

WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
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REVIEWED BY LAUREN
FORNIER

We Should All Be Feminists is a pocket-sized book by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that functions as a non-academic defence of feminism. Adichie writes this essay from the perspective of her experience as a woman based out of contemporary Nigeria and America. Following the thesis established by the book's title, the form and the content of this book are intended to make *feminism*—as a term of self-identification and as a social and political movement—accessible to a mass audience. Adichie uses anecdotal evidence to make her argument that gender-based discriminations persist in contemporary life, and that *feminism* is needed to actively face “the problem of gender.” Adichie directly reasons with those who say that feminism is no longer needed today. She chooses examples that resonate with a wide readership; the informal tone and straightforward language suits an audience that might not be accustomed to thinking critically about gender.

While Adichie took up the issue of male violence against women in her 2003 novel *Purple Hibiscus*, the moments of gender-based discrimination that she illustrates in *We Should All Be Feminists* are less explicitly violent and therefore make for a less taxing read. In choosing examples like the socialization of girls and boys into their respective gender roles, and the ways in which women in managerial positions are read as aggressive for the same behaviours that garner a male manager praise as assertive, Adichie

takes on gender oppression while keeping the tone respectfully light. There are moments of humour and self-reflexivity throughout: Adichie recalls how she began to identify as a “Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men” as a means of anticipating the stereotypes she encountered as a self-identified feminist. Keenly, Adichie emphasizes how men will benefit from feminism just as women do—that the pressures that patriarchy places on the masculine role can be just as detrimental as those placed on women. Hence, the title's argument—*We Should All Be Feminists*—rings true for persons of all genders.

For those familiar with feminist theory, Adichie's title brings to mind bell hooks's *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000). bell hooks structured *Feminism is for Everybody* as an accessible handbook on feminism, which she defines as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (1). Both Adichie and hooks are black feminists who attempt to write non-academic primers on feminism as a means of making feminism accessible to non-academic readers; both begin with the premise that feminism is widely misunderstood and negatively stereotyped; both do not formally cite sources besides themselves; both speak in terms of what hooks's calls “Visionary Feminism,” where readers are encouraged to envision a world that is more equitable and joyous for a greater number of people.

When it comes to contemporary feminist and postcolonial scholarship, and whether or not Adichie's text brings something new to the conversation, this text is limited. Adichie takes a heteronormative and cis-gendered approach to feminism: throughout the book, gender is assumed to be a binary in which persons are biologically male or female—no room is made for trans

and other non-binary identities. More consequential to her overall argument is the decision Adichie makes to focus solely on gender, rather than opting for an intersectional approach. Adichie makes the decision to draw her examples from life in contemporary Lagos, defamiliarizing Western readers' stereotypical understandings of Africa just as she defamiliarizes stereotypical understandings of feminism; in the Introduction, Adichie explains that this essay evolved from a talk at TEDxEuston, “a yearly conference focused on Africa” (3). And yet, Adichie seems to disavow an intersectional approach to feminism in this book: she implies that she is not interested in talking about class or race, here — that “...this conversation is about gender” (43-44). To isolate gender from other positionings can perhaps only be done in the abstract. And yet, it is clear that Adichie is doing so in an effort to rhetorically strip down our complicated social realities and make her argument simple: feminism is needed as a means of acknowledging “the specific and particular problem of gender” (41).

Early in the book, Adichie admits “I often make the mistake of thinking that something that is obvious to me is just as obvious to everyone else” (14). What is obvious to Adichie but is not obvious to many of the people in her life is that feminism is still needed in contemporary life. This book takes what seems obvious to Adichie—and other well-read feminists—and effectively breaks it down into the fundamentals for a wider readership.

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