebody has to be able to say that racists are not monsters. They are people with loving families, regular folk who pay taxes” (390). She cutting, insightful, and anecdotal, but despite the personal anecdotes in her race blog, in some ways, her second blog, The Small
*Redemptions of Lagos* is more personal. She decides that in *Redemptions* the “blog posts would be in a stark, readable font. An article about health care . . . with pictures of the packets of nameless medicine. A piece about the Nigerpolitan Club. A fashion article about clothes that women could actually afford. Posts about people helping others, but nothing like the Zoe stories that always featured a wealthy person, hugging children at a motherless babies’ home, with bags of rice and tins of powdered milk propped in the background” (*Americanah* 514). The blog is more varied, and she becomes connected to it in a way she was not to her first blog, or perhaps, that she could not sustain with her first blog. This blog, too, becomes intertwined in her relationship with Obinze. In one scene, after Obinze makes a remark about his “home” with his wife Kosi, Adichie writes, “It [the presence of Kosi, Obinze’s wife] was palpable and menacing in a way it had never been…She turned away from him, and flipped open her laptop to check on the blog” (*Americanah* 555). Her blog, and virtual space, are both immediately present in the intimacy of her physical life as well as intrinsically separate from it.

Additionally, this blog, to borrow Kenneth Harrow’s term, is the “suture” between fiction and reality with threads wound in each. It connects Adichie and Ifemelu ideologically beyond the relationship of author and character and creates the ability of simultaneous fiction and reality, a way for nonlinear reading in a literary context. Beginning in August 2014, Adichie began to write the blog *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* as an actual, real blog (see figs. 1-3), commenting on things like style, health, pop culture, and current events, all in the voice of character of Ifemelu, with some small purely fictional snippets thrown in about “Ifem & Ceiling.” Zemaye, with whom Ifemelu works on the magazine in Lagos in *Americanah*, even has a few guest posts on beauty. It is a bold move; a blog presumably does not have the same kind of editing process that a novel does; it is more immediate and reactionary. She writes about MAC
lipstick in the color “Be a Lady,” the President Goodluck Jonathan and his wife Patience, the Nigerian army, the leaking ceiling of the Lagos airport, the way Nigeria has handled Ebola, and remedies for facial breakouts. Its mere existence emphasizes the ways that Adichie has become and embraced her role as a public figure in the realms of politics, literature, and pop culture.
Adichie, in her blog, uses supplementary photographs that look as though she took them with a cell phone. She comments on small, political issues in real time, relating back to Macharia's view of blogs as a space to make claims, to be incendiary.
Adichie includes her sincere opinions in all realms of experience. She does not treat certain subjects, like fashion, as lesser in some way. Her parting advice for language in fashion applies also to her fiction. She inhabits the mind of her characters and the blog form and uses words like *oyibo*, the Yoruba word for a white person, without glossing.
Even for Adichie as author in the realm of the Internet, outside of her *Americanah* protagonist Ifemelu, virtual space becomes a place that encourages crossing-over between forms and genres and provides immediate conversation between writer and reader. Adichie has written...
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pieces across styles: a modern day fairytale about a girl with magical, natural hair, nonfiction essays, political stories like the one she wrote on Olikoye Ransome-Kuti--Fela Kuti's brother and health administrator and activist--commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, promoting childhood vaccinations and titled just "Olikoye." Adichie has given two TEDtalks, had a movie made of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and had a sampling of her feminism TEDtalk featured on international superstar and feminist, Beyoncé’s, most recent album, and written numerous blog posts. Lupita Nyong’o and David Oyelowo are set to play Ifemelu and Obinze in the forthcoming film version of *Americanah*. Adichie is setting a precedent for new ways of layering space both in her work and her life. She connects reality to fiction in bold ways. Though she pays homage to historical Nigerian literature, she is a new kind of contemporary author, one who is both literarily celebrated and a global political and pop cultural figure who still claims simply to be a Nigerian looking at the world from a Nigerian perspective. Her innovation of form is important in the context of global literature, which is increasingly focused on questions of the transnational and questions of space in a time when legitimate communities and ideologies are formed and maintained in virtual space as well as physical space.

**B. Feminine Space and Hair in *Americanah***

In conjunction with her use of cyberspace to promote a new type of simultaneous transnational narrative, Adichie examines the ways that other types of ideological space function within geographic and cyberspace. Her work is deftly intersectional, and gendered space, both in the United States and Nigeria, particularly interests her. Adichie has become a public figure in feminism internationally. In *Americanah*, questions of gender equality are prominent. In the short book adapted from her TEDtalk of the same name, *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie says her own definition of a feminist is "a man or a woman who says, yes, there's a problem with
gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better. All of us, women and men, must do better." She writes, "Gender matters everywhere in the world." Her definition is casual, intimate, and implicating. One motif, through which she confronts both race and gender intersectionally in *Americanah*, is the presence of hair, specifically black women's hair.

For Adichie, black women’s hair isn’t just hair, an adornment to the body. Perhaps this is what it should be, but it means more: It is a conversation with gender throughout history, about the social place of black women and their perceptions of themselves. In response to an interviewer, Adichie said that *Americanah* “is about love. But it is also about race and how we reinvent ourselves. And it is also about hair” (Kellaway). Subsequent interviewers probed the question of hair in the novel further, and it became a headlining part of the novel’s identity. Public Radio International titled an interview with Adichie, “Race, Identity, and Good Hair: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on Her New Novel, 'Americanah’.” Similar titles followed. The political implications of black women’s hairstyle choices, generally, have long been recognized and discussed, especially in the context of hair alteration. Of female bodies, following Foucault, Judith Butler writes, “the body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations” (117). Black women’s bodies are often seen and judged in a political space. In an article for *New African Woman*, Regina Jere-Malanda wrote, “Physically, socially, economically, and stylistically, black women’s hair is, indeed, not just hair,” (14). The list in the previous statement implies the conclusions of many researchers that black women’s hair becomes simultaneously a reality in physical space, a metaphor, and a reflection or rejection of dominant societal institutions. In *Americanah*, hair becomes significant both in physical space and in cyberspace.
Important to Adichie's examination of gender and racial space while writing about the U.S. are the cultural implications of black women’s hairstyles, which have deep roots in American history and the transatlantic slave trade. Shauntae Brown White observes, “since slavery, the color caste system within the African American community has perpetuated internalized racism” (297). By this caste system, she means that systematically since slavery American society values lighter skin, less "ethnic" facial features, and straight or wavy long hair (Brown White 297). Robinson notes, “similar to skin color, Black hair texture is graded—given a value ranging from good to bad” (359) and privileges hair that is more European in texture. This “bad” hair necessitates alteration.

Thus, in the early 20th century, C.J. Walker, who became a millionaire, sold her wide-toothed improvement on the hot comb and products for hair growth, the first time a black woman marketed this kind of product to other black women. She claimed many of her ingredients and processes came from Africa and thus were not just promoting white beauty ideals. As an example, Walker shows the complexity (not all negative) of the internalization of the previously perpetuated colonial ideas of beauty even within progress in black-owned businesses. In the 1960s, stylists promoted relaxers, or chemical straighteners, rather than hot combs, as a more convenient and less damaging way to straighten hair (Thompson 80). In the ‘80s, weaves introduced the idea that not only should hair be straight but long. Market research shows that though they make up 13 percent of the population, black Americans account for 30 percent of hair care spending in the U.S. (85). In 2011, Madame Noire, a popular self-described online "lifestyle site geared towards African-American women" published an article titled "What Spending Half a Trillion Dollars On Hair Care and Weaves Says About Us." In this article, the editor concludes that "no matter how you try to spin the debate – fashion fabulous hair is
connected to our need to be accepted by the dominate culture – as beautiful, as equal – as worthy."

Over the decades, advertisements predominately perpetuated these ideas of beauty and promoted the high dollar hair industry. Thompson says, “the issue is actually not about whether a woman weaves or relaxes her hair; it is about why that woman feels she has to…in the first place, and a lack of knowledge about the long-term effects” (87). Effects can include alopecia, burns, and again, large amounts of spent time and money. Reasons for treating hair regularly include many still-prevalent stereotypes and systematic and internalized prejudices within certain kinds of social spaces against natural black hair. In the workplace, employers have deemed many natural black hairstyles “unprofessional” or “distracting.” Several women have sued for being fired from companies over, or partly over, their hairstyle choices. For many African American women,

the choice to wear their hair natural is an act of resistance as they are ‘dis-identifying’ with the status quo. Second, women who make a conscious decision to wear their hair natural seek to find their own center and are acting as their own agents by constructing a new definition of beauty. (Brown White 300)

The choice is about agency. Scholar Cheryl Thompson does not deny that black women have the right to wear their hair in any fashion they choose; rather, she thinks that given the “damaging effects of hair alteration” women should criticize hair style choices in the context of “[juxtaposed] hegemonic [American] norms and black subjectivity,” (88).

It is important to also understand, in the context of Americanah, that black women’s hairstyle choices are not only a topic of consideration within Western and American power structures. They cross over, back and forth, transnationally. Many of the same beauty practices, like relaxing hair, are as prevalent in Nigeria as in the U.S. A precedent in literary space is the
1977 novel *The Slave Girl*. In this novel, Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta writes a scene in which her main character, Ojebeta, cut off all her hair in order to prevent a lock of it from being cut so that she can be married without her consent. Of Ojebeta, Emecheta writes,

> She sneaked to where Eze kept his shaving knife and shaved off every last vestige of hair on her head, then went out to the back of the hut and burned all the pieces. It upset her to do this, for she had been proud of her jet-black hair, which she had never been allowed to grow as she wanted. (142)

She feels a profound loss of freedom in this act, because it is a choice she makes out of desperation rather than reclamation, but it is the only act of agency she has. In the context of colonialism and globalization, black women’s hair becomes a transnational discourse.

As illustrated by this scene, Adichie speaks intertextually with writers who have preceded her even on the topic of black female hair. Ojebeta's act in *The Slave Girl* seems, at least in its execution if not motivation, is similar to a recollection Ifemelu has of her mother. In *Americanah*, the hair salon is an important space of intersection between race and femininity. During one of Ifemelu's visits to the braiding salon, Ifemelu's memory prompts her to recall her mother. Ifemelu’s mother provides a new dimension to the examination of hair from a Nigerian perspective as it intersects with colonially imposed and patriarchal institutions. The salon space allows Adichie to cross over into this memory. Adichie writes, “Ifemelu had grown up in the shadow of her mother’s hair” (49). Her mother had beautiful, thick, perfectly styled and relaxed hair that Ifemelu envied. Until one day, after again converting to a new Christian church from Catholicism, her mother came home and “handful by handful, chopped off all her hair” and then burned it, like Ojebeta, in the backyard along with some Catholic religious objects. When speaking of her conversion by a new preacher, “her mother’s words were not hers” (*Americanah* 50). Her act of agency, cutting her hair, still occurred within a complex institution, like the scene
in Buchi Emecheta’s novel. However, it has sacred significance. It seems to imply that changing hair connects to changing identity. There is the economic question: who owns black women's hair? Ifemelu cries for her mother’s hair. She says, “After that afternoon, her God…became exacting. Relaxed hair offended him,” (Americanah 49). After a while and another conversation, her mother let her hair grow again. Adichie was ten at this time, and yet remembers this incident clearly. This memory of her mother’s hair shows the importance of hair in the connection between generations, of mother and daughter, and between the U.S. and Nigeria. It also shows hair as a site of agency for a woman, even though that agency is complex and tangled within society. When her mother cuts off her hair, she is not just changing styles. From an early age, Ifemelu has learned that hair is significant.

As a part of this generational connection, Adichie wrote a short, contemporary "fairytale" online for The Guardian. In the fairytale, a well-off Nigerian little girl's father loses all their possessions--"His company. His homes. His cars."--to his friend Lugardson over a card game ("Hair"). Though the agreement was written on a napkin, a judge, Lugardson's crony, upholds the agreement, and gives the father one week to give Lugardson everything. Afterward, "the mother's greatest shame was her hair. It was matted, with thick clumps of natural undergrowth because relaxers and weaves were now unaffordable . . . and now she always wore a headscarf, even when alone." ("Hair"). The daughter, too, must let her natural hair grow, but in contrast to her mother she watches "in wonder as it grew back, soft and dense like wool . . . [she] lovingly untangled in every morning with her fingers" ("Hair"). To get their possession back, the family needs to find the physical copy of the agreement their father and Lugardson made. One day months later, after they all have failed to find the agreement, the daughter "heard the voice. It came from her hair. It was her hair. A voice that sounded like her late grandmother but was
somewhat perkier. The agreement is in Lugardson's air conditioner" ("Hair"). It is the daughter's hair that saves the day. After she tells her mother, her mother "then pulled off her scarf and touched her own hair in wonder" ("Hair"). Natural hair is the moving force of this whimsical fairytale, but it takes the daughter to reveal the value of the natural hair to her mother. It connects them. Again, in this story, Adichie connects present to past, mother to daughter, and writes a future that magically sheds past beauty constructions that have no real meaning to a more egalitarian present.

In Americanah, using images of hair and scenes related to the perception of black women’s hairstyles, Adichie illuminates American racism and the construction of “blackness” in an American and a global space. Scholar Shauntae Brown White writes, “This act [choosing to wear hair naturally] is a rhetorical act that challenges the dominant, Eurocentric ideologies about beauty,” (306). When she accepts her natural hair, Ifemelu seeks the support of Internet forums dedicated to natural hair and writes about her decision in her blog, a public platform.

Relationships in Americanah also contain certain forms of gendered space. In her intimate relationships, the internalized implications of beauty norms manifest in Ifemelu’s insecurity about her hair, and her eventual acceptance of her natural hair rejects these norms. When Ifemelu’s hair begins to fall out from the overuse of chemicals, she is in the United States as a student. Her Kenyan university friend Wambui from the African Students Association tells her,

‘It’s the chemicals,’ . . . ‘You can wear an Afro or braids like you used to. There’s a lot you can do with natural hair.’ . . . ‘Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you. You didn’t go running with Curt [Ifemelu’s white American boyfriend-at-the-time] today because you don’t want to sweat out this straightness. That picture you sent me, you had your hair covered on the boat. You’re always battling to make your hair do what it wasn’t meant to do. If you go
natural and take good care of your hair, it won’t fall off like it’s doing now . . . No need to think about it too much.  (Americanah 257-258)

And so she does it: she lets Wambui cut off her hair. However, she immediately has an anxiety-ridden reaction to how she looks. It surprises her. She goes out with a hat on her head and considers buying a wig. She calls in sick to work. Her white boyfriend Curt doesn’t understand why she is so upset, but how could he understand? She lets her hair, of all things, dictate even the way that she occupies public space: she won't go running; she has to cover her hair on the boat.

After this, Wambui suggests in a text message that Ifemelu check out the website “HappilyKinkyNappy.com.” Ifemelu is with Curt when she receives the message, and she goes to check the website on Curt’s laptop, and Curt immediately becomes defensive about something, trying to explain before Ifemelu sees. Minimized in the computer corner is proof that he is email-cheating on Ifemelu. She says to him, “‘All your girlfriends had long flowing hair,’” (Americanah 261). This is the first thing that occurs to her. Significantly, it takes her time to break up with him; she doesn't do it right away. Societal norms manifest in her insecurity about the hair of Curt’s girlfriends and in Curt’s ignorance of the significance of her haircut.

Further, Adichie overtly comments on the stereotypes people have about black female hair and natural hair in the workplace. When Ifemelu does go back to work after she lets Wambui cut her hair, someone asks her if it’s a political decision, as if by its nature her black natural hair must be making a political, rather than aesthetic, statement. She replies only with a no. Someone else asks her if she’s a lesbian. Adichie also notes that later, when Ifemelu resigns from her job to go back to Nigeria, someone asks her if she got fired, and if so, whether she thinks her hair was part of the reason. In this professional space, race, gender, and hair, affect the ways that coworkers see Ifemelu.
And it is not only white patriarchy that enforces these stereotypes about female black hair; they are institutionalized and perpetuated also by black men. As she does in other ways, Adichie use virtual space as an alternate, empowered space for women to challenge beauty norms and build community. This conjures up the consciousness-raising groups in early American feminism that bell hooks speaks of in *Feminism is for everybody: passionate politics*. Of these consciousness-raising groups, she writes, “It was the site where they [the women in the groups] uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. This confessional aspect served as a healing ritual.” For Ifemelu, the Internet provides a space that transcends geographic space and provides a strong, ideological feminist and anti-racist community.

While she is out walking with Curt one day, after Ifemelu has begun to wear her hair naturally, a black man on the street calls out and asks Ifemelu if she ever wonders why Curt likes her “‘looking all jungle like that’” (Adichie 263). After this hurtful incident, Ifemelu finally does go to the website that Wambui recommends. She sees thumbnail photos of black women in the forums with “long trailing dreadlocks, small Afros, big Afros, twists, braids, massive raucous curls and coils” (*Americanah* 262). They “sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal” (*Americanah* 263). The contrast between these two types of space--public and virtual--displays the disparity of gender and race expectations in different kinds of space, the ways that natural black hair is relegated to being some kind of "statement" rather than just what it is, natural.

**C. Geographic Space and Race**

In a scene between Ifemelu and Blaine, her African American Yale-professor boyfriend, Ifemelu says, “‘To be a child of the Third World is to be aware of the many different constituencies you have and how honesty and truth must always depend on context’”
(Americanah 396). To this Blaine replies, "'That is so lazy, to use the Third World like that'" (396). And, perhaps there is some truth to Blaine's question of Ifemelu's use of 'Third World'; however, Ifemelu is aware of her many constituencies and the ways her current contextual situation affects her honesty.

On the level of social theme in Americanah, Adichie's main concern is the treatment of race and the language and narratives that surround race in the United States, specifically ideas of "blackness." In addition to her discussion of nationalism, Adichie explores how geographic spaces and physical social spaces manifest certain ideologies about race. When Ifemelu meets a stylish Haitian poet at a dinner party while she is with Blaine, a poet who says she never had issues with race when she dated a white man in California, Ifemelu tells her this account of her own experience is a lie, something comfortable. She says,

I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. (Americanah 359)

Already in this statement is a separation of space: private and public, and the setting of her conversation, a dinner party, is a perfect melding of the two kinds of space. Even in private space between two people, the idea that love erases the public implications of race is somewhat artificial. Ifemelu tells the poet, "We don't even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we're worried they will say we're overreacting" (359). She internally criticizes Curt, her white ex-boyfriend, for his sporadic perceptiveness about the ways people see race. In this examination of race, too, Ifemelu treats, to a degree, class. She understands that the people who give her funny looks when she is out with Curt associate the dark color of her skin with a lower socio-economic class. They not only
assume she is not Curt's girlfriend because he is white but also because of the "kind of white he is], the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete's body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money" (362). In this, she challenges the true presence of the ideology of socio-economic mobility that is a part of the American national pride.

Outside of intimate relationships, Adichie also looks at intersections of race and class (and gender) in other more concrete locations in the U.S.: hair salons. In the beginning of the novel, related to black female hair, comes the insight that Ifemelu did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair (see fig. 4). It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton— the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could not imagine them wearing braids— and yet as she waited at Princeton Junction station for the train, on an afternoon ablaze with heat, she wondered why there was no place where she could braid her hair. (3-4)

Within physical space, salons are a significant part of the geography of Ifemelu’s story. Hair salons are social spaces and spaces where people make decisions about their bodies the way their bodies convey or don't convey their identities. The salon that Ifemelu must go to is geographically isolated from the hub of knowledge and privilege of which Ifemelu is a part, Princeton. In Trenton, she goes to the salon of two sisters, Halima and Mariam, from Mali, and Aisha, from Senegal. But besides the location of the salon as a physical manifestation of the structural disparities in race in the U.S., it is also a site of physical
transnational community. The other significant, physical transnational community that Ifemelu participates in in the United States is the African Students Association at the university, and so, in some ways, the salon is a more socio-economically inclusive (and gendered) version of that community and represents even further Ifemelu's fluidity as a character.

As shown through Aisha, a Senegalese woman who does Ifemelu's hair, "hair braiding has become the leading profession of Senegalese female immigrants in North America" (Babou 3). Babou writes, "in the diaspora, economic success is becoming the defining element of social status," dissolving, to a degree among the Senegalese immigrants the traditional Wolof hierarchy and caste system but still maintaining a hierarchy under the informal U.S. racial and economic caste system, showing that the U.S. does have a kind of caste system (4). In this space, Adichie characterizes Aisha with stilted English and a certain naivety, but she does not make her a caricature; Ifemelu simply scrutinizes Aisha the way she speaks and thinks of the other characters in the novel. She does not pity Aisha for being in a lower class. From Ifemelu, a lack of scrutiny would be a lack of respect. Aisha has a pragmatic but also artistic approach to her braiding. When Ifemelu refuses Aisha's recommendation for a certain color of her hair extensions, Aisha "shrugged, a haughty shrug, as though it was not her problem if her customer did not have good taste" (Americanah 14-15). Adichie writes Aisha as a brazen and unapologetic character.

And yet the space of the salon is important because it is a space of familiarity but also tension. Though it is a transnational space, like Adichie's character in "The Thing Around Your Neck," the women in the salon seem to have bought into their single stories, single stories of Igbo people, single stories of America; the space reveals the way that Ifemelu prioritizes her Nigerian identity over any sort of pan-African identity. Even when Ifemelu asks Aisha where her
sister is, Aisha says "Africa" rather than "Benin." Ifemelu responds, somewhat accusing, "'Why do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you mean?' . . . Aisha clucked. 'You don't know America. You say Senegal and American people, they say, Where is that?' . . . and then asked, as if Ifemelu could not possibly understand how things were done here, 'How long you in America?'" (Americanah 18) At this point, Ifemelu has been in America for more than a decade; she is leaving. Furthermore, the women expect a kind of solidarity from Ifemelu, that she will agree with them in the salon, "in this shared space of their Africanness," but she does not give this to them freely (Americanah 126). She is critical, analyzing. After Aisha asks her why she lives in Princeton, she says,

'I've just finished a fellowship,' . . . knowing that Aisha would not understand what a fellowship was, and in the rare moment that Aisha looked intimidated, Ifemelu felt a perverse pleasure. Yes, Princeton. Yes, the sort of place that Aisha could only imagine, the sort of place that would never have signs that said QUICK TAX REFUND; people in Princeton did not need quick tax refunds. (Americanah 11)

Though she is quickly remorseful, Ifemelu reveals in this moment her awareness of her position within the space of the salon, the transnational education that facilitates her transnational hyper-awareness. The women at the salon do not understand why she would go back to Nigeria simply because she missed it; they are more rooted in economic pragmatism than ideology or sentimentalty, i.e. Ifemelu's national ideology and her ever-lingering romantic love for Obinze. But, in allowing readers to see Ifemelu's quick judgments, Adichie gives a fairer portrait of the real characters of the women in the salon and of Ifemelu as less than perfect or championing; her realism and unapologetic speech actually avoid stereotyping. Again, in this way, Adichie speaks to the nationalism of the 50s and 60s, speaks to and beyond Achebe.

In Achebe's essay, "Thoughts on the African Novel," he writes, "Africa is not only a
geographical expression; it is also a metaphysical landscape— it is in fact a view of the world and of the whole cosmos perceived from a particular position." He writes, further in the essay, "I have no doubt at all about the existence of the African novel." In another famous essay, "The Novelist as Teacher," collected in the same book, he states, "Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important, but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don’t see that the two need be mutually exclusive." Adichie does see her nationalism as a lens, something more than a geographic expression, but I think she would claim this more of Nigeria than of Africa as any kind of whole. Her nationalism is very specific, feminine, proud, optimistic and yet still critical of Nigeria in a familial sort of way. The nationalism is something Adichie, necessitated by her transnational status, has created, rather than passively assumed. Adichie does not seem to be a pan-Africanist or Afropolitan, nor does she view herself as a national teacher. If she viewed herself as foremost a teacher, she would be perhaps playing into the singularity that she speaks against. Instead, she is a voice. The stories she writes are real and specific and borrow directly from her life. She does not view herself as a person removed from her work or someone with any kind of wisdom or knowledge that her characters lack. With the trenchant style and subject of her prose, Adichie openly invites discourse on the subjects, which she feels passionately about.

In another scene in *Americanah* in the same hair salon, a young white woman, the "aggressively friendly" Kelsey, comes in to have her hair braided (*Americanah* 232) because she is going to *Africa*, to Kenya and the Congo and maybe Tanzania (*Americanah* 233). When Kelsey asks what Ifemelu is reading, Ifemelu thinks that she "did not want to start a conversation. Especially not with Kelsey." In Kelsey, "She recognized . . . the nationalism of liberal Americans who copiously criticized America but did not like you to do so; they expected
you to be silent and grateful, and always reminded you of how much better than wherever you had come from America was" (*Americanah* 232-233). However, the physical proximity and social space of the salon facilitates and almost forces Ifemelu and Kelsey to have a conversation. Kelsey remarks that the book *A Bend in the River* made her truly understand modern Africa, and Ifemelu challenges her and says that she finds the book more about a man’s yearning for Europe than about Africa at all. The ambiguity of her life and even her own feeling in the moment give her a headache. She thinks, "She could have blogged about Kelsey, too, this girl who somehow believed that she was miraculously neutral in how she read books, while other people read emotionally" (*Americanah* 234). Adichie allows literary space to become apart of the salon space, and Kelsey's transnational mobility contrasts to the other forms of transnational experience in the room.

Another incident in which Adichie uses geographic and social space to reveal something about the false political correctness that surrounds race in America occurs in a clothing store. This is an incident drawn directly from Adichie's own life. Soon after Ifemelu comes to America, she goes with her friend Ginika, who is buying a dress for a party. In the store there are two sales clerks, "one . . . chocolate-skinned, her long black weave highlighted with auburn, the other . . . white, inky hair floating behind her" (*Americanah* 154). After Ginika has picked out her shiny, shapeless dress and goes to pay, the cashier asks,

'Did anybody help you?'

'Yes,' Ginika said.

'Cheley or Jennifer?'

'I'm sorry, I don’t remember her name.' Ginika looked around, to point at her helper, but both young women had disappeared into the fitting rooms at the back.

'Was it the one with long hair?' the cashier asked.
'Well, both of them had long hair.'
'The one with dark hair?' Both of them had dark hair. Ginika smiled and looked at the cashier and the cashier smiled and looked at her computer screen, and two damp seconds crawled past before she cheerfully said, 'It’s okay, I’ll figure it out later and make sure she gets her commission.' (Americanah 154-155)

When Ifemelu, who hadn't been in the U.S. long asks why the woman didn't just ask whether it was the black or the white girl, Ginika replies that "this is America. You’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things" (Americanah 155). In this scene, she critiques the false "colorblindness" that dictates public American social interactions.

Furthermore, Adichie uses physically private space in Americanah to bring an intimacy, though at times a hostile form of intimacy, to Ifemelu's social encounters surrounding her race and her femininity. After Ifemelu has been in the U.S. for only a short amount of time, she begins to run out of options for money, and she must pay her bills. She answers an advertisement for a "Female personal assistant for busy sports coach in Ardmore, communication and interpersonal skills required" (Americanah 176). After she arrives at his house, she has the sudden understanding of the significance of the fact that she "was now alone with a strange man in the basement of a strange house in America" (Americanah 176). He tells her that the office position has been filled, but he still needs someone to help him relax. He will pay her one hundred dollars a day. She is sorry that she has come, and she asks him if she can think about it and call him. As she walks to the train station, "The crisp air, fragrant and dry, reminded her of Nsukka during the harmattan season, and brought with it a sudden stab of homesickness, so sharp and so abrupt that it filled her eyes with tears" (Americanah 177).

After more fruitless job searching, her friend Ginika gives her a lead on a babysitting job, and she goes for an interview. They drive up to "a house that announced its wealth, the stone exterior solid and overbearing, four white pillars rising portentously at the entrance" (179).
Kimberly, and her visiting sister Laura, come to the door. They are both "thin and straight and blond" (*Americanah* 180). Kimberly meets her, enthusiastic, and chirps about the fact that she must come from such a *rich* culture, that her name is *beautiful*. Adichie writes that "Ifemelu would come to realize later that Kimberly used 'beautiful' in a peculiar way . . . and always, the women she referred to [as beautiful] would turn out to be quite ordinary-looking, but always black" (*Americanah* 180). She sees ignorance in Kimberly, but also a kind of innocence, what Obinze called "*obi ocha. A clean heart*" (*Americanah* 181). Laura, Kimberly's sister, chimes in to needle and push at Ifemelu's experience and qualifications; the tensions between the sisters are evident. They take a tour through the house, look at pictures of Kimberly's family, always smiling, in far away places like India. Ifemelu also later understands that "Kimberly . . . could not conceive of poor people being vicious or nasty because their poverty had canonized them, and the greatest saints were the foreign poor" (*Americanah* 184). When Kimberly's husband Don appears, early and unexpected, he tells Ifemelu of the time he nearly visited Nigeria when "he worked as a consultant to an international development agency . . . [and] had been hoping to go to the shrine and see Fela perform" (*Americanah* 184). She notes, "He mentioned Fela casually, intimately, as though it was something they had in common, a secret they shared. There was, in his storytelling, an expectation of successful seduction" (*Americanah* 185). Though Kimberly tells Ifemelu, she seems like a fit, Ginika calls the next day to tell her that Kimberly has chosen someone else. When she struggles to pay her rent, she calls the tennis coach, and he tells her she can start right away. She tells herself she can still maintain certain boundaries, but when she arrives and hears the man's tone, "she felt defeated" (*Americanah* 189). He knew she would stay because she had come. And, "Afterwards, she lay still . . . deadened. He had not forced her. She had come here on her own. . . . when he placed her hand between his legs, she had curled and
moved her fingers" (*Americanah* 189). She is sickened by her complaisance; she knows "she should never have gone there" (*Americanah* 190). After this, she cannot make herself call Obinze, although she listens to him say "I love you" in a voicemail and his "voice seemed suddenly so far away, part of another time and place" (*Americanah* 191). Crossing into the man's house detached her from her home. She sinks into a depression, though refuses to call it such, as it is a transitory state and one that is not spoken of in Nigeria. She stops going to classes and stays in her room. Ginika finally pulls her out of her house, after Kimberly calls and offers Ifemelu the babysitting job, because the other sitter is leaving. She takes care of Taylor, the eager boy, and Morgan, the sullen and perceptive, almost-teenager. One day, while she is babysitting, a man comes to clean the carpets, and Ifemelu opens the front door. Upon seeing her he makes a somewhat hostile expression because, "he thought she was a homeowner, and she was not what he had expected to see in this grand stone house with white pillars" (204). His face turns cheery when he realizes that she, too, is only "the help." She remembers the man, and later, she writes a blog post entitled "'Sometimes in America, Race is Class'" (*Americanah* 205). In this post, Ifemelu writes, "*In America’s public discourse, “Blacks” as a whole are often lumped with “Poor Whites.” Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites*" (*Americanah* 205). It is in the private space of the home that these kind of assumptions become most apparent.

Back in the beginning of the novel, when Ifemelu first arrives in the U.S., she stays with Aunty Uju and her cousin Dike. The first night of her arrival, after [Dike] and Aunty Uju got into bed and Ifemelu settled on a blanket on the floor, he said, 'How come she has to sleep on the floor, Mom? We can all fit in,' as though he could sense how Ifemelu felt. There was nothing wrong with the arrangement—she had, after all, slept on mats when she visited her grandmother in the village— but this was America at last, glorious America at last, and she had not expected to bed on the floor. (129-130)
In this first experience of private, American space, the space that is closest to Nigeria in that she is with family, she experiences her first disappointment of America. She realizes that much of the grandeur of "glorious America" is public, media-fueled and class-based. She is still inextricably tied to Nigeria.

In its framework, the geographic scope of the novel is vast. In addition to using private space in the U.S. to uncover the way race relations work on an American national level, Adichie also includes two other national spaces and their relations to race: Nigeria, necessarily, and England. In addition to Ifemelu's story, Adichie follows Obinze's narrative while he is separate from Ifemelu. Since he cannot get a visa to the U.S. after the post-9/11 heightened security, he goes to the London as an undocumented worker. Though she is somewhat more dramatic and unrealistic in her portrayal of this section of narrative, Adichie nevertheless manages to pull off a text that has an unusually large, triangular transnational scope, a feat most authors do not attempt.

And, it is this ambitious breadth, which Adichie imbues in all of her works, both short and long, that marks her as an important figure of contemporary Nigerian and transnational literature. She crosses back and forth between simultaneous spaces--literary, physical, virtual and gendered--with ease and fluidity. To again borrow Harrow's term, she "sutures" fiction and reality and presents a double consciousness that challenges even the continued relevance of hybridity theories in postcolonialism. Though this double consciousness has plenty of historical precedence in literature, Adichie is among the writers pushing it conceptually into the 21st century of transnationalism. She is immediate, outspoken and aware of her own status. Adichie is digital, popular, but still intellectual. To conclude with her call for multiplicity in both criticism and literature: "The consequence of a single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our
recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" ("The danger of a single story").
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Fig. 3. Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "Ifem and Ceiling 2." *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*. 4 Sep. 2014. Web.

Fig. 4. "Princeton Junction to Trenton, NJ." *Google Maps*. 1 Mar. 2015. Web.


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