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TABLE DES MATIERES / TABLE OF CONTENTS

LITTERATURE / LITERATURE

1. LA PERCEPTION DU MARIAGE INTER-CULTUREL DANS LA SYMBOLIQUE DU RÊVE AMÉRICAIN : UNE LECTURE DE <i>MARTIN EDEN</i> DE JACK LONDON Yao Markos KOUASSI, Selay Marius KOUASSI, Hélène YAO-----	1 – 12
2. LA RECONSTRUCTION DU GENRE DANS <i>SECOND CLASS CITIZEN</i> DE BUCHI EMECHETA : DU PARADOXE DE LA CITOYENNETE AU PLAYDOYER POUR L'INCLUSION DE LA FEMME Kouakou Florent Lucien N'DIA-----	13 – 32
3. TRAVEL-ISM AS AN ESSENCE OF IMPERIALISM IN OCTAVIA ESTELLE BUTLER'S <i>KINDRED</i> (1979 [2003]), <i>WILD SEED</i> (1980) AND <i>DAWN</i> (1987) N'Goran Constant YAO-----	33 – 47
4. THE NEW NEGRO IN TONI MORRISON'S <i>GOD HELP THE CHILD</i> : BLACK FEMALE EXCEPTIONALISM IN BUSINESS Adama SORO-----	48 – 60
5. SATIRE AND SOCIAL VISION IN OSCAR WILDE'S DRAMA Moussa KAMBIRE-----	61 – 74
6. PLOTTING NARRATIVES WITH TEXTUAL SEMANTICS: AN ONOMASTIC SURVEY OF AFRICAN AND HISPANIC LITERATURES Ataféï PEWISSI, Pedi ANAWI, Essobiyou SIRO-----	75 – 89
7. ENVISIONING THE FEMINIST FUTURE: A STUDY OF WOMEN'S ALTRUISTIC RESISTANCE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S <i>THE DREAM COUNT</i> Konan Guy KOUADIO-----	90 – 101
8. <i>SONGS OF STEEL</i> OR SONGS OF GUNS: A NARRATIVE ILLUSTRATION OF VIOLENCE BY ANDREW EKWURU Evrard AMOI & N'guessan KRAMO-----	102 – 112
9. RECONCEPTUALIZING SLAVERY IN CHARLES JOHNSON'S <i>OXHERDING TALE</i> Emmanuel N'Depo BEDA-----	113 – 127
10. RETHINKING RACIAL STRUGGLE IN POST-RACIAL AMERICA: AN ANALYSIS OF PAUL BEATTY'S <i>THE SELLOUT</i> Celestin TRA Bi-----	128 – 144
11. WAR WITHOUT WEAPONS: POLEMOMOLOGY, SATIRE, AND POST-IMPERIAL IDENTITY IN DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S <i>RULE BRITANNIA</i> (1972) Nannougou SILUE-----	145 – 155

LIINGUISTIQUE / LINGUISTICS

**12. THE RISE OF ANTI-FRENCH SENTIMENT IN THE SAHEL: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF POLARIZATION IN THE SPEECHES OF THE JUNTA LEADERS IN
MALI AND BURKINA FASO**

Kouamé Aboubakar KOUAKOU-----156 – 168

**13. HEDGING AND GENDER: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS
STRATEGIES IN LEYMAH GBOWEE'S *MIGHTY BE OUR POWERS***

Assiaka Guillaume AKABLA-----169 – 181

**14. LE DOUBLE HERITAGE SYNCHROME D'OUMAR SANKHARE DANS *LA
NUIT ET LE JOUR***

Komi KPATCHA-----182 – 201

INTER-TEXTUAL

ENVISIONING THE FEMINIST FUTURE: A STUDY OF WOMEN'S ALTRUISTIC RESISTANCE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *THE DREAM COUNT*

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Abstract

This study examines the notion of altruistic resistance in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Dream Count* through the lenses of feminist theory and semiotics. In a context characterized by sociopolitical instability and gender-based marginalization, fostering and sustaining communal empathy emerges as a critical imperative. Adichie's narrative promotes collective empowerment via the deliberate actions and symbolic expressions of her protagonists. Through perseverance, moral integrity, and reciprocal care, certain characters navigate oppressive structures while articulating a vision for inclusive societal transformation. Their endeavors culminate in the conceptualization of a redefined social order predicated on equity and shared purpose. However, this vision is undermined by the fragmentation of solidarity due to individuals motivated by ambition and exclusionary practices, resulting in conflict, alienation, and disenchantment. Consequently, it is vital to abandon isolating ambitions in favor of embracing interdependence, recognizing that individual flourishing is intrinsically linked to collective liberation.

Key words: Altruism, empathy, equity, solidarity, transformation

Résumé

Cet article analyse le concept de la résistance altruiste dans *The Dream Count* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie en mobilisant une perspective féministe couplée à une méthodologie sémiotique. Dans un contexte marqué par l'instabilité sociopolitique et la marginalisation genrée, il devient essentiel de promouvoir l'empathie collective. À travers son récit, Adichie plaide pour l'élévation commune par les choix intentionnels et les gestes symboliques de ses protagonistes. Par leur endurance, leur intégrité et leur souci mutuel, certains personnages traversent des systèmes oppressifs et esquissent une vision de transformation inclusive. Leurs efforts aboutissent à une réorganisation sociale fondée sur l'équité et le sens partagé. Toutefois, la rupture de la solidarité causée par l'ambition et l'exclusion compromet cette vision. Désaccords, isolement et désillusion

s'installent. Il est impératif de renoncer aux ambitions isolées et d'adopter l'interdépendance, car l'épanouissement de l'un est lié à la libération de tous.

Mots-clés : Altruisme, empathie, équité, solidarité, transformation

Introduction

Literature often serves as a mirror of struggle for justice, identity, equality, and collective memory. Published in March 2025, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Dream Count* explores people's fight for such values through the interconnected lives of four female characters, Chimaka, Zikora, Omelogor and Kadiatou. These women's experiences of love, migration, trauma, and resilience illuminate the intersections of gender, power, and history. The novel's story threads are historical facts, particularly the transatlantic slave trade and its lingering psychological wounds that continue to shape contemporary African and diasporic identities.

The Dream Count depicts black women as intelligent and selfless people. It suggests dismantling all forms of stereotype attributed to black women. In this regard, the story attributes the most important roles to black female characters. As a matter of fact, "Adichie's protagonists are not merely fictional; rather they are the embodiments of silenced histories and deferred futures" (Okonkwo 77). The narrative is drawn on African women's difficult and painful past. But the story is also a prospect of their future. The characters represent three symbolic registers which are "affirmative, ambivalent, and obstructive" (Mensah & Tchasso 118). Figures such as Nneoma and Auntie Ifeoma belong to the affirmative category. Chuka is an ambivalent participant while the bureaucrats and gatekeepers represent obstructive forces. Black women face a big challenge throughout their history. The transition between the past and the future is "a persistent dilemma across [black] communities" (Kouadio 53). This transition necessitates sacrifices from the women.

These women's altruistic resistance resonates as a feminist world in the future. The scope of this article is to demonstrate how *The Dream Count* offers a literary model for feminist futurity. The analysis is grounded in semiotic theory. It is the study of how signs construct reality. Semiotics is employed, because Adichie's novel is rich in symbolic language, metaphorical spaces, and coded gestures. *The Dream Count*'s characters are interpreted as signs. Their environments reflect broader societal conditions. Thus, semiotics is used to decode how dreams, names, and silences communicate resistance. This article turns around three points. The first is the shared vision for

communal claims. The second is the personal offering for mutual restoration. The last is about betrayal and fragmentation of communal claims.

1. Shared Vision for Communal Claims

The first altruistic resistance act is to share the vision for mutual claims. A community that suffers from displacement and silencing can only regain its strength by acting together for the welfare of everybody. *The Dream Count* presents a group of women who rebuild their dignity not through force but through memory, care and solidarity. Their story displays that communal vision is a powerful form of resistance:

Nneoma stood at the edge of the courtyard with her fingers curled around the notebook. The others had gathered, some seated on mats, others leaning against the cracked walls. They waited not for instruction, but for affirmation. She opened the book and began to read the names, one by one, each syllable a resurrection. The wind carried her voice, and with each name, a murmur of recognition passed through the group. They were not forgotten. They were not invisible. They were counted. (*The Dream Count* 11)

The intertwining of displaced women symbolizes union and unity. These signals evoke an idea of sharing vision. It is an allusion to black women who are engaged in the struggle for the respect of their rights because they “share a complicated history” (Baldwin & Reichelmann s3). Individuals cannot be united if they do not share the same vision and goal. This moment marks the genesis of communal awakening. Moreover, the act of counting dreams becomes a ritual of resistance, a symbolic gesture that binds individuals through shared memory. The gathering is not orchestrated by hierarchy but by mutual yearning. The narrator affirms, “They came not because they were summoned, but because they remembered” (*The Dream Count* 12). This voluntary convergence echoes ancestral assemblies, where oral tradition and collective memory served as tools of survival. The emergence of a chant crafted by Nneoma and echoed by others functions as a semiotic emblem of unity. Its verses, though improvised, carry the cadence of hope:

We are the breath of those who dreamed before us, we are the ink of stories untold, we are the silence that speaks in thunder, we are the names that refuse to fade, we are the hands that rebuild ruins, we are the eyes that see beyond borders, we are the feet that walk toward dawn, we are the count that cannot be erased. (*The Dream Count* 15)

The author uses alliteration to put emphasis on the idea of sharing vision among women. This idea is highlighted by the subject “we” which is the symbol of unicity. Indeed, “Words in general are symbolic signs” (Sebeok 11). Women are gathered in the single vision. That is a signifier of

collective identity. It is not imposed; it is inherited. Such intuitive solidarity reflects the semiotic power of shared symbols. Obedience, in this context, is not submission but alignment. The group members' unanimity about Nneoma's question is an image of solidarity and understanding within the group.

Understanding one another is a pillar of sharing and accepting a vision for the community's wellbeing in a near future. This consensus demonstrates a communal ethic. The dream belongs to all, and its boundaries must expand to include the marginalized. Adichie's narrative underscores that dreaming together is not passive instead it is preparatory. The narrator reports:

In the weeks that followed, they began to gather materials: scraps of cloth, broken mirrors, discarded books. Each item was catalogued, not for utility, but for memory. The courtyard became a museum of resistance. Children learned to recite names. Elders taught songs. The walls, once bare, now bore murals of imagined futures. They did not know when the reckoning would come, but they knew they must be ready. (*The Dream Count* 21)

This preparation serves as a symbolic act, signifying a transition from despair to empowerment. Despite being fragmented by displacement, the community initiates the reconstruction of its collective narrative. Their prevailing discourse is one of determination. The symbolic rejection of silence is vividly enacted when the group confronts the local official who has denied their existence. This episode represents an insurgency characterized not by violence but by assertion of presence. The gate, previously an obstacle, transforms into a threshold. Their victory is quantified not in terms of territorial acquisition but in terms of acknowledgment. The narrator points out that:

They did not claim the building. They claimed the right to be seen. The murals remained. The names echoed. The notebooks multiplied. And in the evenings, they gathered not to mourn, but to dream. The courtyard was theirs. (*The Dream Count* 27)

The communal claims are supported by mutual reinforcement. The narrator describes, "When one faltered, another sang (...). When one forgot, another remembered" (*The Dream Count* 28). The interdependence among dreamers forms a symbolic chain each link essential, each voice irreplaceable. Adichie's characters embody solidarity not through bloodlines but through shared vision. Nneoma's bond with Auntie Ifeoma displays it. It throws light on a reciprocity between women sharing the same vision. This reciprocity is echoed when Ifeoma tells her, "You are the story I never got to tell" (*The Dream Count* 31). Ifeoma uses a personification to talk about Nneoma. A story is something is used to share information, ideas or a vision. Their relationship,

though not familial, is rooted in mutual restoration. The theme of solidarity extends to the detained women whose names are counted in absentia. The narrator pinpoints:

They prepared rooms with blankets and poems. They cooked meals with spices remembered from childhood. They lit candles for those still behind bars. And when the gates opened, they did not ask for names. They simply said, Welcome. (*The Dream Count* 33)

This gesture of welcoming without condition reflects the highest form of collective dreaming. It is not transactional; it is transformative. It affirms that liberation is not individual, but it is communal. Nneoma follows the real objective of black feminism. Actually, “Black feminism is formed to empower Black women towards fighting for their unique cause for social justice” (Mohajan 21). That is the reason why it is fundamental to add personal offering for a communal restoration.

2. Personal Offering for Communal Restoration

Personal offering for communal restoration testifies an altruistic act for the community’s welfare. The act of dreaming together often begins with one voice daring to speak. In *The Dream Count*, Adichie foregrounds the power of individual sacrifice as a catalyst for collective healing. The protagonist, Nneoma, chooses not to keep her visions private. Instead, she transforms her inherited silence into a shared archive. The narrator states:

She had found the notebook beneath her mother’s mattress, its pages brittle with time. The names were written in a trembling hand, some crossed out, others underlined. Nneoma did not know them all, but she felt their weight. She copied each name into a new book, adding dates, fragments of stories, and symbols. She did not ask for permission. She did not wait for approval. She simply began. And when she read them aloud, the courtyard listened. (*The Dream Count* 6)

The passage employs hyperbole to emphasize Nneoma’s profound empathy towards the struggles of anonymous individuals. This act of preserving and articulating marginalized experiences constitutes a form of sacrifice, necessitating considerable emotional labor, vulnerability, and courage. Nneoma’s choice to disseminate the dream count is motivated not by personal recognition but by a commitment to collective remembrance. The narrator asserts that “She did not want to be the keeper. She wanted the keeping to belong to everyone” (*The Dream Count* 7), positioning Nneoma as an exemplar of altruistic figures whose primary aim is selflessly contributing to the well-being of others. Such disposition is indicative of wisdom, which, in Adichie’s narrative, is not contingent upon age but rather on attentiveness. Auntie Ifeoma, despite not being the eldest, emerges as a mentor through her composed resilience. She advises Nneoma “You must listen to

the silences. They speak louder than the stories” (*The Dream Count* 9). This statement functions metaphorically, equating silence with profound expression; silence here symbolizes a woman’s inner emotions and experiences. Ifeoma’s insight is experiential rather than theoretical-shaped by her encounters with displacement, loss, and invisibility-yet she consciously elects to nurture others. The narrator subsequently reflects on this dynamic:

Ifeoma did not speak often, but when she did, the words lingered. She had once been a teacher, before the school closed. Now she taught in whispers, in gestures, in meals prepared without asking. She remembered birthdays no one else did. She mended clothes with thread she had saved. She wrote letters for those who could not. She did not ask for recognition. She did not need applause. Her presence was the lesson. (*The Dream Count* 10)

Wisdom in this context becomes a communal resource. Ifeoma uses her experience to illuminate paths forward. She makes a sacrifice for her community. That sacrifice which seems subtle is a great one. She embodies what Bell Hooks calls “radical care” (Hooks 87). It is a commitment for nurturing the others without oppressing them. The symbolic lyrics introduced by Nneoma gets momentum through repetition. It becomes a tool of unity. The narrator describes:

They sang not for melody but for memory. The words were uneven, the rhythm uncertain, but the meaning was clear. Children sang it while sweeping. Elders hummed it while cooking. Visitors learned it without being taught. It was not a song it was a declaration. A promise. A refusal to forget. (*The Dream Count* 13)

This song, repeated across generations, becomes a semiotic anchor. It binds the community through shared purpose. The narrator notes, “Even those who had never met the dreamers felt claimed by the count” (*The Dream Count* 14). Adichie’s narrative suggests that revolutionary change often begins with one person’s refusal to remain silent. Nneoma’s initiative inspires others to contribute:

Soon, others began bringing their own notebooks. Some wrote in English, others in Igbo, French, or silence. They added drawings, maps, recipes, prayers. The courtyard became a library of longing. No one asked whose idea it was. No one claimed authorship. They simply added. And in adding, they became part of the dream. (*The Dream Count* 16)

This collective archive reflects a shift from individual memory to communal restoration. It is not curated by institutions but by ordinary people. Among the dreamers, Chuka emerges as a figure of practical sacrifice. Unless his skepticism at first, he begins constructing shelves for the notebooks, repairing the walls, and organizing reading circles.

He did not speak of dreams. He spoke of nails, of wood, of rainproofing. But his actions spoke louder. He arrived early, stayed late, and left quietly. He taught children how to bind pages. He built benches from discarded doors. He did not ask what the names meant. He made space for them. (*The Dream Count* 19)

Chuka's labor, though unspoken, is essential. He represents those who contribute through action rather than rhetoric. His sacrifice is physical, tangible, and sustaining. Adichie also portrays loyalty as a form of sacrifice. The narrator delineates Grace, a young woman who assumes responsibility for maintaining the count subsequent to Nneoma's illness. For instance, "Grace did not know all the names. She had not heard all the stories. But she read them anyway. She lit candles. She copied pages. She added her own. She did not ask if she was allowed. She simply continued" (*The Dream Count* 22).

Devotion reflects a commitment to continuity. Grace embodies perseverance. Her motto, though unspoken, is evident: "I will remember harder." The ethics of equality are central to *The Dream Count*. The narrator writes, "No name was more important than another. No story was too small. No silence was ignored" (*The Dream Count* 24). This principle echoes the final commandment in Orwell's *Animal Farm*. As a matter of fact, it is written, "All animals are equal" (Orwell 7). In Adichie's world, equality is enacted through inclusion, not decree. External critics have noted this egalitarian impulse. As Okonkwo argues, "Adichie's narrative resists hierarchy by decentralizing memory. The dream count is not authored but it is assembled" (Okonkwo 79). This decentralization reflects a feminist ethic of shared authority and mutual care.

To recapitulate what has been said earlier *The Dream Count* conceptualizes individual sacrifice not as martyrdom but as a form of generative labor. Through processes of memory, narrative, and tangible contribution, the characters transmute personal suffering into collective resilience. Their actions-characterized by quiet persistence and symbolic significance-establish a foundation for communal aspiration. However, akin to the dynamics observed in *Animal Farm*, the conflict between altruism and self-interest remains unresolved. The subsequent section will examine how individual ambition and internal fragmentation pose threats to the coherence of the collective vision.

3. Betrayal and Fragmentation of Communal Vision

Betrayal between individuals is a big obstacle to communal vision. Actually, the disintegration of shared dreaming often begins with the pursuit of individual prestige. In *The Dream Count*, Adichie examines how personal ambition corrodes collective memory and interrupts communal restoration. When recognition supersedes reciprocity, the dream loses its integrity. The narrator introduces Chuka's transformation:

He had once built benches, repaired walls, and taught children how to bind pages. But now he arrived late, spoke loudly, and corrected others. He began to mark his notebooks with initials, claiming authorship. He questioned the accuracy of names he had not written. He dismissed stories as exaggerations. He suggested a hierarchy of dreams some more valid than others. The courtyard grew quiet when he spoke. The silence was no longer reverent. It was wary. (*The Dream Count* 36)

Chuka's shift from contributor to gatekeeper signals a rupture in communal ethics. His desire for control undermines the ethos of shared dreaming. The narrator observes, "He no longer built. He curated" (*The Dream Count* 37). This subtle change reflects a semiotic fracture: the dream count, once a symbol of unity, becomes a mechanism of exclusion. Portraying betrayal is not through confrontation but through quiet omission. Upon Grace's discovery that multiple names have been removed from the central archive, she directly challenges Chuka. The narrator subsequently details this event:

She held the old notebook in one hand, the new one in the other. The missing names were circled in red. Chuka shrugged. 'They were duplicates,' he said. 'Unverified.' Grace did not argue. She simply read them aloud, one by one, in front of the courtyard. The others listened. Some wept. Some nodded. No one spoke. The names hung in the air like smoke. They could not be unseen. (*The Dream Count* 39)

This moment demonstrates the resilience of memory against deletion. Grace's act of reading becomes a counter-narrative, a refusal to let ambition overwrite history. Fragmentation is intensified when Chuka proposes a formal hierarchy. He suggests that the courtyard needs a coordinator to manage contributions and enforce consistency. "There was murmuring. Some nodded. Others frowned. Nneoma, still recovering, remained silent. Auntie Ifeoma stood and said, 'The dream does not need a leader. It needs listeners.' Her voice was steady. Chuka laughed. 'Even dreams need direction,' he replied. The courtyard did not respond. The silence was not agreement. It was resistance." (*The Dream Count* 42). This exchange marks a turning point. The horizontal ethics embedded in dream is threatened by vertical ambition.

Critical views are a symbolic power. Positive and constructive critics deeply impact an individual. Nevertheless, negative critics aim at destroying people and their vision. That can be analyzed as a betrayal. As Bell Hooks writes, “When power is hoarded, community dissolves. True leadership is the art of listening, not commanding” (Hooks 45). Chuka’s actions exemplify the dangers of monopolizing influence. The consequences of betrayal unfold gradually. The narrator describes the courtyard weeks later: “Fewer people came. The benches remained empty, murals faded. The chant was whispered, not sung. New notebooks were kept at home. The count continued, but it was no longer shared. The courtyard was still a place of memory, but it had lost its echo” (*The Dream Count* 45). This decay is emblematic. All women remind their sad past, but they do not have the same way of thinking. In this respect, Adichie underscores that they “remembered together, but they no longer dreamed together” (*The Dream Count* 46). Misinformation reshapes the perception of a leader’s vision. That is why when Chuka blames Grace for the courtyard’s decline, he circulates a letter accusing her of mismanagement. This tactic isolates dissenters and distorts accountability.

The figures of authority in *The Dream Count* such as the clipboard-carrying official embody institutional detachment. A man portrays the figure of authority. As illustration, Adichie upholds “He wore a badge and carried a clipboard. He asked for names, not stories. He recorded numbers, not memories. He said ‘We need data, not dreams.’ He did not return.” (*The Dream Count* 50). This character reduces the dream count to metrics, stripping it of emotional resonance. According to him, instead of concrete actions, people are in disillusionment. He uses an allusion to compare their leaders’ sayings to politicians’ speeches. He sees their actions as a betrayal to their comrade. For instance, “Adichie critiques the bureaucratization of memory, where lived experience is replaced by quantifiable metrics” (Okonkwo 77). People are like inanimate objects. It is the symbol of beings that are commanded by another one. Those beings do not have their own sayings. Their minds are made up to be focused on precariousness and demagoguery. Demagoguery is used to have citizens’ empathy and confidence with words that make them happy. Those words are promises that will not be kept. In few months, people realize the betrayal of their leaders. That makes them lose confidence on those who want to really change their living condition and status.

The final line encapsulates the cost of ambition without empathy. When personal agendas override communal care, the dream fractures. The courtyard, once a sanctuary of unity, becomes

a site of division. The breakdown of communal ethics in *The Dream Count* is not only caused by internal ambition but also by external manipulation. Adichie introduces figures who, though briefly present, symbolize institutional interference. These individual officials, donors, and media agents arrive with promises but leave with narratives that serve their own agendas. The narrator tells:

They asked for access to the courtyard, for interviews with the dreamers. They filmed the murals, recorded the chants, and took photographs beside the notebooks. They did not ask what the names meant. They did not stay for the readings. They left with footage, not understanding. Their stories aired on television, but the courtyard remained unchanged. (*The Dream Count* 61)

This intrusion distorts the purpose of the dream count. What was once a sacred space of memory has become a backdrop for visibility. The dreamers, once open and trusting, begin to retreat. Their silence is no longer a gesture of reverence but it is a shield.

Suspicion grows among the ones who decide to be identified as women's leaders. Grace, who had continued the readings faithfully, begins to notice subtle changes in tone and participation. The narrator describes that "She saw fewer children. She heard fewer songs. The benches were dusty. The notebooks remained closed. She asked herself whether the dream had ended, or whether it had simply changed shape. She did not speak of her doubts. She wrote them down instead" (*The Dream Count* 3). The remark made by Grace is a message. It is a sign. In his definition of semiotics, Daniel Chandler writes something interesting. Indeed, he notes that in "a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects" (Chandler 2). Grace has noticed the appearance of distrust among her companions.

The quiet withdrawal mirrors the emotional fatigue that follows betrayal. Grace's decision to document her doubts rather than voice them reflects a shift from communal engagement to personal reflection. The narrator affirms that "She did not stop dreaming. She stopped expecting others to dream with her" (*The Dream Count* 64). The fragmentation reaches its peak when a group of newcomers proposes a restructuring of the courtyard's activities. They suggest formalizing the readings, assigning roles, and creating a schedule. The narrator recounts, "The proposal was typed, printed, and distributed. It listed objectives, timelines, and responsibilities. It spoke of efficiency, of impact, of measurable outcomes. It did not mention names. It did not mention stories. It did not mention dreams." (*The Dream Count* 5)

This bureaucratic approach clashes with the organic nature of the dream count. The courtyard, once a space of fluid memory, is now threatened by rigidity. Aunty Ifeoma responds with quiet defiance: “We do not need a program. We need presence” (*The Dream Count* 66). Anger starts taking control of people’s hearts. They perceive their leaders’ absence as a betrayal. They need their presence at their sides. They need them on the field ground. They express their tiredness about the absence of people who pretend to defend their rights. They look betrayed by those persons. That offers a final reflection on the cost of division. This image of the reservoir encapsulates the emotional and symbolic stagnation caused by selfishness and internal division. The dream, once expansive and inclusive, becomes guarded and fragmented. As Bell Hooks reminds us, “Community is not about perfection. It is about commitment to healing” (Hooks 87). In Adichie’s narrative, characters are often trapped by their own desires and conflicts, mirroring the stagnant waters of the reservoir. This symbolic stagnation highlights the struggle to overcome personal and societal divisions. Through their journeys, the characters learn that true healing and restoration demand a willingness to confront past mistakes and embrace vulnerability.

Conclusion

This analysis has elucidated that women’s altruistic resistance constitutes a pursuit of a feminist future. The female characters in *The Dream Count* exemplify women united by a shared vision. This vision is embraced collectively, reflecting their desire for positive transformation in their favor. Such positive change necessitates individual sacrifices, entailing personal offerings for communal restoration. The sacrifice of any one woman enables the collective to advance toward realizing their vision, requiring each member to subordinate personal interests and prioritize selflessness.

Consequently, women’s altruistic resistance holds the potential to yield substantial outcomes. Nonetheless, negative attitudes and behaviors within interpersonal relationships may undermine these efforts. It is important to recognize that altruistic resistance is not a singular act but rather a habitual practice of care—a vigilant commitment to maintaining the delicate bonds that unite individuals. It represents the resolute choice to persevere when others withdraw, safeguarding what is sacred even in the absence of celebration. Therefore, altruistic resistance should be embraced as a foundational strategy in communal struggles. Through steadfast commitment, altruistic resistance emerges as a transformative mechanism that cultivates resilience

and solidarity within the community. By emphasizing collective welfare above individual interests, women demonstrate the requisite strength and resolve to surmount obstacles and attain substantive progress.

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