

# Sex and Sexuality in the Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

by

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## Abstract

More often than not, the themes in African novels revolve around sociological issues like bad leadership, corruption, economic hardship, religious hypocrisy, female subjection, etc., and the attendant criticism of these works take into cognisance mostly these themes. Depictions of sex within the narrative, when they exist, are either frowned at or considered inconsequential. New Nigerian fiction has particularly faced much criticism from older generation of critics, especially Charles Nnolim, for being a literature of the “flesh”. This paper examines sexual activity in the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, beginning from *Purple Hibiscus* through *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*, noting how they reflect the author’s attitude about sex and sexuality.

## Sex and Freedom in *Purple Hibiscus*

*Purple Hibiscus* is a novel about growth, and thus, a story of maturation. It chronicles the transition from self-ignorance to self-discovery and self-awareness. Most critical readings however focus on Kambili’s discovery of her “voice”, emphasising the psychological independence she achieves and de-emphasising the very vital part of her person that finds expression later in a sexual metamorphoses. The regime under her father had not only prevented her from speaking her mind but also from feeling her own body. As a teenage girl, this is perhaps the most heinous abuse the father could have doled out to her. Teenage years are particularly unforgettable for many people because they represent their transition from childhood to adulthood. The sexual hormones at this time work overtime, and it is the sole privilege of the teenager to feel the rush of these hormones and deal with them. Success or failure in this very fundamental issue goes a long way in determining the sexual and/or mental health of an individual later in life. What Papa Eugene thus denied Kambili is a chance to recognise her sexuality, a chance to realise that she is female and at some point or the other may have an interest in a male.

It might seem to the casual reader that Papa Eugene's sole reason for being so callous to his own children stems from a purely religious desire to keep them away from sin. But it becomes evident that his callousness emanates from a desire not let the children experience the bodily pleasure he was denied by the priests while growing up. He therefore assumes that any opportunity or little freedom given to his children would be spent in pursuance of such pleasures. He then does not only lock up their minds, but he also locks up their bodies. A case in point is the episode where Jaja asks for the key to his room after he had just returned from Aunt Ifeoma's place, pleading for a need to have some privacy. The reaction of the father to this request is noteworthy. He automatically assumes that Jaja is only seeking an opportunity to indulge in sexual pleasure with himself: "What? What do you want privacy for? To commit a sin against your own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?" (198). It is amazing that he thinks that a child he had taken such care to give "sound" religious upbringing would not think of anything else to do in privacy but to masturbate. This is most likely because it is what he would have done at that age and with such opportunity. Thus, he wasn't imprisoning the children because he wanted them to be holy, but instead because he feared that they were too much like him. For example, after he had poured hot water on Kambili and Jaja's feet for staying in the same house with his father (whom he considered a heathen), he explains to Kambili that:

"I committed a sin against my own body once," he said. "And the good father, the one I lived with while I went to St. Gregory's, came in and saw me. He asked me to boil water for tea. He poured the water in a bowl and soaked my hand in it...I never sinned against my own body again. The good father did that for my own good," he said. (203)

Hence, Eugene attempts to justify his abuse because his fear is that one level of freedom would only lead to another, and would allow the children to discover a pleasure that had been denied to him. It can also be seen that his arrested self-discovery is at the root of his psychological imbalance. He perhaps would have been a more responsible father if he had been allowed to encounter and deal with the torrent of teenage passion on his own. And if for nothing else, he would have known how to guide his children through the rites of passage of teenage years. Here, it is also not unlikely that his abuse of his family is a vengeful act for what the priest had done to him when he was young and dependent. But now that he had become older and richer and able to wield control in his family, his demons are released to punish the innocent for the sins of others. And consequently, his wife bears the most pain in this abuse because she is the one closest to him, the most dependent on him, and yet grateful to him because he decided not to marry another wife.

As mentioned, Eugene's callousness is couched in the garb of religion, and in his view, anything that draws attention to the body or makes it attractive to look at is considered sin. Kambili therefore must cover her long and beautiful hair; she must conceal her lovely athletic legs; she must in no way embellish her face; and she must not look at the nakedness of another person, male or female, for all these were considered sin.

Furthermore, attention was to be totally drawn away from the body, from sexuality. This is why *Purple Hibiscus* is seen as an indictment against that fanatic brand of Catholicism – or any other religion that seeks to suppress the development of the total human in the name of “holiness.”

Kambili’s discovery of herself evolves in gradual phases. First, she learns to look at the nakedness of another human like her by staring at Papa-Nnukwu’s naked form while watching him pray. She stands fascinated at his nakedness, even taking particular note “that his nipples were like dark raisins nestled among the sparse grey tufts of hair on his chest” (176). This is a far cry from her initial reaction at the sight of someone’s nakedness. Seeing Amaka undress on her very first day in Aunt Ifeoma’s house, she could only imagine that she “looked liked a Hausa goat: brown, long, and lean” (25), a rather unusual comparison stemming from her non-familiarity with such a sight. Of course, she quickly looks away because “it was sinful to look upon another person’s nakedness” (125-6). However, after only a few days in the house, she peeps at Papa-Nnukwu and confesses: “I did not look away, although it was sinful to look at another person’s nakedness” (175). Kambili’s initial reaction is not surprising, considering that she had even been brought up not to look at herself, or much more to look at someone else. As much as she wanted to, she couldn’t bring herself to look at and admire herself in shorts because it would be vanity, and “vanity was a sin.”(187). It is worthy to note that Kambili becomes well on her way to emancipation only when she becomes comfortable with her own body and conscious of that of others. Her fast movement towards the break from the mental chains her father had put on her is premised majorly on her decision to lay aside her religiosity and let her body respond to the attractiveness of another person.

Undoubtedly, we also learn that Kambili’s attraction to Father Amadi is from the very beginning a physical one. During his second visit to Aunt Ifeoma’s, she notices “the way his hair lay in wavy curls on his head, like the ripples in a stream” (170). By the time he comes to pick her up for the soccer game, her awareness of him had graduated:

His shorts seemed longer the last time I saw him in them, well past his knees. But now they climbed up to expose a muscular thigh sprinkled with dark hair. The space between us was too small, too tight. I was always a penitent when I was close to a priest at confession. But it was hard to feel penitent now... I could not focus on my sins, could not think of anything except how near he was” (182).

There is no doubt that it is Kambili’s never-to-be-consummated attraction to Father Amadi that helps in unlocking her potentials. His notice of her legs made her join the volleyball group on the second day of school, in spite of the whispers and ridiculing laughter from her fellow students. In fact, her recovery after the near-fatal beating her father gave her can be attributed to the effect of Father Amadi. Even though she felt life “slipping out of me, slipping away...”, she didn’t let go because essentially “I wanted to keep my eyes open, wanted to see Father Amadi, to smell his cologne, to hear his voice”(219).

Adichie therefore juxtaposes the Catholicism of Father Benedict and Papa Eugene with that of Father Amadi, and amongst several other things, demonstrates a major difference in their willingness to acknowledge the role that sex and sexuality play in the life of humankind. Father Benedict and Papa Eugene's religion taught Kambili never to admire herself, to cover up anything that made her attractive as a woman, thus causing her to suffer low self-esteem. Father Amadi's Catholicism on the other hand, recognises the woman in Kambili and acknowledges the need for her to utilise her potentials to the fullest. It is this kind of religion that Adichie preaches: a religion that does not stifle that major part of an individual's personality. Hence, Adichie raises this crucial concern in another dimension through the character of Amaka as she plays with the possibility of having optional celibacy, or at least, part-time celibacy where priests would be permitted to fornicate once in a while, say, once a month or any other stipulated time. Thus, suggesting that even for a priest, religion should not demand the absolute sacrifice of the sexual component of his being. The forbidden nature of sex in the life of the priest is symbolised by the Allamanda flower. Father Amadi asks Kambili: "Is this the flower you can suck? The one with the sweet juices?" Kambili unwittingly provides the answer to his dilemma in the words: "No. It's ixora you suck" (273). Sexual relationship was forbidden him by reason of his vocation. For a committed priest like him, its consequences for his conscience would be grave. As attractive and tempting as it might seem, it is not the ixora. It would eventually turn out bitter in his mouth.

In spite of the centrality of the concern for sex in the novel, it is noteworthy that Adiche does not dwell on explicit descriptions of the act. In fact, the word sex is only mentioned thrice in the entire novel and it is in a reported speech by Amaka towards the end. Kambili's growing sexual awareness is not expressed erotically but in a simple, innocent, and chastely manner. It is thus easy for the casual reader to miss the intensity of Kambili's feelings. It would elude the reader how such an innocent statement as "you have good legs for running. You should practice more" can evoke in the mind anything sexual. To Kambili, "it seemed too close, too intimate, to have his eyes on my legs, on any part of me" (183). Sexual anticipation is expressed very simply as in "His body touching mine was tense and delicious" (776). It is also subtly expressed with metaphors as in "He picked up the water bottle, drank deeply from it. I watched the ripples in his throat as the water went down. I wished I were the water, going into him, to be with him" (231). The lack of pornographic descriptions does not take anything away from the intensity of the sexual tension in the following lines. Indeed, it seems to add to the image of foreplay, only in an abashed manner:

Father Amadi ran his hand over the loosening braids, in gentle, smoothing motions. He was looking right into my eyes. He was too close. His touch was so light I wanted to push my head toward him, to feel the pressure of his hand. I wanted to press his hand to my head, my belly, so he could feel the warmth that coursed through me. (232).

The only part containing anything bothering on overtly sexual contact is found on page 280, towards the end of the book: “He leaned over the gear and pressed his face to mine. I wanted our lips to meet and hold, but he moved his face away.”

Thus, sexual intents and encounters between Kambili and Father Amadi are so toned down that they are almost unrecognisable as such. Adichie’s attitude towards the depiction of sex is like that of a teenager who is at once fascinated with the idea and innocent about what it entails. She expresses deeply sexual emotions as if they do not proceed beyond the touching of hands.

It can be argued that Adichie’s depiction of sex is rather virginal because she is indeed Kambili. Written in the first person, *Purple Hibiscus* sees the world through the eyes of Kambili, a scarred teenager, battered under the religious restrictions of her father. She therefore would naturally, not possess explicit knowledge about sex and related issues. It is also true that if Adichie had been a writer of a different orientation, the sexual scenes might have been given more erotic quality instead of the innocent musing of a virgin as we see. Compared to latter Adichie, as would be done in this paper, it is evident that what we encounter in *Purple Hibiscus* is the beautiful piece of a writer still trying to find her voice. Like Kambili, stifled within the confines of fanatic Catholicism, Adichie tries to find her own unique voice from the shadows of such great writers as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Brenda Cooper observes that “three powerful intertexts frame *Purple Hibiscus*-Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood* and Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple*. These both consolidate and enrich Adichie’s integrated vision...” (7) As her writing attains the maturity evident in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she becomes bolder in the expression of sexual content. The “waters-testing” phase in her career was done with just one book, as she had gained reputation within and especially outside Africa as a writer of note. Teenagers in *Half of a Yellow Sun* about the same age as Kambili and Jaja are presented with such erotic boldness as to make Kambili’s fantasy seem like those of a nun.

### **Sex as Metaphor in *Half of a Yellow Sun***

Encountering *Half of a Yellow Sun* after reading *Purple Hibiscus*, any reader will be surprised at the sensuality of the characters, especially the sexual robustness of the young Ugwu. In a world of characters from very diverse ethnicities and nationalities, sex becomes a common denominator. It is one of those few things which they all, in spite of their many differences have in common. Adichie’s depiction of sex in this novel is conspicuously more graphic than that of *Purple Hibiscus*. Though not dwelling unnecessarily on details, the descriptions remain graphic enough to shock the reader who has sized up Adichie by her first novel. Many examples can be cited from the novel, but only a few shall be examined. Describing Ugwu’s nightly encounter with Chinyere, the writer narrates: “The light was off, and in the thin stream that came from the security bulb outside he saw the cone-shaped rise of her breasts as she pulled her blouse off,, untied the wrapper around her waist, and lay on her back...she was silent at first and then, hips thrashing, her hands tight around his back “(129).

The writer also describes rather graphically, the lovemaking between Olanna and Odenigbo:

She knelt down before him and unbuttoned his shirt to suck the soft-firm flesh of his belly. She felt the intake of breath when she touched his trousers' zipper. In her mouth, he was swollen stiff. (252).

She unbuckled his trousers. She did not let him take them off. She turned her back and leaned on the wall and guided him into her, excited by his surprise, by his firm hands on her hips. She knew she should lower her voice ...and yet she had no control over her own moans, over the raw primal pleasure she felt wave after wave... (289)

Apart from such explicitly described lovemaking, there is also some vulgarity and the use of words describing body parts, like penis etc. For example, when Olanna tells her cousin Arize about Odenigbo's infidelity, she calls him a "wild animal from Abba. His rotten penis will fall off soon" (229). Aunt Ifeka comments that "Odenigbo has done what all men do and has inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away" (230). And constant reference is made to Ugwu's fantasy about Nnesinachi's breasts and Eberechi's perfectly rounded buttocks. The reference to body parts in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a far cry from what obtains in *Purple Hibiscus* where the male organ is only referred to as "a limp cocoon."

The sexual content in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a deliberate attempt to underscore the humanity of the characters. In her essay, "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran experience", Adichie confesses: "I was determined to make my novel about what I like to think of as the grittiness of being human – a book about relationships...about people who have sex and eat food and laugh, about people who are fierce consumers of life" (50-51). It is worthy of note that the success and setbacks in the relationship between the main characters are predicated on sex. The conflict between Odenigbo and Olanna arises because Odenigbo sleeps with Amala; Olanna complicates it further by sleeping with Richard, who faces the consequence in Kanene's vengeful burning of his manuscript; Kainene's complicated relationship with Olanna, her twin, becomes even more so because of the betrayal. Sex thus becomes an ingredient for the theme of betrayal that permeates the entire novel. Almost all the characters are engaged in some form of betrayal of those who trust them and are dear to them – Odenigbo, Olanna, Richard, Susan, Chief Ozobia etc. Charles Nnolim extends the ramifications of the betrayal:

Northerners betray their Igbo neighbours and friends by killing them in an orgy of massacres...Biafra betrays Nigeria by its act of secession, and the Nigerian government betrays the Igbo living in the North by refusing to prosecute or punish the rampaging Northerners guilty of the crimes. The Yoruba betray the Igbo by harassing and even killing the Igbo among them in Lagos. And inside Biafra stories of saboteurs, real or imagined are rampant. (148).

Apart from the use of sex as a means of emphasising the humanity of the characters, it is also used to perform other symbolic functions. For example, the lovemaking episodes between Odenigbo and Olanna are a metaphor for the nature of their relationship: it is a relationship unlike the typical African man–woman relationship, a relationship in which the woman takes the lead. In the short passages quoted above, it is clearly evident that it is Olanna who initiates the lovemaking, Odenigbo only follows her lead. Just as in the lovemaking, Olanna calls the shots in matters such as whether or not to get married, whether or not to have a baby, whether or not to keep Amala’s child, when and where to have the wedding, etc.

Her assertiveness is enhanced by the fact that she is a well-educated woman who can hold her own anywhere in the world. The writer, however, attempts to balance Olanna’s control of the relationship with the idea that Odenigbo has some form of control over her emotions and she couldn’t stop needing him even if she wanted to. The emphasis on Odenigbo’s virility is also to show that he is no less of a man because of the power Olanna wields in the relationship.

For Ugwu and for many in the novel, sex symbolises a settlement for substitutes, a temporary filling of the space which only the absent desired can fill. In his clandestine activities with Chinyere, this is the motivation. He fantasises about Nnesinachi while having sex with Chinyere, who in turn calls a certain “Abonyi” in moments of ecstasy. In a period where the familiar world is falling apart and losing all sense of order, the characters resort to the one thing they have control over, the one excitement that is created of their own volition and with the merging of bodies aflame with passion and not bombs and bullets.

Sex, again, is a metaphor for oppression and exploitation in the novel. The several instances of exploitative sex in the novel are pointers to what obtains in the larger society, where a very few lord it over the majority and make themselves rich from the sufferings of others. Take for example, the Colonel who is offered Eberechi as a gift to change her brother’s posting. He must consider it a benefit he should enjoy by reason of his ability to grant their request. Even Ugwu and his fellow soldiers betray the ideals of freedom they are supposed to be fighting for and proceed to rape a helpless bar girl. That action, for which he would always be ashamed, emphasises the effect of the war on his personality. As his nickname rightly announced, he had metamorphosed from being a teacher, a builder of the future, to “Target Destroyer”, the destroyer of the innocence of helpless girls. Ojukwu, the ideologue and leader of the Biafrans is also said to imprison people on the charge of being saboteurs only so he can get to their wives. Father Marcel, the catholic priest, is not exempted. He uses his power to provide nourishment at the refugee camp as a means to make the young girls his sex slaves. Kainene is totally shocked when she discovers that he is responsible for Urenwa’s pregnancy: “‘Apparently I’ve been blind; she’s not the only one,’ Kainene said. ‘He fucks most of them before he gives them the crayfish that I slave to get here’” (408). Considering how even those expected to uphold moral values in the society perpetuate exploitation of their fellow humans, it is small wonder that Ugwu remarks close to the end of the narrative: “there is no such thing as greatness” (409).

Sex is a major ingredient in the characterisation of Richard. The writer presents him as possessing a weak personality and often unsure of himself. Nnolim has noted that the portrayal of his character is one of the major achievements of the novel. Adichie has taken care not to present the usual stereotypical British character we often see in works of fiction – the superior, intelligent, condescending, snobbish white. “In the character of Richard, the character of the white man as ordinary, fallible human being in African literature is beginning to emerge” (Nnolim: 150). In his relationships, he continually plays the secondary role. With Susan, he is the one to be shown around, to be chaperoned to parties and introduced to people who matter. In Odenigbo’s house, he plays a passive participant in the discussions, consumed with self-consciousness and self-questioning. Even his main reason for coming to Nigeria – to write a book- is eventually unachieved and left for Ugwu to carry out. But more than these instances mentioned, the part that underscores his ordinariness is his relationship with Kainene.

He again only dances to her tune. She takes the lead and he tags along. In their sexual relations, he is totally unreliable. His inability to perform that simple function which all the other characters seem to perform so effortlessly reduces him even further in the eyes of the reader. His unstable sex life can be seen as a metaphor for his understanding of Kainene who, for the most part of the book, remains an enigma to Richard and the reader too. Having created a wall around herself with her cynicism and impenetrable silences, the reader is only left to grapple with the suspicion that there is so much more in her than she lets out. Richard’s struggle to know her sexually is synonymous with his struggle to understand her person. His sex with her becomes fairly stable only as he achieves better understanding of her. His subordinate role nevertheless remained the same. This is evident in this little passage:

They would go out to the veranda and he would push the table aside and spread out the soft rug and lie on his naked back. When she climbs astride, he would hold her hips and stare up at the night sky and, for those moments, be sure of the meaning of bliss. It was their new ritual since the war started, the only reason he was grateful for the war” (315).

The constant role he plays in preparing the place for their lovemaking is reminiscent of that of a housewife who waits patiently at home for the return of her hardworking husband and the ritualistic sex that comes afterwards. The fact that Kainene is always the one on top during the act is symbolic of her control in the relationship. As in the relationship between Odenigbo and Olanna, Adichie tries to balance Kainene’s control with the idea that Richard wields a certain power over her emotions. The note Kainene slips into Richard’s briefcase pronounces her vulnerability: “Is love this misguided need to have you beside me most of the time? Is love this safety I feel in your silences? Is it this belonging, this completeness?” (154). It is interesting to note that the only time Richard is actually associated with some level of virility is when he sleeps with Olanna in her drunken state.



Adichie obviously does not use the erotic for the sake of achieving cheap thrill. The human robustness we identify with in the characters would be absent without this very vital part of them. This, however, goes on to raise questions whether the characters she portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus* are less human because we do not see the sexual parts of their lives. The logical answer would be that she has only chosen to look at humanity from a perspective different from that of *Purple Hibiscus*. Her decision to describe in more graphic details the sexual relationships in the story is simply a reflection of her maturation as a writer and as a person. Compare Kambili's fantasy with Ugwu's, for instance:

His touch was so light I wanted to push my head toward him, to feel the pressure of his hand. I wanted to collapse against him. I wanted to press his hand to my head... my belly, so he could feel the warmth that coursed through me. (*Purple Hibiscus*, 232)

He wished Nnesinachi would drop by now and take his hand in hers and tell him soothingly that his mother's illness was not serious at all, and then lead him to the grove by the stream and untie her wrapper and offer him her breasts, lifting them up and forward toward him. (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 91)

The second excerpt is Ugwu's fantasy. It is obviously different from Kambili's even though they are both teenagers and virgins (Ugwu at this time had not begun his clandestine activities with Chinyere and still wondered what a woman's breasts felt like). It can be said that in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie is restricted on the subject of sex – despite its centrality in the novel – because of the religious upbringing and perspective of the narrator Kambili. But the possibility of a more erotic depiction can be argued. Comments or expressions overtly sexual or erotic could have been attributed to the characters of Amaka and Obiora who seem really precocious for their age. The writer, in *Purple Hibiscus*, had simply set out to write a novel that talked about sex without dwelling on the details of the act. She probably had not acquired that maturity as a writer to enable her to use sexual details for means beyond themselves. Thus, the difference between *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* is that in the former, Adichie writes about sex as a chaste virgin would; in the latter, she writes unabashedly as a deflowered woman who knows and revels in the pleasures of sex.

## Extending Sexual Boundaries: Gay Features in *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Some stories in Adichie's most recent collection of short stories stand out, not because of any peculiar narrative technique, but because of the peculiarity of their content. "On Monday Last Week", "Jumping Monkey Hill" and "The Shivering" feature characters who without shame, proclaim themselves as gay or as having gay tendencies – something fairly unusual in African literature, particularly in African literature south of the Sahara. Except for South Africa, where the gay community has become accepted in society, most African nations frown on homosexuality and lesbianism, and even pass laws to prosecute anyone found engaging in such activity. And where it is found in literature, it is often to express the effect of the Western influence on African society. Daniel Vignal summarises this succinctly:

For the majority of [African Writers], homophilia is exclusively a deviation introduced by colonialists or their descendants; by outsiders of all kinds: Arabs, French, English, *metis*, and so on. It is difficult for them to think homophilia might be the act of a black African" (Chris Dunton: 2007).

In "On Monday Last Week" the focus is on Kamara, a Nigerian who had just arrived in the United States of America and taken up the job of a nanny. She finds herself attracted to Tracy, the mother of the little boy she is supposed to be taking care of. Her initial reaction to the attraction is once again typical of the general reaction of Africans to homosexuality/lesbianism: "A fellow woman who has the same thing that you have? Her friend Chinwe would say if she ever told her. *Tufia!* What kind of foolishness is that?"(81). But in spite of her reservations, she still finds herself fantasising about a relationship with Tracy. She reacts in her presence as she would in the presence of an attractive man: "Tracy's hand was still on her chin, slightly tilting her head up, and Kamara felt, at first, like an adored little girl, and then like a bride. She smiled again. She was extremely aware of her body, of Tracy's eyes, of the space between them being so small, so very small" (87)

One point that leaves the reader wondering is how exactly Kamara had come to have such gay tendencies. There is absolutely no mention of any previous situation that influenced her sudden change in sexual preference.

To the reader, she had been presented as a regular woman who came to America to meet her husband only to discover that he had changed in too many ways. There is nothing said about any change on her part apart from her gaining more weight. It is then rather sudden that she would think herself attracted to a woman overnight. Unlike most African writers, Adichie does not overtly present Kamara's change in sexual preference as resulting from a foreign influence. But the reader might wonder why it is in America that she discovers the gay part of her, and not back in Nigeria.

Also, in “Jumping Monkey Hill”, the freedom of sexual preference is conveyed through the character of the Senegalese, who pronounces herself a lesbian at a writing camp. Reacting to the story she had written, the paternalistic Edward says that such homosexual stories are not reflective of Africa. Ujunwa, the main character, responds to his comment forcefully: “Which Africa?” Adichie here presents two views about the place of homosexuality in Africa, and it is easy to see where she stands on the issue. Presenting the popular perception – that such sexual expressions are alien to Africa – through such a despicable character as Edward, the writer seeks to discredit such a view. Ujunwa, who one might see as Adichie’s mouthpiece expresses her contrary opinion. The writer is clearly of the opinion that homosexuality cannot be called alien to Africa; or at least, can no longer be said to be so, if it had been. Foreign “experts” on Africa who still see her as still living in the age of innocence must take note of this.

Lastly, the writer presents her third gay character in “The Shivering.” The writer’s goal here, it seems, is to convey the ordinariness and normalcy of gay people. In the character of Chinedu, we see that it is also possible for homosexuals to be just as religious as straight people, to have faith in God even stronger than straight people’s. Thus, there is a conscious attempt to separate sexuality from religion, and as a result, Chinedu’s status as a homosexual does not in any way detract from his relationship with God. And the passing mention of the gay club where he and his boyfriend, Abidemi, shook hands with a former president directs attention to the fact that some very important people in society are gay, though they might not readily admit it in public.

The above-mentioned stories present people who have refused to remain within the confines of sexuality set by society, and consequently, they defy the prevailing perception concerning sexuality, and it is not necessarily because of any foreign influence.

## Conclusion

This essay has examined the varying presentations of sexual issues in Chimamanda Adichie's novels. From a rather chastely portrayal of sex in *Purple Hibiscus*, the writer graduates to the explicit sexual episodes in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and finally, to the freedom of sexual preference in *The Thing around Your Neck*. And all through, what comes across from the works of Adichie is a concern for sexual matters; whether writing about the crippling effects of religious fanaticism and dictatorial parenting or the harrowing experiences of the Nigerian-Biafran civil war or other unconnected issues, the reader's attention is drawn to sex and the sexuality of her characters. Also, from the short stories examined, it is also evident that she does not believe in succumbing to the restrictions placed by society on sexual expression, and thus homosexuality and lesbianism are portrayed as simply human characteristics, and not as "unAfrican" codes of behaviour. Her odyssey from *Purple Hibiscus* to her most recent work is akin to the transition of a virgin of innocence to a person of sexual experience.

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