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FRAGMENTED INTIMACIES: GENDER, AFFECT, AND DIASPORIC DISPLACEMENT IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S DREAM COUNT

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how Adichie's *Dream Count* (2025) explores the fragmented intimacies, displacement, and structural isolation by constructing a transnational feminist narrative that spans the interconnected lives of four African women. By employing close textual analysis, the paper discusses how Adichie portrays intimacy not as a site of stability but as a fragile, fragmented network of relationships shaped by gendered expectations, cultural, economic, and racial perspectives, as well as irregular patterns of global mobility. As the novel progresses, each of the four core female figures' emotional, familial, and romantic connections somehow remain incomplete, interrupted, or conditioned by power, thus portraying intimacy as a site of fracture and isolation as a structural condition. Considering the text's multi-layered characterization, this paper uses bell hooks' idea of feminist intimacy and marginality (1984), Sara Ahmed's affect (2004), Paul Gilroy's theorization of diaspora (1993, 1987), and Hartman's (2019) idea about the fragility of black intimate life to argue that these fragmented intimacies cannot be separated from the broader experiences of displacement, whether geographical, cultural, or personal. Each character, through literal migration, cultural alienation, or the violation of bodily autonomy, undergoes a form of dislocation that unsettles their sense of belonging. These experiences result in isolation that transcends individual circumstances and highlights the structural forces shaping contemporary African and diasporic womanhood. Finally, the article asserts that fragmented intimacy serves as the relational thread that connects otherwise separate narratives, transforming isolation from a personal experience into a shared structural condition and providing a critical framework to understand feminine epistemology in *Dream Count* (2025).

Keywords: *Fragmented Intimacy, Diaspora, Affect, Displacement, Structural Isolation, African Diaspora, Diasporic Womanhood, Ngozi Adichie, Dream Count.*

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1. Introductio

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count* (2025) traces the lives of four Black women whose lives are interconnected and span across Nigeria, the USA, and Europe. Each woman has a narrative section that explores how she loves, remembers, works, and tries to survive a shifting global landscape while dealing with personal issues and dislocation. What is particularly striking is that intimacy, in this novel, is shown as fragile, incomplete, and fractured rather than being a composite site of refuge. Chiamka, Zikora, Kadiatou, and Omelogor have their lives connected, but they are unsettled in themselves; their bond sustains them, but their emotional ties elsewhere fail to produce a sense of belonging. This novel, with its transnational feminist narrative, shows that intimacy is a site where multiple factors like power dynamics, displacement, alienation, diasporic elements, race, gender, and patriarchy are at play.

Critical engagements with Adichie's fiction have often employed lenses like migration studies, postcolonial studies, and diaspora studies to examine Afropolitan experience, cultural dynamics, displacement, and the politics of gender, race, voice, language, Black identity, and memory in her works. Comparatively limited attention has been paid to how intimacy in her work is constructed and shaped by the structural forces, especially in *Dream Count* (2025). Reading this novel predominantly as a story of loss, love, and dreams risks the loss of its more challenging exploration: that for African and diasporic women, intimacy is constantly fragmented because of global patriarchy, gender dynamics, capitalism, and racial hierarchies. This paper addresses the gap by analyzing how intimacy is shown as a site of fracture rather than completion in *Dream Count* (2025).

2. Literature Review

As already observed, scholarship on Adichie has positioned her as a significant figure in contemporary African and diasporic literature, tracing her treatment of gender, power, and transnational identity within intersecting power structures. Scholars have explored how Adichie's works examine transcultural and globalized identity in the paradigm of diaspora and migration. Niyonkuru et al. (2025), for instance, argue that Adichie's fiction explores how diaspora creates a situation where identity is continuously reshaped by the clash of memory, nostalgia, and exile, resulting in a rupture. Other critics

have examined how her narratives challenge racial hierarchies and gender expectations that shape women's lives across different cultural contexts (Emenyonu, 2017). Adichie's own feminist ideas, including *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), have shaped the critical debate on how gender is a socially constructed system in need of a new pedagogical approach and political engagement.

Feminist scholarship on this particular area has also highlighted the need to move beyond the predominant emphasis on displacement. *The Feminist Review* editorial *Gendering Diaspora (2008)* emphasizes the need to move beyond general formations of diaspora to a gendered diasporic dimension, providing a transcultural feminist framework. Patton (2011) also notes the need to follow new directions of womanism and feminism in the African diaspora. Similarly, many critics have furthered the debate by discussing the varying spectrums of identity and the dangers of limitations. For instance, Mohanty (2003) has argued that "Third World women" should not be evaluated under a single lens without understanding their circumstances or global hierarchies of class, mobility, race, and other power structures.

This perspective is particularly relevant while reading Adichie's works, where African women emerge as transcultural subjects battling with dominant structures and the complexities of belonging and cosmopolitanism. It situates diaspora within broader feminist debates. Recent studies have also worked on Adichie's narrative in the context of gendered mobility. For instance, Ndaka (2020) explored the gendered idea of home and belonging in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013).

The most comprehensive scholarship on Adichie is available in the form of essays collected in Emenyonu's *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* (2017). It positions Adichie as a leading figure in African and diasporic literature. The contributors to the volume employed multiple lenses to examine and understand her work across different dimensions of gender, memory, nationalism, domestic and transcultural spheres. It highlights how Adichie's female characters exist in a space in which their identities are constructed and shaped by dislocation, gender roles, power structures, postcolonial elements, motherhood, ritualized abuse, the female body, domestic sphere, migration, and cultural identity. It has scholarship on the following works: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *Americanah* (2013), and *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009).

Current studies have conceptualized borders as discursive constructions shaped by globalization, historical shifts, and technology. For instance, Okolie (2022) examines border poetics in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) to reveal how migration is not a one-time crossing. She argues that borders are symbolic, racial, epistemological, and bodily, shaping the character's sense of identity and belonging. It also analyzes the return and the politics

of continuous negotiations of identity politics. Moreover, Jaseel and Gaur (2023) approach *Americanah (2013)* from a distinct perspective by examining how autonomy is structured by gendered precarity and vulnerability. They explore the vulnerability of a migrant African woman and how her agency becomes problematic under structural constraints.

Despite the expansive scholarship on Adichie's work on diaspora, gender, and transcultural identity, there is a lack of critical attention to intimacy as an analytical lens. Existing research focuses on relationships and consequences of migration, but intimacy as a site of fracture has not been discussed. While feminist and diasporic frameworks highlight how Black African women move and try to belong under different circumstances, the politics of intimacy and how relational bonds fracture under power structures have been ignored. This gap is particularly evident in the reading of *Dream Count* (2025), where intimacy is continuously fragmented and incomplete.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper employs 'fragmented intimacies' as a central lens to analyze the emotional, structural, and relational experiences of four women and their lives in *Dream Count* (2025). Fragmented intimacies refer to partial, incomplete, or socially and structurally constrained forms of emotional, physical, or relational closeness. To understand these complex dynamics in the novel, to begin, the paper draws on bell hooks' (1984) idea that for Black women, relationships become microcosms of larger structures of power, thus marginalizing them in the intimate spaces as well. Her work explores how love, emotions, and care are political, which helps illustrate how women in the novel navigate closeness in gendered spaces with a lack of power. hooks' (1984) idea that patriarchy structures emotional life and cannot be separated, helps situate the fractured relationships of concerned women in a broader context.

Second, Sara Ahmed's (2004) concept of "affective economies" deepens the analysis by supplying a framework for exploring how emotions circulate between bodies, social spaces, and communities. She argues that affect is not personal but rather transmitted; it moves across borders, languages, and relationships, resulting in either alienation or a sense of belonging. Ahmed (2014) explains why women can feel emotionally isolated despite being physically present, as well as the politics involved in emotions.

Third, Paul Gilroy's theorization of diaspora (1993, 1987) demonstrates how displacement results in an identity that is often characterized by in-betweenness, unbelonging, and an impossibility of fully belonging to homeland or the host land. He further emphasizes that diaspora complicates the idea of cultural legitimacy or belonging,

and as a result, diasporic subjects can encounter alienation even within Black communities. This helps to understand the characters whose intimate relationships became sites of exclusion. The way they policed their actions and speech showed how diasporic women inhabit an unstable position in African and American circles alike.

Finally, Saidiya Hartman's (2019) understanding of Black intimate life is invoked. Even though she addresses, in particular, the production of fragile forms of intimacy because of historical or structural violence, her idea that Black women's connections are shaped by longing, abandonment, and displacement is significant here. It's particularly important in understanding Zikora's history of abandonment, or the ones whose emotional connections never resulted in stability.

Together, these theoretical angles allow us to explore intimacy in *Dream Count* (2025) as a site of fragmentation and tension marred by broader political, cultural, and social structures. This reading positions fragmented intimacy as a political thread woven through Adichie's (2025) narrative, offering an insight into understanding contemporary African and diasporic womanhood.

4.Textual Analysis

4.1. Failed Intimacy: Performance, Desire, and Diasporic Misrecognition in Chiamaka's Narrative

Chiamaka's narrative, which spans the first part of Adichie's *Dream Count* (2025), illustrates how intimacy becomes fragmented, establishing the central tension between global connection and emotional disconnection. Her story begins during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, further highlighting the complexities surrounding connections and intimacy among people. Although she is in contact with her friends and family spread across Enugu, London, Lagos, and Washington, she struggles with this idea of connection over Zoom calls. Voices surround her, yet she is stranded alone in her Maryland house, highlighting that global connectivity does not guarantee emotional fulfilment. Ahmed's (2004) affect theory explains this distance and how emotions differ when mediated environments are involved because they produce a sense of proximity without relational security. Chiamaka saw this masked isolation and despaired, "On Zoom calls, everyone echoed, reaching but not touching, the distance between us all further hollowed out" (Adichie, 2025, p. 08). This shows how diasporic relations have complications with emotional belonging.

Chiamaka then proceeded to avoid phone calls, even from the closest of friends. This restlessness led her on a journey to recount all her past relationships, as she had a lot

of time on her hands during the quarantine. Interestingly, when addressing retrospective reflection, she mentioned being "flooded" (Adichie, 2025, p. 16) with guilt. Later on, we will realize that she had always felt alienated despite being in multiple relationships. Her recounting of romantic relationships further highlights this fragmentation. Her three-year relationship with Darnell shows how identity can collapse when a relationship is founded on performance rather than mutual understanding. She herself explained quite vividly how she performs versions of herself that were tailored according to his desires, "I lied to please him, to be the person he wanted me to be, and sometimes I lied to wrest wretched scraps of reassurance from him" (Adichie, 2025, p. 19). This could be identified as "misrecognition" (Lacan, 2006), where her idea of self is formed around Darnell's gaze and expectations. This performance is not simple but gendered and racialized, a globalized Black African woman internalizing the subtle or blatant criticisms of a Black American man she is dating. He repeatedly jabs at her, questioning her African belonging because of her privileged background, mocking her travel writing and habits, and disregarding her point of view in every aspect. These microaggressions have their intended effect, negatively impacting her self-esteem. She remembers one instance where he said something "... with that side twitch of his mouth that shredded my self-esteem. I began worrying about being patronizing" (Adichie, 2025, p. 27). Not only this, but she also makes a lot of space for him; she shifted plans, cancelled tours just because he decides to emerge from his so-called silence, while he did nothing of that sort. This illustrates how the uneven power dynamics between couples can fracture the emotional connection, leading to dominance and dependency as explained by hooks (1984).

Significantly, despite making every point to shatter her self-worth, he had no qualms about spending her money. "Sometimes he delayed in bringing out his wallet, even for the smallest of things…" (Adichie, 2025, p. 35) or the time he performed a ritual of reluctance but readily accepted an iPhone and MacBook on his birthday. At other times, he accused her of trying to buy him with money but never refused the money she spent on him. This again raises the issue of her socio-economic cognition being taken advantage of when required, but never ensuring her a place to belong, as we will discuss later.

Moreover, the social factors surrounding them further isolated her. Among his friends and social circle, she was ostracized and always remained an outsider. She always felt his disappointment whenever she said something while sitting among them, so she had to police her speech and expression accordingly. She always had to play along with the politics of belonging to be tolerated by the group. This group had no qualms about making her socio-economic background a site of suspicion. Gilroy (1993) has theorized the liminality of diasporic identities and how this leads to perpetual othering. Chia also felt displaced, and her Igbo identity was linked to the myths of their affluence after the Biafran

War, putting her within a complex hierarchical web of class and ethnicity. For instance, her family's financial situation was brought up at random times to emphasize how her father bought her a house in Maryland, allowing her to sit and write in peace. She could not think of anything that could make them relate to her and thus felt alienated.

She travelled transnationally, and this global mobility highlights the paradox of cosmopolitan belonging. Her intensive travels and her ability to move fluidly through borders suggest privilege yet hides her lack of emotional fluidity. The same was true of her relationship with Darnell; she was everywhere with him yet could never connect emotionally. After a trip to Mauritius, she accepted the fact in the following words, "About being in a relationship but never feeling at home, about being unsure, and never made to feel that I could one day be less so" (Adichie, 2025, p. 37). She discussed all that with her best friend, Zikora, and realized how she wanted to be truly known and how much she failed at that in her relationship.

Her desire to appease everyone was not just confined to him. She wanted him to be liked by everyone around her. She invited him over so he could meet Kadiatou, hoping for his good mood, but "He was in a bad mood, and already I felt as if I had done something wrong, or would do something wrong…" (Adichie, 2025, p. 48) because his application for a fellowship was rejected. He stormed out, and after weeks of cold silence and no contact, he came back just like that. So, when Omelogor was in America for a conference, she dreaded her meeting with Darnell in advance. Such was his effect on her. The meeting went as well as expected; it turned into Omelogor voicing her opinions, Darnell countering them, and Chiamaka being afraid. Chia was accustomed to toning her voice down to fit into the American culture, while Omelogor had no such qualms. This again highlights how routes shape diasporic identities, not just roots, creating diverse identities even among black people (Gilroy, 1993).

This went on for a while, and Chia was miserable, but then, like a silver lining, Darnell got his fellowship in Paris and invited her to live with him. She was over the moon and booked her ticket instantly. She felt hopeful that a changed landscape could change Darnell. She was aware of her shortsightedness when it came to him, as she herself said: "It was control, a rationing of what I was allowed. He squashed my smallest pleasures, and I helped him flatten them, sinking myself into the mean crevices of his will" (Adichie, 2025, p. 60). Then, the beautiful dream was shattered just because she ordered a mimosa in Paris. All these years of the relationship were enough to see how she did everything she could to fit in with a Black American man, being a Black African woman, and failed to develop any intimacy whatsoever.

Her relationship with Chuka later complicates the situation further. She met Chuka at a wedding in Indiana and instantly clicked. With him, she experienced respect and stability. He was caring, supportive, and confident. She still saw "his otherness" (Adichie, 2025, p. 70) and was unable to love him despite having explosive sexual chemistry. Her inability to love him points to a deeper contradiction: she wanted a connection and was not willing to follow the structures required to maintain it. It should have been perfect given that he was an engineer, a man from Ambara State, and Catholic (Adichie, 2025). She even told her mother about him and was hopeful for a future. It all fell apart when they were planning their wedding, and Chiamaka said she was not ready:

I wished I could think of marriage as an honor, a badge bestowed on me. But I couldn't. The thought of marriage to Chuka felt like the truncating of my life to fit a new mold, and I could think only of what would change that I did not want changed. (Adichie, 2025, p. 85)

This shows how patriarchal structure demands that women pursue marriage, yet it can restrict their autonomy. Here, Chia is clearly resisting the structure that could reshape her identity. No system facilitated "merging of souls" (Adichie, 2025, p. 64). The ultimate form of intimacy she desired without a husband or a child. Here, her fragmentation was a result of limited socially permitted forms of intimacy.

She encountered other men, including the British man for whom she adopted a fake accent, revealing how new forms of performance are demanded in global contexts. Again, her romantic notions led her on this journey of love, but it collapsed the moment another structural truth emerged that he was married. After that, their relationship collapsed, illustrating the fragility of such intimacies in transnational contexts where identity is always in motion.

4.2. Waiting as a Wound: Patriarchal Expectation and Affective Abandonment in Zikora's Narrative

Zikora's narrative adds more to the novel's exploration of fragmented intimacy by adding the politics of bodily vulnerability, patriarchal conditioning, and abandonment, along with the idea of generational trauma and silence. Zikora's sense of self and her concept of relationships are quite fragmented, and it is apparent at the very beginning of her narrative. Her story begins under extreme conditions, with her in the throes of childbirth in the absence of the child's father, experiencing pain and abandonment at the same time. To understand the history of abandonment and her desire for marriage in Zikora, Hartman (2019) provides an argument about how Black women's long histories of loss shape their attachments. The command given by her mother, "Hold yourself together" (Adichie, 2025, p. 101), encapsulates how Black and African women are emotionally

disciplined to act in a certain way. This reinforces the idea that composure is both a cultural demand and a survival tactic demanded of women. In that hospital room, she experiences the cruelest form of abandonment while going through the profound act of creation.

Her romantic experiences reveal how intimacy collapses in her life under patriarchal structures long before Kwame (the child's father). Her twenties and thirties were invested in men who wanted her for reproductive ability, domesticity, or compliance. She does not expect to meet two men "who were thieves of time, because she stayed waiting for them to propose, waiting while her late thirties slid past, and waiting still" (Adichie, 2025, p. 111). The first man is by no means ideal, as his house is a dirty mess, he always has to say one thing or another about women and their responsibilities in marriage, and he asks for proof of fertility from her. He does everything except propose to her. The second one is a man "who sulked like a child" (Adichie, 2025, p. 115), loved to see her tearful apologies, and never said anything to ensure the security of their relationship. She performs like a perfect candidate for an ideal wife by doing everything for him, allowing him to see how she perfectly "handled work and home" (Adichie, 2025, p. 117). It does not come to fruition. Zikora's wait to be recognized became structural and alienated her in a way that her intimacy is suspended.

Kwame's act of betrayal and abandonment reinforces this structural condition. The way he silently leaves without further contact after hearing about her pregnancy reveals how he held power through his retreat and silence. This ambiguity that surrounds the departure turns violent when it questions her sense of self and the desired future. She has a timeline in mind, all starting with a good job, "then a splashy Catholic wedding, followed shortly by two children, or maybe three" (Adichie, 2025, p. 107). The collapse of this timeline leaves her suspended between the woman she wants to be and the woman she is forced to be.

Childbirth intensifies the issue as she is left with her fragmented self and a baby boy, and she looks at him "knowing it was her baby, but in the space where her joy should be there was nothing." (Adichie, 2025, p. 138). The absence of the immediate and expected joy of becoming a mother also challenges the traditional norms of motherhood. This moment is marked by an act of abandonment so painful that she became numb.

Her relationship with her mother further highlights and complicates the theme of fragmented intimacy. Her mother's arrival and her somewhat cold and distant attitude showed how Zikora had even experienced rejection from her mother throughout her life. This portrayed the patterns of fragmented intimacy shared across generations. Zikora could not find peace during the period of delivery, even with her mother present. As the narrative unfolded, her mother is portrayed in a new light as she flies to America the moment, she

hears that Zikora is giving birth and stays with her. With her own pain of abandonment, she realizes: "It was her father who destroyed, and it was her mother she blamed for the ruins left behind" (Adichie, 2025, p. 151). She sees a woman who adopted strength as a fighting mechanism against the patriarchal norms of her society.

The later revelations make it clear that her mother experienced displacement that was not necessarily geographical but emotional. When they come back home, while Zikora fights with postpartum, her mother starts opening up about her own life. It was the first time her mother had shared something intimate with her about her past, and she felt like "... her mother was becoming a person before her eyes" (Adichie, 2025, p. 154). Her mother reveals how she had a hysterectomy while giving birth to Zikora and never tells her husband because she was afraid. In her own words, "To be a wife without a womb was to be useless" (Adichie, 2025, p. 155). She keeps on pretending to have miscarriages and allows her husband to marry another woman and carries silence as a form of protection. This reveals how the patriarchal expectations of her society isolated her, and she has a fragmented idea of self and equally incomplete and conditional intimacy with her family, especially her daughter.

Zikora, somehow, internalized the pattern, and both women experienced a cycle of misrecognition where they desired acknowledgement but could not demand it. Zikora misread her other because she could not see the roots of the apparent silence. Ahmed's (2004) affect theory explores how emotions are not private but are socially produced and "stick" to certain bodies. As in Zikora's case, the fear of abandonment and longing shaped her desires and decisions. She invested a lot in her relationships, but her partners' continual withdrawal created emotional deficits (Ahmed, 2004). She keeps on trying to find refuge from the inherited history of emotional instability and to confront it. Her pursuit can be seen as a "wayward" (Hartman, 2019) experiment to create a life out of abandonment, but it failed to produce desired results. It is also apparent in her friendships with women, as Omelogor observes in her narrative that "She relates with women only through the pain caused them by men" (Adichie, 2025, p. 290).

The fragmentation lingers on. In short, abandonment becomes an "affective currency" (Ahmed, 2004), and Zikora's distrust of men and alienation becomes structural issues. The instance when Chiamaka brings Chuka along to see Zikora's son, she refuses to talk to him. She does not trust him and thought: "What manner of monsters were hidden in his nice guy skin, and how soon before they emerged to torment Chia?" (Adichie, 2025, p. 157). This distrust and relational idea are shaped not just by Kwame but also by her father and repeated encounters with physical and emotional abandonment. This specific need for intimacy remains unfulfilled, reaffirming Gilroy's (1993) idea that displacement

is given in the Black diasporic subject. Zikora is displaced emotionally and is unable to find stable relational structures with no promise of certainty.

By the end of her narrative, Zikora and her mother find a connection in their shared postpartum space, as they try to negotiate intimacy on their own terms. It does not resolve the issue but allows them a space built on shared pain rather than silence. Her story demonstrates how alienation and difficulty in relationships are not merely personal but structural. It is based on gendered expectations, intergenerational currency of affectiveness, and cultural norms, thus reinforcing the central idea that intimacy in Adichie's *Dream Count* (2025) is continually destabilized.

4.3. Sexual Violence, Migration, and the Collapse of Intimacy in Kadiatou's Life

Kadiatou's narrative is rich in a structurally grounded exploration of fragmented intimacy in *Dream Count (2025),* showing how global power dynamics, displacement, class, and patriarchy fracture a woman's emotional world. Unlike Chiamaka or Zikora, her narrative begins by showing a life from childhood and how she had limited choices available to her. The death of her father is the loss she experienced early, and it shows how her experience of a relationship ended in violence. Her pain and sense of hollowness are quite synonymous with the way her father's body was found: "Nothing of Papa was left whole" (Adichie, 2025, p. 165). This also shatters the family's idea of security and sets a precedent for a pattern in how intimacy in Kadiatou's life is always threatened by forces she cannot control.

Binta, Kadi's older sister, exhibited a desire for escape that Kadi didn't share in the beginning. Binta was born with dreams, and her "spirit circled above, never landing, waiting until her real life could begin with Tantie Fanta in Conakry" (Adichie, 2025, p. 164). They were displaced and moved to the village after their father's death, and Kadi liked it. She was praised by everyone there for being a girl who would one day become an ideal wife, an early conditioning into gendered roles. Her fragmentation appeared through the ritual of female genital mutilation (FMG): "On the day they were cut, Kadiatou thought, they are going to cut us today, but they did not tell us that they are going to cut us today." (Adichie, 2025, p. 168). This shows how patriarchal norms have authority over female bodies and autonomy. They are cut at an age when they have no idea what this means. Ahmed's (2004) idea helps explain how emotions of betrayal, fear, and confusion can become embedded in the body, resulting in lifelong conditioning towards silence and compliance. Kadi's silence and endurance, as well as Binta's verbal protest, foreshadowed the opposing paths both sisters would take and would shape Kadi's inability to process harm.

Kadiatou's first attempt away from the expected roles was her early romantic entanglement with Amadou. "Kadiatou wanted a harmonious home, and if you wanted a harmonious home, you married a close relative, to keep the lineage clean." (Adichie, 2025, p. 174). She had internalized this traditional logic, yet she dreamed of a life with Amadou in the faraway land of America, where her imagination could not reach.

Binta's sudden death that Kadi felt as an "implosion in her heart, the beginning of a deathless sorrow, the moment that love forever turned to loss." (Adichie, 2025, p. 179). This deepened the emotional void and made her prone to exploitative relationships. As the village was plagued by sickness and crop failure, she was married off to an older man, Saidou, without her consent, and had to move to a mining town.

The marriage deepened her sense of fragmentation as she was thrust into "noise and dust" (Adichie, 2025, p. 183). She could not adjust there and was mocked by the people because of her village background. She cried and scrubbed the floors and furniture, with "her loneliness aching in her bones" (Adichie, 2025, p. 185). She was stripped of familiar people and community, subjected to the patriarchal demand that she should never refuse her husband. Another rupture appeared in the form of a miscarriage and the death of the second child, and "She felt such coldness in her heart" (Adichie, 2025, p. 187). This only silenced the capacity for intimacy and made her body a site of sorrow.

She experienced emotional turmoil after discovering that Saidou drank alcohol, and she felt a deep sense of fear. She thought that his drinking was a curse, and that's when she embodied silence, and sexual intimacy was dreadful for her. She felt like she could die. Then came the news that her husband had been killed in a mining accident. After the death, her in-laws took everything and cursed her for not having a son to continue their line. The discovery of pregnancy after his death became a point of resistance. She silently went to Conakry and lived with her aunt, where she gave birth to a baby girl. "A complete baby, and hers, all hers" (Adichie, 2025, p. 189). She named her Binta and somehow restored the lost fragment of intimacy that was lost with her sister's death. She worked as a cook at someone's place and then proceeded to work as a server in a restaurant. She dreamed of owning a restaurant one day. In that economic space, she was raped by a man she trusted. "Shame, shame like hot water scalded through her. And shock. Shame and shock" (Adichie, 2025, p. 193). This trauma is also physical and affective, reasserting Hartman's (2019) analysis of how bodies of Black women are a site of vulnerability because of the social structures that normalize their exploitation.

She felt hope rise again when Amadou came back and stated that he wished to take her and Binta away from there to the USA, but migration became another source of fragmentation. Her asylum papers were approved without a hitch, and she was taken to

Queens by Amadou to stay with his uncle. His uncle, Ibrahima, was a nice man, but Amadou was a different man in America. He was not coming to the point of marriage, and his efforts to assimilate her into their culture were beyond her understanding. Then she discovered he had a child he had never mentioned or met. Migration somehow relocated her vulnerability to a new and different system, and she felt lost. Gilroy (1993) reminds us that diasporic people experience emotional displacement in addition to geographical displacement. Kadi's arrival in American society does not warrant recognition, so she must figure it out on her own.

Her bold decision to rely on herself and to take up a job at a hotel in Washington marked a turning point in her life. For the first time, she asserted her agency: "She tried not to show how much her own decision frightened her. The galloping heartbeat flooding through her. Find her own place on her own. Alone with Binta" (Adichie, 2025, p. 205). There she met Chimaka and experienced an intimacy not conditioned by marriage or blood. Chia offered her resources with an open heart. With her help and connections, she got a better job at George Plaza. With her all-appeasing nature, Chia took Kadi and Binta under her wings "until Kadiatou was the caretaker, with her own key, coming and going, even when Chia was away" (Adichie, 2025, p. 207). This moment of connection with Chia and her friends is significant because it demonstrates that intimacy is possible when relationships are not imposed but chosen.

A moment of rupture appeared when Amadou was jailed for marijuana possession. She felt another sort of alienation while meeting him there and thought that, "She should not have come here just to look at him, like an animal in a cage. Seated separated from him by hard glass, so far from him that he could not even smell her jasmine scent" (Adichie, 2025, p. 212). It revealed that his secrecy was to save her from trouble, and then it was a waiting game from there.

The peace she experienced in her life was short-lived, and it came crashing down on "The day that changed her life began ordinarily as most extraordinary days do" (Adichie, 2025, p. 219). A VIP guest in suite number 2806 sexually assaulted her, thus shattering the fragile structure of intimacy. The assault itself was violent and painful, but the aftermath revealed the institutional betrayal. After that, she was forced to recount the event repeatedly by multiple people, had to undergo extensive and intrusive medical examinations, and had to live in fear of losing her job. Her experience of intimacy from then on was with surveillance and interrogation. The VIP turned out to be famous and important, so the case also became an international headline. Her home was no longer a safe space for her as people wanted to interview her, and she was shocked because "How could this happen in America? Strangers banging on her door, demanding to be let in"

(Adichie, 2025, p. 238). This captures her shock quite vividly as she had thought that America was a safe country.

From there on, she became a public object and "her old life was over, the careful life she had built for herself and Binta, the future with Amadou; the certainties she held, all were gone" (Adichie, 2025, p. 240). She was under scrutiny and surveillance, and what she really wanted was to go back to her normal life. Hartman (2019) discusses how the public perceives the suffering of Black women and how their pain is institutionalized as a scandal or means of entertainment and is not recognized as trauma.

She felt violated further by the gruesome investigations, where everything was cross-examined, and she felt isolated in the worst possible ways. "Chia said the prosecutor was on her side, fighting for her, but she knew as soon as she arrived that she was not among friends." (Adichie, 2025, p. 246). She was questioned in ways she could not comprehend, and all her past was laid bare for people to see and comment on. She felt violated with "Americans speaking fast, her name on strangers' lips, chopping her story into bits with a knife, as if anybody but her could discern what truly happened to her" (Adichie, 2025, p. 252). Then came the labelling and threats. She was labelled as a prostitute, and she had to face the stereotypes that typically surround a Black working-class woman. The intimacy she once found collapsed under the systemic violence she faced: "This would never end; she could not see how this could ever end. She would never wash off this stain. Her life would never be the same" (Adichie, 2025, p. 253). These remarks are evidence that her loss was going to remain, highlighting a site of failed intimacies and dreams, shaped by a patriarchal marriage, childhood loss, economic standpoint, migration, and sexual assault.

Her section concludes with a realization that she is alone, which perfectly aligns with the article's main argument that intimacy fails because of the systems that surround an individual, as explored above. It's a living condition of women who navigate intersections while moving across borders.

4.4. Intimacy without Attachment: Power, Observation, and Emotional Distance in Omelogor's World

Omelogor's narrative enriches the novel's exploration of fragmented intimacies by portraying a Nigerian woman who is financially stable, outspoken, emotionally articulate, socially well-established, yet unable to possess intimacy in certain regards. Her economic and social standing is apparent from the very beginning as she has a large house in Abuja, domestic staff, cars, a driver, a cook, and a large circle of friends. Yet this stability is soon questioned by reminding her that she is "childless at the age of fourty-six" (Adichie, 2025, p. 246). While the whole world is talking and worrying about coronavirus, her aunt is

worried about her womb's biological clock running out. "Those words pierced and sank in and cut. *Don't pretend that you like the life you are living* [italics original]" (Adichie, 2025, p. 257). This remark forced Omelogor to confront the question of whether she was living her dream life or not, and her desire to have a child came to the fore. Ahmed (2004) has discussed how cultural norms and expectations dictate what a fulfilled woman's life should look like, and Omelogor is also made to question whether her life aligns with what a woman should want. The intimacy between her contentment and the idea of motherhood being the ultimate female goal is fragmented.

Her social presence and friendships counteract the fragmentation, as she has friends who are dependable, trusted and close. "Jide is the oldest and closest, and of course, Hauwa" (Achidie, 2025, p. 258). She loves to host dinners, feed her friends generously, and take care of her house help and staff financially in whatever way she can. She loves Chia and refuses to partake in family politics that require her to badmouth this particular cousin of hers. She loved her and was always ready to meet her, and explicitly stated, "Yes, I have time for Chia. Chia is easy to love, but had she not been, I would have loved her still. Sometimes two humans have spirits fully at rest with each other and lucky for" (Adichie, 2025, p. 305). This suggests a woman who is comfortable with her emotions and relations. Her vulnerabilities appear intermittently, though; for instance, her slightly possessive bond with Hauwa shows a hidden sense of insecurity. The alienation is, however, observed when she went to the all-girls party with Hauwa, where married women indulge themselves in transgression, drugs, sex, and reckless behaviour.

Moreover, Omelogor also navigates the world of finance by masking her femininity and getting lost in it. It is interesting to see her mastering the male-dominated corporate world. She wanted to be the CEO's "... star right hand, whispering in his ear, and wielding the soft and secure power of it" (Adichie, 2025, p. 321). She achieved that by successfully handling male egos and establishing her intelligence. She expressed how she did that by "a delicate balance with powerful men like him, whose shockingly thin skins I came to know well… The more they talked of my braininess, the less they mentioned my body or asked for my number or joked about taking me home" (Adichie, 2025, p. 323). She learned to re-direct the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) into a gaze of respect. Not only this, but she also successfully invested in stock, and "Then the implosion of money, almost overnight, when PGT went public, and the shares made millionaires of us—us being a tight, tiny circle, the men in the secret cave and me" (Adichie, 2025, p. 297).

This came with a cost, though, as she assimilated so much that she learned to utilize her intelligence negatively and, in a few years, she "had learned to paint fraud in pretty colours" and "... knew what to write in the books to hide bad transactions…" (Adichie, 2025, p. 327).

That is how she got herself entangled in the complex web of the morally corrupt world of money laundering that she spearheaded. Then she experienced a moral awakening and attempted to repair the ethical failure by deciding to help women in need by skimming money from each transaction. She came up with this plan and named the company Robyn Hood. "Jide said it was a crazy idea, going around giving money to women with small businesses" (Adichie, 2025, p. 329), but she hired Eze to find such women and then flew to the places to award the money. Even this endeavour seems to embody structural distance, as she is not emotionally connected to the women she helps.

Moving to her romantic life reveals another site of emotional fragmentation. It is interesting to see how Omelogor and the people around her described the process of meeting someone they found interesting. Chia called it a "short passion attack" (Adichie, 2025, p. 291), Jade considered them "thirst-quench" (Adichie, 2025, p. 291), and Omelogor called them emotions. Her romantic entanglements are quite short-lived. The first one was with 'Mr Big Head', as she called him; she was disgusted by him and even lied about her need to pray to get rid of him. He tried to tarnish her reputation because she refused to see him again in the working circle. She lost a few projects as a result. With Arinze, it lasted for eleven months. "There was a man who said, "I love you" over and over in bed, like an incantatory chant for raising the dead, which distracted and disrupted my desire." (Adichie, 2025, p. 294). So, she broke up with him. Chijioke was a man she wished to love but refused to be with him. Her friends thought that having money and living comfortably made her immune to the idea of intimacy. Her own account revealed a much deeper issue of affective dissociation (Ahmed, 2004). "For so long, I have known myself to feel emotions without being inside them, as if to feel it was merely to watch it, myself and the emotions separate things, eternally unable to coalesce." (Adichie, 2025, p. 342). She even treated relationships as "experiments" to see how people treated intimacy, not fully immersing in the experience but rather clinically observing it.

Her decision to study pornography cemented this analytical endeavour. She was interested in the mechanics of it and how it shaped men's sexual habits and expectations. Arinze told her that she was such a man because she wanted to be left alone after intimate moments. She could not say 'I love you' to him. He was the one who got her into the mechanics of pornography when he said, "*Who do you think teaches men stuff?* and I began to feel sorry for men" (Adichie, 2025, p. 344). This urged her to turn the intricacies of sexual experiences into an academic inquiry. That is how she went to America to pursue her graduation in pornography and left behind the lucrative world of finance. Moreover, she launched a website titled "For Men Only", where she explored their psyche, intimacy, emotions, their relationship with women, and how they treat women in a humorously sarcastic way. She addressed them as "Dear men" and signed off with "Remember, I'm on

your side, dear men" (Adichie, 2025, p. 352). This again shows how she was an observer of male intimacy but never a participant in her own. Her critical observation deepens the split between understanding and feeling.

America intensified the split to an extreme. It triggered an emotional turmoil along with a physical one. It all began with the first visa interview, following headaches, and she realized, "I had never thought such morbid thoughts before, but I had also never lived in a place so acutely not mine" (Adichie, 2025, p. 352). She went into bouts of depression and could not understand why and went to therapy for the first time in her life. Even in her graduate class, she was an outsider, and her social circle collapsed. As she noted, "I had no friends in America" (Adichie, 2025, p. 355). She came to America looking for something she had lost but felt like losing herself more. She got into arguments to appease her misery and blamed America. "America didn't owe me restoration and yet I felt that it did, as if it had reneged on a promise that was never really made" (Adichie, 2025, p. 362). Gilroy's (2000) framework of diaspora explains this feeling of arriving in a new place, hoping for renewal but instead encountering racism, alienation, attachment, and lack of belonging. She came back and decided to live her life in Abuja.

Omelogor's story asserts this paper's claim that fragmentation is not simply a product of lack and is not limited to women who are silenced or economically unstable. She excels in public spaces, is an excellent observer of emotions, but is unable to articulate her own. This shows how intimacy is structurally fragile under capitalist and transnational patriarchal powers.

5. Conclusion: Fragmented Intimacy as a Structural Condition

Dream Count (2025) ends by returning to Chia's perspective, drawing the narratives together in a full circle. This section highlights the structural isolation of their lives, woven together but with a thread of fractured intimacy. The lockdown is finally over, but emotional alienation remains. Chimaka's "dream count" (Adichie, 2025, p. 403) is not merely a ritual of revisiting desires during quarantine but an affective audit of a life filled with incomplete or partial intimacies. Her regret over not trying enough for Chuka reveals how she came to a mature conclusion about what sort of intimacy a steady love would have brought. Nevertheless, this awareness arrives too late when nothing can be done about it, hence showing that the novel resists a resolution for fractured sites of connection.

Zikora's world is still riddled with the dilemma of abandonment. Her son, Chidera, is now five, and Kwame's parents are still unaware of his presence. This detail is important to emphasize how fragmented intimacies persist and familial rupture remains unhealed even after periods of growth. Zikora's resilience in the face of trauma is notable, in any

case. Omelogor acts as the emotional anchor for Chia as she analyzes her relationships with her, but her romantic life remains guarded. Her intelligence, eloquence, and stability could not protect her from the isolation she experienced. She revealed the deepest fracture about how she could not surrender control to let intimacy grow. Kadiatou marks the emotional climax of the novel. After being victim-blamed and ostracized by the social and justice system, her case was dropped because her account was not deemed trustworthy. This should have brought a sense of doom, but Kadi was relieved, and her depression left her. Chiamaka observes, "I felt that I was observing something remarkable, the unfolding of Kadi, a woman becoming anew before my eyes. How in a moment despair was flung away" (Adichie, 2025, p. 407). This is yet another site of fragmentation which shows that she still cannot cope well with the idea of loss and lacks the ability to process it.

To conclude, this shows and reaffirms the article's claim that intimacy remains fragmented and incomplete in *Dream Count* (2025), suggesting that it cannot be restored to its intact form under global patriarchy, capitalism, racial mechanics, and diaspora. It hints at the ongoing repair work after the structural disruption. The novel offers a cartography of connections and how they are made and unmade under different structures of power. Reading these stories through the lens of fragmented intimacies provides a profound idea about how African and diasporic women cultivate attachments that are fragile under the pressure of structures that rarely allow them a space to belong.

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