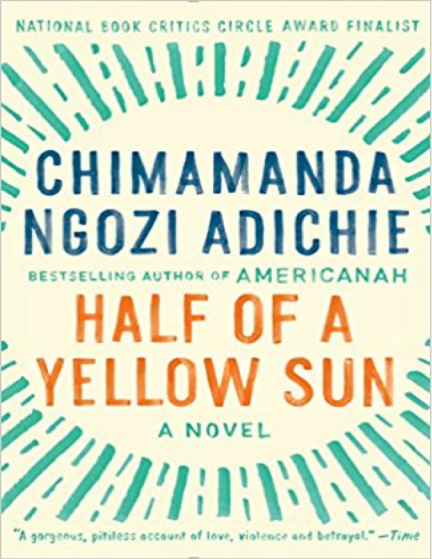
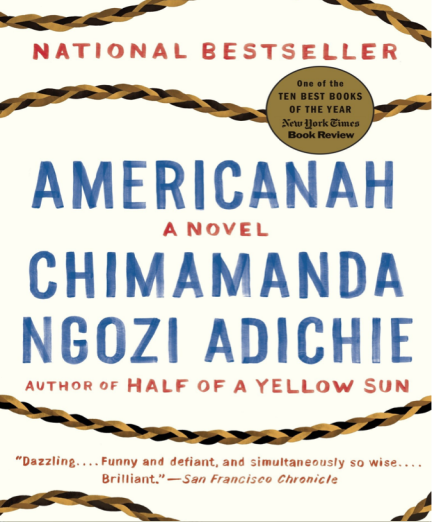


By Madison Behrend Vaughn

# **“The Grittiness of Being Human”**

**Individualizing Sexual Expectations in Adichie’s Novels**



# THESIS STATEMENT:

I will argue that sex serves many purposes in Adichie's novels and that these varied purposes allow her to detach the expectation of motherhood from women's sexual experience and give validity to other sexual experiences for women, while acknowledging the roadblocks to full potential liberation of female sexual experience.

# Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



## About

- Igbo-Nigerian author
- Nationalist and feminist novels

## Quotes

- “The danger of a single story”: stereotypes
- “The grittiness of being human” shown in characters “who have sex and eat food and laugh...who are fierce consumers of life”

# Cultural Background: Women Igbo Writers & Sex

## Other Novels Written by Women Igbo Writers:

Buchi Emecheta & Flora Nwapa

- Important for women to bear children
- Negative and Positive sexual experiences all with the objective of pregnancy

## Cultural Expectations:

Igbo

- Sex = marital responsibility or childbirth
- Women still had public power but the motherhood expectation remained

## Colonizing Powers (England)

- Introduction of Victorian values
- Demolition of women's political groups ("mikiri")

# Quick Summary of Novels

## HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

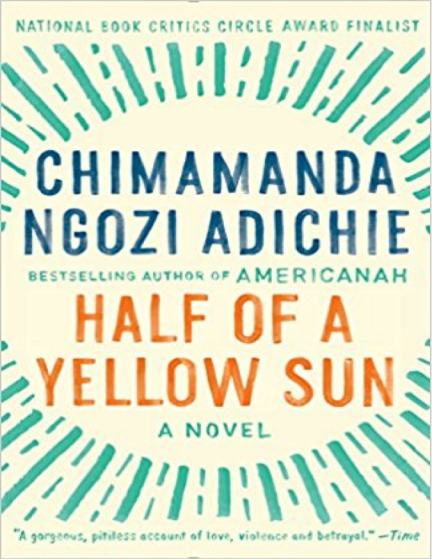
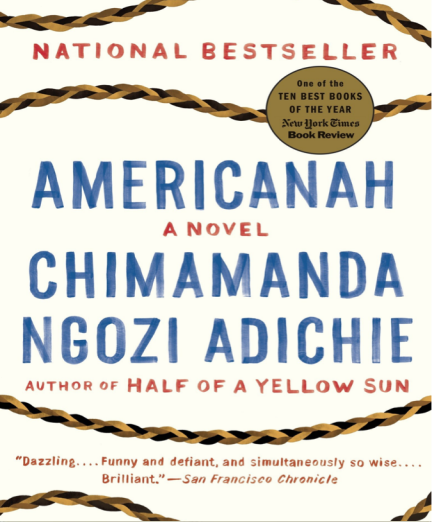
Tracks two adult relationships and a coming-of-age experience in the midst of the Biafran War and the characters' descent into poverty conditions.

Sexual Context: provides metaphor for the violent change of war times, examines the relationship between traditional and modern values, and tracks changing priorities and connections

## AMERICANAH

Follows the story of a Nigerian-American immigrant, Ifemelu, as she tries to gain success in work and relationships in America.

Sexual context: exploration of interracial/international relationships, of fantasy vs. reality, and of changing cultural expectations



# THESIS STATEMENT:

I will argue that sex serves many purposes in Adichie's novels and that these varied purposes allow her to detach the expectation of motherhood from women's sexual experience and give validity to other sexual experiences for women, while acknowledging the roadblocks to full potential liberation of female sexual experience.

# Why does Adichie detach sexual experience from expectations of motherhood?

- 1) Show complexity of human experience
- 2) Uplift individual experience
- 3) Caution about unhealthy sexual relations
- 4) Critique fantasy expectations

# Example

Uplifting female characters and  
separating motherhood from sexual  
experience

“Baby” is not the product of Olanna and Odenigbo’s sex, and remains unconnected to Olanna’s positive sexual experiences with her partner.

“We’ll keep her...she startled herself by how clearly she had articulated the desire to keep the baby and how right it felt” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 314).

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# Example

Cautioning about existing patriarchal structures

Sexual freedom taken to exploitative degrees: Ifemelu is desperate for work in America and feels trapped in the expectation that she will submit to a man who will give her 'work.'

"She was already here, already tainted...she did not want to be here"  
(*Americanah* 189)

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# **Concluding Comments**