

## Food and Female Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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### Abstract

Culinary literary criticism is a new field which has gathered interest among many scholars around the world. The cultural significance of gastronomic representations in literary texts is usually interconnected with the issues of gender, race, and class. The current study aims to examine the relation between food and gender identity in the selected works of two prominent Nigerian female writers in terms of Susan Bordo's views on 'food and the ideal body image' and 'cooking and gender roles'. In the present age, the ideas of having an ideal gendered body and also gender obligations have permeated more deeply among individuals by the social media, including advertisements, and thus have gained increasing prominence among scholars. Employing Foucault's terminology, Bordo criticizes the individuals' obsession and excess to shape their bodies according to the gendered ideals and thus turning to docile bodies and also the issue of cooking as a gendered micropractice. Here, it can be argued how Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the two feminist novelists, present the motif of food and cooking in their works to question the dominant patriarchal culture and the expected gender roles.

### Keywords

Culinary Literary Criticism; Ideal Body Image; Docile Body; Cooking; Gender Roles; Micropractice.

### 1. Introduction

The presence of food and culinary elements in different genres of literature and literary essays are about "more than a realistic depiction of everyday human existence" (Thompson 1338). Literary scholars and anthropologists agree that food acts like a language, communicating between people. Food in literary texts, "forms a second layer of signs" and renders "a language of symbols" (1338-1339). Roland Barthes in "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption", argues how food should not be

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considered as trivial and insignificant. In his perspective, food is “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usage, situations, and behavior” (Barthes 21). The preparation and consumption of food are deeply intertwined with “the beliefs, practices, and laws of nations and cultures”; therefore, “food and culture define one another” (Kaplan 10). Accordingly, Margaret Atwood in her novel, *The Edible Woman* writes, “Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk” (Atwood 53).

Food has recently appeared as a topic for serious literary studies. There are growing body of works written on the interrelation of food studies and literary studies. Critics apply various approaches to study food in literary texts. Some critics explore the function of culinary images as a literary device such as a symbol. Others study food as a cultural sign and they analyze the ways in which food can represent, “construct or deconstruct identity” and “denote or mask” the concept of “otherness” (Baučeková 79). Therefore, they investigate the ways in which food relates to such issues as class, gender, bodily health, national, and ethnic identity (Fitzpatrick 128).

The main argument of the present study focuses on the representation of food in the selected Nigerian novels and how food and its representations are utilized by these authors to depict the gender identity of some characters. The theoretical framework is based on Susan Bordo’s views on food and gender identity. Susan Bordo (1947- ), the well-known cultural historian, feminist scholar, and media critic, has specialized in contemporary culture and its relation to the body, focusing on eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, cosmetic surgery, beauty and evolutionary theory. Bordo is a professor of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Kentucky and the writer of significant works. Her totally remarkable book, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993) is a classic of the genre of gender and food particularly women and food (Thompson 1007). Bordo advocates feminism’s analyses of culture and its practical consequences on women’s everyday lives. She insists on the political activism of feminism; therefore, feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s is her model (Leitch 2361). Her work has been developed from the theories of the second wave feminists and she criticizes many of her colleagues particularly Judith Butler for rejecting ‘old’ feminist work (Green 177).

Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are both feminist writers who depict their concern for gender and cultural issues in their works. Florence Onyebuchi “Buchi” Emecheta (1944-2017) was a Nigerian-born British novelist who wrote more than 20 books including novels, plays and autobiography, as well as works for children. As a second generation Igbo female writer, Emecheta’s works “have created a milestone in African literature” (Nadaswaran 146). Her works mostly incorporate themes of child slavery, racial prejudice, motherhood, female independence, female freedom through

education, and the tension between tradition and modernity. Women in Emecheta's works suffer from the pain of being marginalized by the patriarchal structure of the society. Emecheta in her 1986 essay, "Feminism with a Small 'f'" writes that she has chronicled the everyday life of the African women she knows in her works, and by doing this she has been labeled a feminist. She acknowledges that she did not know that by writing about the African women she was going to be called a feminist (Emecheta 1986: 175). Emecheta believes that African feminism differs significantly from Western feminism due to the distinct cultural values. Therefore, she admits that if she is supposed to be called a feminist then she is indeed "an African feminist with a small f" (175).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (1977- ) is an award-winning Nigerian novelist, writer of short stories, and nonfiction. Her works mainly deal with themes of culture, gender-specific issues, family, domestic violence, politics, national identity, self-realization, and colonialism. Adichie, as one of the third-generation African female writers, believes that gender equality has not yet been recognized in most African nations (Kaboré 408). In comparison with the first and second generations of African female writers who were "cautious with the term 'feminism' because of its Western baggage", Adichie envisages feminism differently (416). She does not conceive feminism "in opposition to the West, but in relation to it" in that feminism "transcends cultural differences" and "seeks to enhance the dignity of individuals without disrupting community cohesion" (416). Adichie's interest in using the motif of food and eating in her works is also noteworthy. Food, as a major motif in her works, is always present as an inseparable part in the lives of the characters and depicts their feelings, situations, and experiences.

The following section of the paper explores the major examples of the literature review. Then, the third section which is dedicated to the theoretical framework aims at giving an insight into Bordo's views on 'food and the ideal body image' and 'cooking and gender roles'. The fourth section attempts to analyze Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* in the light of Bordo's aforementioned viewpoints. And the conclusion summarizes the main points discussed in the previous sections of the paper adding the findings.

## 2. Literature Review

There have been various books, dissertations, and articles written on the significance of food and its ramifications in the works of fiction by different writers around the world such as Indian, Chinese or English writers. Here are a few examples to mention. Joan Fitzpatrick in *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern Dietaries and the Plays* (2016) studies common and exotic food in Shakespeare's plays. This book directs scholarly attention to the significance of early modern dietaries, analyzing their role in wider culture as well as their intersection with dramatic art. It explores how culinary elements are indices of

one's position in relation to complex ideas about rank, nationality, and physical and spiritual well-being. Shakuntala Ray in *Divided Tongues: The Politics and Poetics of Food in Modern Anglophone Indian Fiction* (2019), places food at the center within postcolonial literary readings. She argues that food functions as a signifying system that points at gender, sexuality, caste, class and nationality. Wenying Xu in *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (2008) studies alimentary references in the works of seven Asian American writers (John Okada, Joy Kogawa, Frank Chin, Li-Young Lee, David Wong Louie, Mei Ng, and Monique Truong), depicting Asian American identities in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, class, diaspora, and sexuality.

There are some books and articles about the representation of food and its significance in the works of fiction written by some African writers; however, the number of studies carried out about English works by Nigerian writers particularly on the selected works of the present study is considerably deficient. Syarif Hidayat in "Food, Modernity and Identity: Cosmopolitanism in Adichie's *Americanah*" studies Kwame Anthony Appiah's theory of rooted cosmopolitanism in *Americanah* aiming to answer "how the tug-of-war between local and cosmopolitan is seen in Ifemelu's food choices and her adoption of the American lifestyle" (92).

Bishop Highfield in his book, *Food and Foodways in African Narratives: Community, Culture, and Heritage* (2017), studies African culture and history by rendering the examples of the motif of food in some works of fiction by certain African writers. The works by Nigerian writers which are included in this work are *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Graceland* by Chris Abani. The writer does not render any specific theoretical framework in his study of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. He studies domestic violence and resistance through rendering the symbolic significance of food in this novel. In "Dining Room and Kitchen: Food-Related Spaces and their Interfaces with the Female Body in *Purple Hibiscus*" (2017), Jessica Hume employs the feminine space theories derived from the British feminist, Sarah Mills' "Gender and Colonial Space" and the Australian feminist, Grosz' "Bodies/Cities". Corinne Sandwith in "Frailties of the Flesh: Observing the Body in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" offers a reading of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) through the lens of the body as it articulates the reciprocal connections between the patriarchal tyranny and violence of the domestic sphere and the public violence of the postcolonial state. Sindhu and Lydia in "Food and Social Difference in *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adichie" trace the characters' differences in their social positions through their food choices; however, there is no theoretical framework in this article. J Santhiya in "Food as a metaphor for colonial power in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" examines the effects of colonization on the characters' food choices but there is a lack of theoretical framework in this article too. In chapter seventeen of *The Routledge Companion to*

*Literature and Food* (2018) entitled “Transforming Hunger into Power: Food and Resistance in Nigerian Literature”, Jenni Ramone emphasizes on the significance of food and particularly commensality as indicative of belonging in Nigerian literature and culture. Exploring food and resistance in some works by Ben Okri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Chris Abani, she charges colonialism with the destruction of commensality in Igbo society. Mansour Gueye in his PhD dissertation, *Women in African Women’s Writings: A Study of Novels by Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga*, studies Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*, and *Double Yoke* and also Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, and *The Book of Not* to explore how these writers adapt the mainstream feminist tradition to their own African cultural context and protest against women’s subjugation.

Shirin Edwin in “Subverting Social Customs: The Representation of Food in Three West African Francophone Novels” examines the representation of food in Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les soleils des indépendances* (1968) (*The Suns of Independence*), Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre* (1979) (*So Long a Letter*), and Aminata Sow Fall’s *Le revenant* (1979) (*The Ghost*). Edwin in this article represents the ways these novelists employ food and eating habits to criticize the social and political situations of West African societies. Dan Ojwang in the third chapter of *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature* entitled “Gastropolitics and Diasporic Self-Writing” explores the autobiographies of Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Jameela Siddiqi’s *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* and Vassanji’s *No New Land*, demonstrating how food conveys the experience of migration. In this chapter, Ojwang argues that food “encodes histories of resistance, accommodation and cultural exchange, acting in the process as an inscription of memory in material form” (Ojwang 19).

The present study sees the merit of these readings; however, it attempts to bridge the gaps and add some new findings. This work approaches a major part of feminine identity that has not received the attention it deserves and that by applying Susan Bordo’s views on the selected novels, it can be observed how food (not just as cooked dishes, but also in terms of production and distribution), gender identity, and culture are inextricably linked.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1. Food and the Ideal Body Image**

In *Unbearable Weight* (1993), Susan Bordo opens her discussion with a survey of the history of Western philosophy about the mind-body dualism. She argues that in the Western religious and philosophical traditions, men are identified with mind and reason; therefore, self-management has frequently been “coded as male” (185). In contrast, women are associated with body which is the site of desire and appetite threatening

reason and rationality (143). Therefore, women are considered weak in reason, and they are supposed to control their bodily desires. In Bordo's words: "all those bodily spontaneities—hunger, sexuality, the emotions—seen as needful of containment and control have been culturally constructed and coded as female" (185). Thence, in the contemporary world, slenderness is supposed to be the ideal of female attractiveness and it serves as "a metaphor for the correct management of desire" and appetite (184).

Bordo's works highlight the ways in which the body is conceptualized and articulated within distinct cultural discourses. She contends that "the body—what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body—is a medium of culture" (165). She believes that the body operates as "a metaphor for culture" (165) or "a tabula rasa, awaiting inscription by culture" (35). She holds a "social constructionist" view of body, and argues that body does not have a fixed nature; bodies change according to "the social demands placed on them" (Leitch 2360). Concluding from the works of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, Bordo argues that "the body is not only a text of culture" but also, "a practical, direct locus of social control" (1993: 165). Quoting from Bourdieu, she asserts that culture is "made body" through "seemingly trivial routines, rules, and practices" and it is transformed into "automatic, habitual activity" (165).

Bordo's work, particularly her recognition of the implications of docile bodies in her analysis of the relation between culture and the problems with food and body image, is highly influenced by Michel Foucault (26). According to Foucault, modern power, in contrast to sovereign power, works through "selfhood and subjectivity", that is, power is maintained through "individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms" rather than mainly "through physical restraint and coercion" (27). Bordo quotes from Foucault that the enactment of modern power does not need "arms, physical violence, material constraints" (qtd. in Bordo 1993: 27). According to Foucault, it only needs "a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself (27). Bordo asserts that Mary Wollstonecraft's argument in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), has also the theme of Foucault's 'docile body' as she elaborates on the social construction of femininity. She quotes from Wollstonecraft that "genteel women" are "slaves to their bodies, and glory in their subjection, women are everywhere in this deplorable state" (18). Wollstonecraft contends that women "from their infancy" are taught "that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison" (18).

To Bordo, women are more obsessed with having an ideal body image and are more vulnerable to eating disorders than men (184). The Western media, including television commercials and programs make women's "restriction and denial of hunger" the most significant aspect of "the construction of femininity" (130). As Bordo mentions, in media,

hunger for food operates as a code or metaphor for sexual appetite (110). She asserts that female hunger is more frequently “represented by Western culture in misogynist images permeated with terror and loathing rather than affection or admiration” (116-117). Women depicted on television programs or commercials are allowed to satiate their hunger only by consuming measured amounts of food (112). They are usually allowed to show their desire for food when they are pregnant or near starvation (110). Using Foucault’s terminology, Bordo states: “The social control of female hunger operates as a practical ‘discipline’ ... that trains female bodies in the knowledge of their limits and possibilities” (130). Therefore, women’s act of denying themselves food “becomes the central micropractice in the education of feminine self-restraint and containment of impulse” (130). Bordo contends that by following “an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity” which drains one’s time and energy, “female bodies become docile bodies” (166). Docile bodies are accustomed to “improvement” by “external regulation, subjection, and transformation” (166). Through attaining beauty ideals and “self-modification” or improvement, women tend to believe that they are not “good enough” (166). Bordo argues that trying to achieve the ideals of body image, in its extreme forms, may lead women “to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death” (166).

In her article, “Not just ‘a white girl’s thing’” (2013), Bordo argues that women’s obsession with slenderness is not peculiarly observed in Western societies. Through Western media, the idea of slenderness as the ideal female body image has spread all over the world among different races, classes, ethnicities, nationalities, ages, and genders; thus, it is not limited to “the problems of rich, spoiled white girls” (Bordo 2013: 274-275). In the past, the ideal body image was not the same throughout the world. Bordo renders some examples about the previously admired body images in various cultures which have been altered due to the globalization of media on how people see their bodies.

Bordo contends that “our culture” breeds disorder since it fosters “extremes, excesses, and obsessions” (271). She also asserts that according to some medical studies, genetics may play a role in people’s vulnerability to some eating disorders. However, the widespread development of these disorders in a brief period of time and the immense popularity of the global media implies that “culture is the ‘smoking gun’ that is killing people, and that the situation will not change until the culture does” (272). Bordo maintains that culture consists of “the contradictory and extreme messages we are constantly receiving about eating, dieting, and fitness” (272). As she puts it, eating disorders are “the crystallization of much that is wrong with” culture (Bordo 1993: 141). Women suffer from what Kim Chernin in *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (1981), names “tyranny of slenderness” which has become so prevalent in contemporary culture (ibid 141).

Bordo states that the obsession with diet and slenderness is normal in our contemporary world and “may function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century” (186). Such obsession generates “self-monitoring and self-disciplining ‘docile bodies’” who do not depart from social norms related to the improvement and transformation of body (186). Bordo concludes that some solutions should be found to “create a better world” by standing against the “absurdities of our lives” which is the blind imitation of what is advertised in society (2013: 275).

### **3.2. Cooking and Gender Roles**

According to Counihan, the responsibility of cooking and feeding others “have been ambiguous sources of oppression, violence, drudgery, power, and creativity for women” (2012: 7). Being under the influence of Michel Foucault’s ideas, Bordo notes that “the material ‘micropractices’ of everyday life” including “who cooks and cleans ... and even, more recently, what one eats or does not eat—have been brought out of the realm of the purely personal and into the domain of the political” (1993: 18). She asserts that the “metaphorical dualities at work” entails an idealized “gendered division of labor” in which men merely belong to the public sphere whereas women are responsible for the domestic sphere (118). To justify such a division of labor, there is a “powerful ideological underpinning” for “the cultural containment of female appetite” which posits that “women are most gratified by feeding and nourishing *others*, not themselves” (118). According to this ideology, a woman’s “passion is to give food” and she “experiences the one form of desire that is appropriately hers” through caring for and feeding others (118). Bordo examines some representations from television programs and movies to study the relation between cooking and gender roles concluding that “men eat and women prepare” (119). In spite of the increasing number of women who participate in the “public” space, their domestic role of feeding others remains “ideologically intact” (119). She suggests that men should also participate in the act of cooking in that it is not merely a woman’s responsibility.

Popular representations in media almost never display a man cooking as a routine chore, practiced every day as “the unpaid service of others” (119). Of course, men can be depicted serving food as butler or waiter or roasting a variety of items when camping, barbecuing meat or preparing a salad for special guests, or preparing instant coffee. However, all these activities are not routine, and they are done only in exceptional occasions such as birthdays. Men may be cooks only if they are skillful or professional. If they reveal too much attraction toward cooking and recipes, or if they are vegetarian, their masculinity may be undermined (Thompson 1008).



Bordo observes that in our culture, food is regarded as equal to maternal and wifely love and care. In almost every commercial, there is a woman in the background who has prepared the food for a man to eat. The woman in the background almost always “speaks the language of love and care through the offering of food” (Bordo 1993: 123). In these representations, men’s eating is bound to women’s extending of their love and it is implied that “women receive *their* gratification through nourishing others” (123). Bordo emphasizes that by her analysis she does not intend to downgrade female caring for the physical and emotional health of others or the “maternal” work that has been offensively socially disparaged even as it has been honored (123). She also notes that she does not suggest that women are getting oppressed by such roles in those commercials. Bordo believes that women usually feel gratification by preparing food for their loved ones; however, they also resent when their contributions are taken for granted or belittled (124). The relation between food and caring investigated by Bordo has also been examined by the feminist sociologist, Marjorie DeVault in her book, *Feeding the Family: the social organization of caring as gendered work* (1991). DeVault explores the implications of ‘feeding the family’ from the perspective of women, depicting how the invisible work of shopping, cooking, and serving meals can maintain women’s subordinate position in household life. Nevertheless, like Bordo, DeVault highlights the relationship between women’s cooking and caring. She argues that for women, feeding is a caring practice inculcated during childhood, and reinforced through the practice of being a wife and mother. DeVault suggests that it is the practice of caring in the domestic space that makes women’s feeding different from men’s cooking and also makes gender inequalities resistant to change (Ashley 133-137). She asserts that by cooking for the family, a woman is continually “constructing her own place within the family, as one who provides for the needs of others” (DeVault 138).

Bordo argues that popular representations do not depict men as “naturally” caregiving through feeding others or women as “appropriate recipients of such care” (1993: 124). Even in the case of little children, little boys are represented to be fed more frequently than little girls and they never learn how to feed others but little girls learn how to do so. Bordo notes that according to the contemporary culture, caring is “representationally ‘reproduced’ as a quintessentially and exclusively female activity” (125). In a heterosexual family, women are supposed to feed men and by this practice express their love and care and men can eat as much as they want. In Bordo’s words, “men can eat *and* be loved; indeed, a central mode by which they receive love is through food from women” (125). On the other hand, women are almost never depicted being fed by men. Women’s eating or self-feeding “in the form of private” can serve as “a *substitute* for human love” (126). Accordingly, Bordo notes that in one of the commercials a woman says that food is “the only thing that will take care of me” thus

corroborating her argument (126). Women are usually expected to cook dinner even when they come back home rather late from their full time jobs and it is rather difficult without any help from their husbands. Bordo concludes that we should teach our little boys that “cooking and serving others is not ‘sissy’”; therefore, they can also learn to cook and care for others without expecting feeding others as only a woman’s responsibility (132). In the next sections, Susan Bordo’s views on ‘food and the ideal body image’ and ‘cooking and gender roles’ can be traced in Emecheta’s *Double Yoke* and Adichie’s *Americanah*.

#### **4. Reading Two Nigerian Novels in Terms of Bordo’s Concepts**

##### **4.1. Food and Female Identity in *Double Yoke***

*Double Yoke* (1982) was written in 1981 immediately after Emecheta’s return to England from a period spent lecturing on creative writing to students of the University of Calabar in eastern Nigeria. Set on the campus of Calabar University, *Double Yoke* gives us a glimpse of student life. Nko is bewildered how to reconcile the social demands to fulfil a traditional female role, and her own desire to be an educated woman with an independent career. Ete Kamba, her long-time boy-friend, is similarly perplexed as his fear and ambivalence towards modern women threaten to ruin his relationship with Nko. Nko must further deal with some unscrupulous professors who would take advantage of her position as a young woman in a male-dominated society.

By describing the way that the female characters are supposed to serve men modestly, Emecheta criticizes the patriarchal power within the family. Women’s act of feeding men appears to be an absolute responsibility which men take for granted. Ete’s mother, for instance, eats with her younger children in a separate room and this shows that there is no room for equality in the male-dominated atmosphere of their home. His mother serves “the men of the house”, including Ete and his father, on a special table with a clean table cloth (Emecheta 1982: 18). The men have their food in “very clean but plain imported plates” and they have a bowl of water to wash their hands (18). Ete’s mother usually leaves the room while saying “please enjoy your dinner” to which Ete’s father never answers (18). He just frowns and looks “at the food from side to side in a boring way” as if he is “being forced to eat sick”; however, the food is “almost disappeared” just in a few minutes (18). According to Bordo, cooking and serving food in such a space is not gratifying for a woman since her service is belittled and viewed only as an obligation (1993: 124). According to Emecheta in her “Feminism with a small ‘f!’” (1986), the role of a woman as the nurturer of the generation must not be looked down upon and it should be treated as “the highest paid job in the world” (179). She says:

In our kitchens we raise all Reagans, all Nkrumahs, all Jesuses. In our kitchens we cook for them, we send them away from home to be grown men and women, and in our kitchens they learn to love and to hate. What greater job is there? (180)

Being a good cook is a significant qualification that both Ete Kamba and his friend, Akpan believe their future wife should have. Ete thinks that his future wife should be “a very quiet and submissive woman, a good cook, a good listener, a good worker, a good mother with a good education to match” (Emecheta 1982: 26). However, he also believes that “her education must be a little less than his own, otherwise they would start talking on the same level” (26). Ete is trapped in his traditional and patriarchal upbringing and yet his university education which has opened new windows to the modern world makes his choice of his future wife quite paradoxical. Akpan also says that he will marry a “completely illiterate” girl who would be able to bear children and be “a great cook” (132). Akpan’s male-contrived values are later mocked by their professor, Miss Bulewao who is the fictionalized representation of Emecheta herself.

For Nko, as a young girl in a male-dominated society, it is hard to bear the burden of reconciling tradition with modernity. She confides in her mother that she wants to be an academician so that she can be financially independent and she also wants to be “a quiet nice and obedient wife” to her future husband, Ete (94). Her mother answers:

You know sometimes I think you modern girls are not so lucky. When I was your age, all I was thinking of was how to go to the fattening room and make myself round and beautiful for your father. [...] Now you have this new thing, this mad education for women and yet still, you want to have everything we had ... it is going to be difficult. (94)

Her mother concludes that she knows her daughter is “under a double yoke” and what she needs is “a stronger shoulder with which to carry it” (94). Nko’s mother feels sorry for her daughter as a modern young woman who tries to keep her diet to remain slim. In fact, Nko’s mother, as a traditional woman, is also the victim of patriarchal culture which perpetuates gender expectations. As a young woman, she was sent to the fattening room in order to look voluptuous and attractive to her future husband. Both Nko and her mother have been “docile bodies” who have followed, in Bordo’s words, “an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity” and their forces and energies have been “habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement’” (Bordo 1993: 166). Both of them have been expected to discipline and manage their bodies according to the ideal body image of their times.

In this novel, there is also a related discussion between the girls in the dormitory about the cultural impacts of both tradition and modernity on women's appearances. They speak about how the traditional standard of beauty for women in Nigeria is totally different from the modern one which originates from Western countries. They mention that in some parts of Nigeria, mainly in villages, young women still go to "fattening rooms" so they can "dance and show off" their "fat bodies in the open fields" (Emecheta 1982: 103). Esther says she has recently seen some fat girls "like overfed seals" on television who appeared "coming out of fattening rooms" (103). They contrast the traditional practice of getting fat in Nigeria with that of anorexia nervosa in America and England where girls would "starve" themselves to look slim; therefore, "some unfortunate girls in their desperate efforts to be admired, ended up being victims of Anorexia Nervosa" (103). In Nigeria, the modern educated women imitate the Western ideal of beauty and as one of the girls asserts, "it is gradually becoming fashionable to be skinny here as well though not as skinny as the Western models" (104).

It appears that Emecheta renders a solution about this issue in Missy's conclusion that women "don't have to accept the dictates of the society" (104). She suggests that women should break the shackles of being obsessed with their body shape and weight. Mrs Nwaizu disagrees by adding that nowadays, even the educated and feminist women are troubled in their ways to voice their attitudes or to behave accordingly; otherwise men will call them feminists and run away from them. She says here in Nigeria "feminism means everything the society says is bad in women" including "independence, outspokenness, immorality, all the ills you can think of" (104). Emecheta was aware of the harsh situations for women to believe in themselves and not to act or appear according to the patriarchal standards of the society. However, through these female students' discussion she renders a solution which is similar to what Bordo elaborates on. Women should free themselves from the patriarchal yoke of the society and avoid "reproducing patriarchal culture" by "shaping and decorating" their bodies (Bordo 1993: 31).

In this novel, Emecheta shows that she has Bordo's similar views about 'cooking and gender roles' and 'food and body image'. Emecheta believes that women's act of cooking should not be downgraded or taken for granted. In this novel, both Ete and his friend Akpan, as fictional representatives of young men in the society, believe that being a good cook is a significant qualification that women should possess. In such a male-dominated culture that Emecheta portrays, women's act of caring through cooking is taken for granted. Ete and his father do not appreciate her mother's cooking and serving food for them and their act of eating their food in a separate room from his mother and younger siblings shows that there is no room for equality. Emecheta also criticizes women's obsession to shape their bodies according to the ideal image that the culture imposes. By presenting several female characters' views about the ideal body weight, the writer concludes that women should free themselves from such patriarchal shackles of the culture.

#### 4.2. Food and Female Identity in *Americanah*

*Americanah* (2013) is Adichie's novel about a young woman from Nigeria called Ifemelu who immigrates to the United States to continue her education. She reminisces and relates pieces of her life in Nigeria as a child, her first love with a young man named Obinze, her migration to the United States, her struggles with culture, language, and money in the United States, her two relationships since leaving Nigeria, her return to Nigeria, and her renewed relationship with Obinze. The story is told mainly through Ifemelu's narration but in some parts, the narration switches to Obinze's point of view as he relates his failed attempt to join Ifemelu in America, his undocumented life in London, his return to Nigeria, and his getting married.

In the beginning of this coming-of-age novel, Ifemelu learns to question gender roles. When she is a teenager, she cannot cook and she does not like cooking but her boyfriend, Obinze can cook well (Adichie 2013: 74). Obinze's mother is a sophisticated university professor and through her teachings, he has learnt not only the skill of cooking but also the fact that cooking is not a woman's responsibility. In her book, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), Adichie contends that a young girl "can counter ideas about static 'gender roles' if she has been empowered by her familiarity with alternatives" (23). She exemplifies that if a young girl "knows an uncle who cooks well – and does so with indifference – then she can smile and brush off the foolishness of somebody who claims that 'women must do the cooking'" (23). From the beginning of the novel, Obinze acts as an alternative for Ifemelu. The first time that Ifemelu is invited to Obinze's home, she observes how he and his mother cook together, "his mother stirring the soup, Obinze making the garri" (Adichie 2013: 73). At the table, Ifemelu compliments Obinze's mother for the soup but she says that it was her son who cooked it (74). Therefore, Adichie shares the same standpoint with Bordo as she aims to break the shackles of traditional views about cooking and gender roles in her novel. In her book, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), Adichie contends: "The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are" (15). She states that women are not "born with a cooking gene", thus cooking should not be considered merely as a woman's natural responsibility (15).

When Obinze goes to England, he lives with his cousin, Nicholas, and his family for some time. Back in Nigeria, Nicholas and his wife, Ojiugo, were rebellious, glamorous college students. However, after their marriage, both of them go through significant personality changes. Ojiugo, the once-outspoken girl, has turned to a subservient woman and she is treated as an inferior by her authoritative husband. Observing Ojiugo taking the tray of her husband's food "to him in his study or in front of the TV in the kitchen", Obinze wonders if she bows "while putting it down" (Adichie 2013: 238). Obinze sympathizes with Ojiugo whose work at home is taken for granted. Obinze once cooks some chicken for dinner, and Ojiugo praises his cooking by saying "whoever marries you will win a lottery" (239) and tells her son that Obinze is a better cook than she is (240).

Obinze observes that Ojiugo has become twice her size in her university years. Under the influence of the Western society where she lives, Ojiugo attempts to gain the ideal body image. Once she goes to “Weight Watchers meetings” to control her weight, she hides a Twix bar in her bag for herself (242). According to Bordo, women’s eating or self-feeding “in the form of private” can serve as “a *substitute* for human love” (1993: 126). By eating a Twix bar privately, she seeks to obtain a substitute for the lack of her family’s love. Ojiugo strives to express her love by serving and nourishing her family, yet no one in her family thinks about how she feels. Ojiugo attends another weight loss program and after two meetings, she decides not to bother herself to continue it. She has got annoyed that white people have related her love of eating to “an internal issue” that she is “repressing” (Adichie 2013: 242).

When Ifemelu arrives in America and visits her old classmate, Ginika, she is surprised by her loss of weight. Ifemelu asks her: “When did you stop eating and start looking like a dried stockfish?” (125). For Ifemelu who has traditional Nigerian views about the ideal body image, being thin connotes hunger and lack of food. According to Bordo, the body operates “as a metaphor for culture” (1993:165). She notes that for Africans as well as Italians, the Jewish community, and Black Americans, skinniness has been linked with starvation, poverty and disease particularly AIDS. In Nigeria, thin is not a good word and when Ginika tells her “You’re thin” she objects by saying that she is slim and not thin but through Ginika she learns that in the United States “thin is a good word” and she has the kind of body that people like (Adichie 2013: 127). Ifemelu says that in Nigeria she always wished she had “a bum” like Ginika’s and she does not like her loss of weight. Ginika relates her experience about the differences in the ideal body image between Nigeria and the United States and her attempts to conform to the norms of the society. She says:

Do you know I started losing weight almost as soon as I came? I was even close to anorexia. The kids at my high school called me Pork. You know at home when somebody tells you that you lost weight, it means something bad. But here somebody tells you that you lost weight and you say thank you. It’s just different here. (127)

Ifemelu removes the word ‘fat’ from her vocabulary and substitutes the word ‘big’ since as Ginika has told her that ‘fat’ has a negative connotation, “heaving with moral judgment”, and it is not “a mere description”, thus calling someone fat is like calling that person “stupid” or “bastard” (12). However, after thirteen years of living in the United States, Ifemelu gradually gains weight. Once, when she is paying for a notably big bag of Tostitos at the supermarket, a man behind her in the line makes fun of her by saying

“fat people don’t need to be eating that shit” (13). At first, she gets offended and decides to file a post under the title “race, gender, and body size” in her blog. However, when she arrives home, she stands in front of the mirror and by gazing at herself, she internalizes what the stranger in the supermarket has told her and she realizes that she is fat and “not curvy or big-boned” (13). She utters the word ‘fat’ and resumes thinking about this word and the other words she had learnt not to use in the United States.

When Ifemelu comes back to Nigeria after almost thirteen years she observes that the standard of beauty has also altered in Nigeria due to the impact of the globalization of Western media. She attempts to lose weight to get “back to her slender self” but she does not succeed (399). When she speaks with Obinze about her weight, he tells her that she is voluptuous which is quite normal in Nigerian culture and that she has become an Americanah by having conformed to the American ideal of body image and thus thinking that she is fat. In an interview about *Americanah*, Adichie points out that she is “interested in challenging the mainstream ideas of what is beautiful and what is acceptable” (Jones 2014). She criticizes the American culture for demonizing weight which she finds quite “disturbing” (2014). As a Nigerian, she notes that the idea of the ideal body image is changing in Nigeria in that people are watching the program, *America’s Next Top Model*; however, Nigerian culture does not demonize weight (2014).

As it was mentioned earlier, Obinze likes cooking and through his mother, he has learnt to reject the relation between gender and cooking. However, his wife, Kosi, does not like his cooking since she has “basic, mainstream ideas of what a wife should be”; therefore, she thinks his wanting to cook as “an indictment of her” (436). She is socialized in a way to blame herself if Obinze feels like cooking in that she believes cooking is her own responsibility. Gender roles and expectations are not burdensome only with women. Obinze is depicted to be fascinated by cooking and thus against the idea that cooking is only a woman’s obligation.

As it was mentioned, Adichie shares Bordo’s views about ‘cooking and gender roles’ and ‘food and the ideal body image’. Through the representation of some of the characters’ interests in this novel, the writer implies that cooking should not be considered a feminine obligation and that the traditional views about cooking and gender roles are burdensome for both men and women. She also attempts to alter the reader’s view about the ideal body image that the culture dictates. She describes how such a male-dominated image had been different in various cultures and how globalization has created the same ideal, that is slenderness, for all the women in the world.

## **5. Conclusion**

The present study has managed to examine food and female Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. To reach this aim, Susan Bordo's views on 'food and the ideal body image' and 'cooking and gender roles' has been traced in these two novels. It has been concluded that both of these Nigerian feminist writers agree with Bordo's aforementioned views. According to Bordo, "the body is not only a text of culture" but also, "a practical, direct locus of social control" (1993: 165). She contends that culture fosters "extremes, excesses, and obsessions" (271). Women in different historical and geographical backgrounds have tended to shape their bodies according to the ideal body images of their societies and cultures, thus they have turned to docile bodies. Owing to the impact of the globalization of media, the slender body has become an ideal among women. Therefore, they hunger themselves and consequently suffer from eating disorders. In these two novels, Emecheta and Adichie as feminist writers, challenge the mainstream idea of the ideal body image. They agree with Bordo that women should stand against the excesses and the obsessions that the culture breeds and value their bodies regardless of the imposed patriarchal standards.

According to Bordo, the micropractice of cooking has been historically coded as a female duty in that it represents caring which is an "exclusively female activity" (125). As Bodo observes women usually enjoy cooking a delicious food for the members of their family particularly their children. However, cooking cannot be a satisfactory experience when their efforts are belittled or taken for granted. Through these novels, Emecheta and Adichie imply that those with a higher degree of cultural capital ignore the stereotypical gender roles. They let their children know that cooking is an art and learning how to feed oneself and others is an essential life skill regardless of one's gender. Individuals should learn that cooking is not a feminine responsibility. Cooking is also a matter of interest regardless of one's gender.



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