

“A PRIVATE  
EXPERIENCE”  
CHIMAMANDA  
ADICHIE

Study Notes



# Some Thoughts...

- The story deals with issues related to situational identity in contemporary Nigeria. Two women from different religions and socioeconomic backgrounds find themselves together and alone with their assumptions and prejudices about each other.
- The two women who find themselves hiding together from the chaotic confrontation between Muslims and Christians outside, humanize, for the reader, the experiences of “the other.” On a bigger scale, outside the women's hiding place, we see that the differences between Muslims and Christians have led to misunderstandings and a violent conflict.
- Adichie’s ideas about “the danger of a single story” are reflected in the plot of the story. While the violence outside stems from lack of empathy and understanding and the long-held erroneous assumptions Muslims and Christians in the region have made about each other, the two women hiding together have the opportunity to share aspects of their personal stories, challenging the stereotypes they have about one another.
- In her essay, “The Difficulty of Imagining Other People,” Elaine Scarry argues that “the human capacity to injure other people is very great precisely because our capacity to imagine other people is very small” (101). Through this story, Adichie challenges readers to take a close look and imagine the lives of two people on the opposite ends of a violent conflict.

# Some Useful Resources

The following resources will give you some context relevant to the story:

- **Article:** “The Roots of Nigeria’s Religious and Ethnic Conflict”: This is an article written by Dr. Moses Ochonu, a Professor of African History at Vanderbilt University. It provides a brief, but informative explanation of the conflict that is part of the setting of the story:

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-03-10/roots-nigerias-religious-and-ethnic-conflict>

- **Author:** This is an interview with Chimamanda Adichie in which she speaks about the role of stories in humanizing history:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Lx1BDdNF4w>