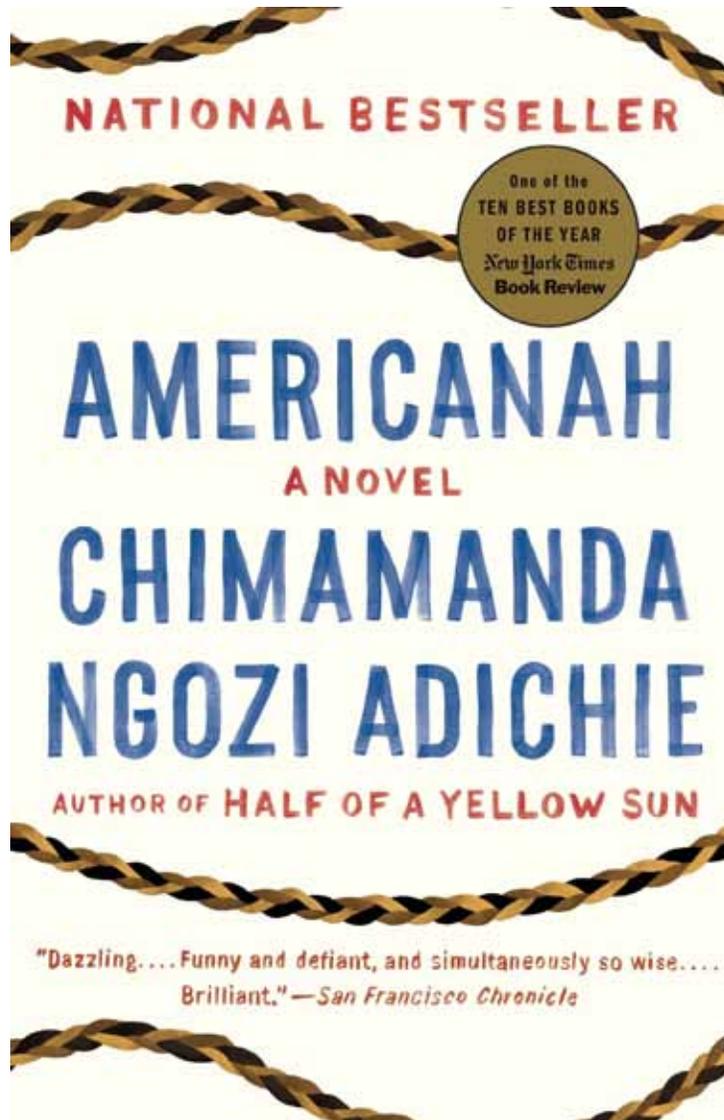


THE FLUIDITY OF BLACKNESS IN AFRICAN LITERATURES

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My research examines the literary representations of multifold facets of African identities in the 21st Century. In the 20th century, colonial occupation in African countries prompted ontological studies about the black identity, hence, the discussion about inherent characteristics of blackness. For African intellectuals, the artistic self-determination of blackness was a response to fallacies about the cultural and intellectual inferiority of black peoples. These discussions are the fulcrum of theories such as Negritude, created in the 1930s, spearheaded by the francophone intellectuals Leopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon-Gontran Damas. They sought to dispel racist ideologies by devising a unified identity of black peoples from French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, thus employing a collective empowerment. Pan-Africanism had similar goals, as it proposed the transnational unification of black peoples across the world through the deployment of a strategic essentialism of black identities to combat colonialism and imperialism.

However, I contend that fixed notions of blackness do not fully encompass its complexity, due to the cultural and ethnic diversity African countries have within themselves, as well as the irreversible effects of the contact with the West. My research aims at analyzing how contemporary black identities evince a fluid interplay among erstwhile ostensibly fixed ideas of race, place, and nation. I address the subject employing an interdisciplinary reading of works by contemporary African writers such as Akwaeke Emezi, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Fatou Diome, and Sefi Atta, amongst others. My goal is to analyze how these works debunk the hegemonic and reductionist stereotypes that Western imperialism have imposed on black peoples throughout history. Furthermore, I analyze how the depiction of migrant characters mirror international and transnational experiences of contemporary African writers.



Cognizant of the bibliographical nature of my intellectual inquiry, a CAS travel award enabled me to expand these discussions by presenting my ongoing research project at conferences, and academic events, especially interdisciplinary ones. Most recently, I presented the paper “Black Girl in Paris: Decolonizing Mind and Body” at the 9th Annual African, African American and Diaspora Interdisciplinary Conference. In this work, I discussed the effects of gender and class in black agency, and the way in which literature can serve to critique

racism, one of the lingering effects of colonization, and prod black self-determination. I intend to continue my project by studying the works of writers across Africa, and analyzing how they respond to the changes in the notions of identity in contemporary African diaspora. Hence, I posit that continuing a long-standing dialogue about African identities and their literary representations will help bring them, and the factors that affect them, to the fore.

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