Dream Count by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. New York: Knopf, 2025.

Malaika Selasie Patel

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count* is a rich, reflective narrative that navigates the emotional territories of womanhood, class, migration, and desire. Structured through the intimate reflections of Chiamaka, Zikora, Kadiatou, and Omelogor, the book explores how dreams, memory, and identity are shaped by global inequalities and personal longings. Also, through the characters' personal reflections and interwoven stories, Adichie constructs a world where women are constantly asked to explain their pain, justify their dreams, and negotiate the cost of desiring more and how various migration trajectories shape them. Given the present global regulations that restrict mobility and dehumanise immigrants, as well as the recent mass deportations of long-term residents in the West under increased nationalist ideology, Adichie's examination of migration takes on new relevance.

Adichie's work explores the layered nuances of migration, not only as physical movement, but also as a form of symbolic transformation. She examines the classed and racialised gatekeeping embedded within immigration processes through Kadiatou, a working-class immigrant women working as a hotel cleaner and housekeeper, who curates a narrative for her asylum application designed to satisfy immigration authorities. Seeking to escape an abusive past and secure a future for her daughter, Kadiatou is nevertheless penalised for her act of survival rather than recognised for the trauma she endured. The novel poses the uncomfortable question of whether victims must be perfect to be granted justice, exposing the harshness of migratory regimes that criminalise desperation while disregarding the structural conditions that compel people to migrate. *Dream Count* reveals how many migrants are not only victims of the law, but also of an idealised America that portrays itself as a nation of comfort and opportunity. This demonstrates the brutal contrasts of global movement: the promise of freedom is often accompanied by new

constraints, and immigration regimes sometimes punish the very desperation they profess to safeguard.

This literary work uses Kadiatou's story to challenge the notion of meritocracy at the core of Western immigration policies, where only those who perform the correct type of suffering, packaged in bureaucratically acceptable terms, are permitted a chance at legitimacy. Adichie questions whether the current nation-state can ever adequately account for the complexities of displacement, especially because legality and morality are sometimes mismatched. Alongside seeking freedom through migration, Adichie presents a distinct migratory arc; one of reinvention and eventual disappointment. She challenges the West's idea of self-reinvention through the character of Omelogor, who leaves Nigeria in search of atonement, expecting the West to offer not merely opportunity but moral rebirth, an expectation ultimately exposed as illusory. This is evident in the academic space, where migrants are often misunderstood, disregarded, or condescended to, their ideas dismissed without justification and their critiques subjected to disproportionate scrutiny. The growing cynicism and wish to return home reflect a common experience in migrant journeys, where the promise of the West often gives way to disillusionment. As Grace Musila (2017) observes, many migrants come to understand "home" not only as a place of return, but as a space for recovering self-worth and belonging after facing racial and gender barriers abroad. The notion that one can "start over" in the West is shattered, particularly for women who do not conform to prescribed gender expectations that position them as obedient caregivers responsible for domestic duties and discourage them from questioning authority or speaking freely. Omelogor's perspective on expectations from society marks her as a deviant, since she exhibits intellectual assertiveness and openly expresses her views on issues.

Omelogor's criticism of American academia as less a site of enquiry than one of ideology exposes the limits of its alleged liberalism, where even institutions ostensibly committed to social justice remain entrenched in racial and class inequities. Her comment that "America makes more sense when you look at it from the outside" (68) points to the contradictions of Western freedom and the psychological dislocations produced by transnational life. The choice to relocate, remain, or return is always hidden in larger networks of responsibility, guilt, and performance. For many African women, the stakes of

migration are not only personal, but also communal. This load puts a lot of strain on people, especially when success is measured only by material wealth or professional achievement, rendering migration both an opportunity and a source of constant accountability.

Adichie demonstrates how the migrant subject, particularly the African woman, is expected to embody achievement not just for herself but also for her family, community, and, in certain cases, her nation. Women's migrations, whether across nations or social classes, are never just personal decisions, but rather actions embedded in political, economic, and cultural hierarchies (Mama 1997). Their movement is a compromise with both patriarchy and progressive capitalism. Survival migration represents what Musila (2017) refers to as "the im/possibilities of the margins" in which African women's migrations are both enabling and restricting—acts of agency accompanied by exclusion. Adichie's narrative also aligns with Obioma Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of "nego-feminism," or "feminism of negotiation; no-ego feminism," which stresses how African women manage repressive institutions through flexibility, communal care, and covert resistance, rather than outright revolt. Within African feminist migration literature, these dynamics call for a reconsideration of movement as an interrelated process shaped by gendered expectations, social hierarchies, and cultural responsibility. As Mama and Nnaemeka remind us, the personal is directly related to the political; it is through women's lived experiences that bigger systems of inequality are supported and challenged.

The novel also explores the tensions between African immigrants and African Americans through Chiamaka's relationship with Darnell, who weaponises historical grievance and class resentment to undermine her. Darnell says, "You know Chia's people probably sold my people?" (22), referring to the terrible heritage of African involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. His comment, disguised in comedy, indicates a deeper dissatisfaction with Chiamaka's money and position as a Nigerian immigrant, what he refers to as "fancy-ass." Beneath the humour is a frustration shaped by class and different life experiences. Adichie shows how privilege and opportunity can create tension within Black communities, where people's understanding of race depends on where they come from and what chances they have had. Adichie uses this to show how class differences can cause

mistrust and distance, even among people who share the same racial identity. According to Bernard Dayo (2021), some African Americans believe that African immigrants gain from civil rights efforts without fully knowing or recognising their historical background, while some Africans accept stereotypes and fail to acknowledge African American cultural validity. Adichie does not provide a conclusion but rather demonstrates how such hereditary traumas re-emerge in human interactions, influenced by race, class, and migration. The issue of responsibility and reparation gets complicated: Chiamaka is burdened with guilt for a history she did not create, while Darnell masks his anguish with passive-aggressive superiority.

As Adichie reveals the complex compromises of gender and affection, the story raises questions about power dynamics within relationships. What happens to mutual understanding when caring and intellect become ways to control? If women are constantly encouraged to soften their intelligence or suppress their discomfort to maintain harmony, should the burden of emotional balance fall on them, or should we instead question the social systems that normalise such silencing as an expression of love? A similar tension emerges in Adichie's portrayal of Chiamaka and Darnell's relationship, which begins as an intellectual connection, yet gradually reveals how tenderness can mask dominance. Darnell's fixation on correcting and reframing Chiamaka's ideas reflects a larger societal dynamic in which a woman's emotional reality is considered invalid unless it aligns with male comfort, while her fears are dismissed as hormonal or trivial. This demonstrates how love, when shaped by uneven power, may become a form of silence. Adichie skilfully depicts how women's sorrow is frequently overlooked under the guise of affection, and how love, shaped by power inequalities, can devolve into self-erasure. Adichie's treatment of this relationship is nuanced and cumulative, allowing readers to gradually see how charm and control can coexist in one person, and how women frequently confuse emotional manipulation for love, connection, or care. Chiamaka's story is a cautionary tale about the cost of investing in a partner who demands your silence as proof of your depth.

Adichie shifts attention to the generational transfer of endurance and blame within patriarchal systems, revealing through the novel's portrayal of motherhood how women are socialised to accept responsibility for male

misdeeds and uphold cultural institutions that equate virtue with silence. The narrative depicts how women are frequently pushed to bear the guilt for men's wrongs while being rewarded for remaining silent and strong. However, Adichie rejects the notion that stillness and perseverance indicate weakness; instead, she portrays them as techniques women have evolved over time to survive and assert themselves. This is consistent with Mama's (1997) argument that women's responsibilities in maintaining family and community unity, while productive, are also susceptible to exploitation. Adichie shows us that silence may be a sign of intelligence and choice, not just submission. The true question is not whether women fight back, but rather how they transform endurance into a deliberate act of resistance.

The emotional balance of the book comes not just from the individual experiences, but also from the way women care for one another: Chiamaka's support for Zikora through her pregnancy, the shared concern for Kadiatou's as she navigates her legal battle, and a broader sense of feminine solidarity form an alternative network of survival. Their care extends beyond friendship, becoming a collective act of resistance in a world that isolates women and demands silence of women. These relationships embody the feminist concept of community, in which empathy and collective care challenge the competitive and individualistic values that frequently shape modern life. The women's care for one another demonstrates how connection can be political; by caring together, they regain power, belonging, and the ability to create their own kinds of strength. It also promotes female friendship as a space for empathy, resistance, and healing. Chiamaka, Zikora, Kadiatou, and Omelogor's emotional labour exposes a common place for narrating and reinterpreting grief. The women in *Dream Count* find significance through one another. Their connections are more than just a source of consolation; they are silent acts of resistance, spaces for mutual witnessing and understanding. These relationships, particularly those that span class lines, call into question the idea that compassion must stem from similarity. Instead, they demonstrate how understanding may emerge from shared vulnerability. These connections also represent a rejection of seclusion, quiet, and the neoliberal narrative that portrays women as competitors. Chiamaka's modest gestures of care, such as cooking, listening, or showing up unexpectedly, establish a picture of

community that transcends location and status. She presents us with real women who are prepared to sit in the discomfort of each other's realities.

The book reminds us that migration does not necessarily imply a move forward, that love can be both a salve and a blade, and that dreaming, particularly as a woman—African, or migrant—is sometimes a form of resistance. Adichie explores how cultural inheritance and choice influence identity through the language of dreams, hopes, betrayals, and renewals, connecting personal longing to broader feminist themes of freedom and defining oneself. The stories of the characters inspire readers to consider: What sacrifices have I made to become who I am? What am I still dreaming about? And how much of that dream is mine, truly mine?

In conversation with scholars such as bell hooks, who argues that patriarchal ideology conditions men to perceive their domination of women as natural and justified, Adichie's *Dream Count* offers a radically feminist, transnational lens through which to examine gender, class, and migration, advocating for a reimagining of power not only in public institutions but also in private relationships, and inviting readers to reflect on their own dreams and the costs of pursuing them. Adichie transforms personal memories into collective reflections. Rooted in the grief of her mother's death, the novel grows into something more, a reflection on how women globally learn to endure, stay strong, and keep reimagining their lives in the face of loss or failure. Migration and class weave across their lives, demonstrating how privilege and dislocation coexist. The book's emotional pulse is centred on modest acts of care, with women holding space for one another in the midst of loss, pain, desire, and separation.

Adichie explained that she did not initially realise she was writing about her mother, but rather about "female connection;" however, the two are intertwined. She honours a lineage of women forged by endurance and mutual recognition, evoked through her mother's imagined sigh, as if her mother were present to read the novel: "Nwanyi ibe m," (my fellow woman) (Egan 2025). In giving her mother the final word, she respects not just her own memories, but also the generations of women whose quiet bravery enables survival.

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