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### Analytical Final Essay

Chimamanda Adichie, the author of “A Private Experience,” composited this short story about a single event. The main events of the story focus on religious and cultural disagreements during those times. The short story begins in the middle of the riot on the streets of Kano, Nigeria introducing the two main characters climbing through the window of a store: “Chika climbs in through the store window first and then holds the shutter as the woman climbs in after her” (Adichie 80). As the story progresses, the readers can find out that Chika has lost her sister in the middle of the riot, and that she will not be able to find her sister again. “She will tape photocopies of the photo on the walls of the market and the nearby stores. She will not find Nnedi. She will never find Nnedi” (Adichie 82). The readers can also feel how bad the outside riot is through the rising tension in the store that they are hiding. “... its squeaky wooden shutters swinging in the air. The street is quiet at first, and then they hear the sound of running feet. They both move away from the window” (Adichie 83). Even though these two women have nothing in common, they start to grow friendships while being stuck in a small store. Readers can see that the woman has opened her heart to Chika when she ties her own scarf around Chika’s wounded leg. “She wets one end of her scarf at the tap and cleans the cut on Chika's leg, then ties the wet scarf around it, knotting it at the calf” (Adichie 86). When the morning finally comes, the riot

seems to be settled down and two women say goodbye to each other and start heading to their own ways.

Chika is the main character of this story and thus the story follows Chika's point of view. She is an Igbo woman who is attending a medical school in Lagos. She has a sister called Nnedi and their family is pretty wealthy. The book tells us that she has a "light complexion" (Adichie 80) and that she wears Western clothing: "She looks down at her own denim skirt and red T-shirt embossed with a picture of the Statue of Liberty" (Adichie 82).

While her physical appearance shown through direct characterization, her personality is described through indirect characterization, or through her action. The readers can see that Chika has never experienced violence because she does not know how to react to the riots, and she seemed confused. The small details like her Burberry bag, private driver, and the fact that she is attending a medical school suggests that she has a high social standing. "Riots like this were what she read about in newspapers. Riots like this were what happened to other people." (Adichie 83). This shows that she was not expecting these horrible things to happen to her.

Chika is an educated woman who knows about politics and has the power to understand what is actually behind the riots. "...riots do not happen in a vacuum, that religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another." (Adichie 83). And the readers can also see that Chika is highly conscious of the social difference between the woman in the store and Chika herself and tries to not offend her by showing off the privilege that she has because of her wealthy parents. "She does not add that the

handbag was a Burberry, an original one that her mother had bought on a recent trip to London” (Adichie 80).

The name of the woman whom Chika hid with does not appear in the story. However, the interaction between her and Chika during the riots highly affected Chika and her perspective on the world. The woman is a Muslim from the ethnic group of Hausa. The narrator portrays her as an uneducated and unprivileged market trader who has five children to feed: “She unties her green wrapper and spreads it on the dusty floor. She has on only a blouse and a shimmery black slip torn at the seams” (Adichie 82). Despite her physical appearance, her personality seems kind and compassionate, as she is the one who helped Chika to hide together in the empty store. Although there were violent riots going on outside between two different ethnic groups, which the woman and Chika were each in, the woman still offered to help Chika, not even knowing who she was and where she came from.

In the first part of the story when Chika and the woman are getting to know each other, Chika seems very judgmental based on stereotypes of poverty and ignorance. The words that Chika chooses to describe the woman such as “threadbare” suggest that Chika is looking down on the woman. Furthermore, Chika even describes the woman’s scarf as “the garish prettiness of cheap things” and her smell as “something harsh and clean like the bar soap their house girl uses to wash the bed linen.” (Adichie 82). However, Chika did not realize that it was the woman’s knowledge of her life experiences that have saved Chika’s life from the riot.

When the woman starts praying in the store, Chika carefully observes her. “She knows the woman is on her knees, facing Mecca, but she does not look. It is like the woman's tears, a private experience, and she wishes that she could leave the store. Or that she, too, could pray,

could believe in a god, see an omniscient presence in the stale air of the store. She cannot remember when her idea of God has not been cloudy, like the reflection from a steamy bathroom mirror, and she cannot remember ever trying to clean the mirror” (Adichie 85). The woman’s act of prayer seems to have moved Chika’s heart by making her think that she also wishes to be in the faith with God.

When Chika tells the woman that she studies medicine, the woman asks Chika to advise about her breast problem. Chika believes that the woman has no education and would have no clue about what she is talking about so Chika gives a false answer to cover her lack of knowledge. However, when the woman catches it, Chika tries to build a relationship with her by finding a common ground between them. When Chika thinks the riot seems to calm down, she suggests that they go home, but the woman advises that it is too soon to leave the store. Despite her advice, Chika makes a determination to escape the abandoned store that they were in. On her way back home, she witnesses a recently burned body, becoming fully aware that the woman was right: the riot is not over yet. While she is hurrying to get back into the store, she injures her leg. When she successfully comes back to the store, the Muslim woman ties Chika’s wounded leg with her scarf and they quietly wait for the riot to settle down. When the morning finally comes, the woman tells Chika that it is now safe to go back home. When they are getting ready to leave, Chika debates whether to give the scarf back to the Muslim woman or to keep it for herself to remember the meaningful relationship between them. Chika asks the woman if she could keep her scarf and the woman agrees without hesitation.

The whole chain of events in the story focuses on the conflict between the Muslim people and the Christian Igbo people in the city of Kano. The story includes the conflicts that are formed

between the two ethnic groups that have a different religion, culture, and social status. Chika and the Muslim woman were from two different groups that hated each other, but despite their differences, Chika and the woman help each other during the hard times. The narrow perspective of Chika's view on the world changed when she met this unprivileged woman who cannot afford the luxury, as she lives a hand to mouth life. Chika had to renounce her naive preconceived ideas and gain wisdom when an uneducated woman from the lower social class saves Chika's life multiple times during a large riot.