

Carla Dedier-Woney

Dr. Wozniak

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### The Analysis of "A Private Experience"

"A Private Experience" is a pleasant story. It tells of a gentle relationship between two women who, under normal circumstances, would not have shared the same space; much less, engage in conversation. But calamity strikes, forcing them to find solace in each other's company and show the best version of themselves. It never ceases to amaze me the way tragedy brings people together. It causes us to see that in the grand scheme of things, religion, ethnicity, wealth and poverty mean little; if anything at all! Life is put into its proper perspective and we come to terms with the fact that we need each other; be it old or young, rich or poor, Muslim or Christian.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a brilliant writer. She weaves an intriguing tale in "A Private Experience" as she sets the scene in Nigeria, where a dreadful war breaks out because a Christian man rolls his car over a book that Muslims consider hallowed. They, in turn, commit the heinous act of decapitating the man's head and parading the village with it. But, here's my dilemma: how sacred could this book be to its avengers if it is found lying on the side of the road? Shouldn't this "Holy Book" (46) be tucked away behind layers of bullet-proof glass or hoisted high in the air like a flag for all to gaze upwardly?

Chika, a young Christian girl of high social standing and an unnamed Muslim woman of lower status get caught up in the crossfire. One also belongs to the Igbo tribe

and the other, Hausa. They seek welcomed refuge in a small, dusty, abandoned store, and later find commonality in their sense of humanity.

At first, Chika comes off as being highfalutin and judgmental as she looks her nose down upon the lowly market vendor. She criticizes her religion, jewelry, clothing and education in comparison to her Christian faith, Burberry bag from London, high-heeled shoes and pre-med school status. Chika passes judgment upon the Hausa woman, imagining that the necklace she laments over losing in the stampede is “probably plastic beads threaded on a piece of string,” and refers to her scarf as “flimsy,” “cheap,” and “garish” (44). But, the kindness and care the Hausa woman shows Chika forces her to see that these things are material and insignificant. Death is lurking beyond the walls of the cramped, tiny store. So, the only things that matter are good, intangible character traits.

The Muslim woman tends to Chika (despite the cross pendant that dangles from her neck) as she would her missing daughter, Halima. Chika ends up caring for her, too. It is evident when the Hausa woman bares her hurting breasts for her to prescribe relief. And this she does. Significant to note, also, is the fact that Muslim women are discreet when it comes to their bodies. So, the Hausa woman clearly feels comfortable with Chika. They are also able to share about the pain of not knowing where their loved ones are in the midst of the troublesome circumstances.

The story comes to a close with Chika asking for the woman's scarf. This item from the rest of her apparel is indicative of her Muslim faith. The narrative says that Chika questions her Christian beliefs after their encounter. This cliffhanger leads the interpretative reader to wonder if the author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, wants to

deliver another message aside from unity in troubled times. Maybe, she thinks that Christianity is a weak religion, like the writer of “Chike’s School Days,” Chinua Achebe, who believed that it was a faith forced fed to Africans by white Europeans. Is it possible that Adichie is persuaded that Christians are lofty-minded hypocrites (like Chika) who will abandon their faith at the first sign of trouble? But, Muslims (like the Hausa woman) are true, humble, kind and devoted. Jesus delivers some of His most profound messages by telling stories or parables. I wonder if this was Adichie’s strategy for winning her readers over to the Muslim faith.

All in all, this story is the perfect segue to more literary works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Thanks to Dr. Wozniak for offering “The Headstrong Historian,” an equally great read. Both writings carry tales of women who have strong character, and that is inspirational for me.

#### Work Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. 1st ed., Anchor, 2010