

>> Bob Smith: From WXXI News, it's 1370 Connection.

[music] I'm Bob Smith and you're about to meet one of the most acclaimed young writers in the English speaking world today. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie will be speaking this evening at RIT, as part of a Caroline Werner Gannett Visionaries in Motion lecture series. Her best-selling novels include, Half of a Yellow Sun, Purple Hibiscus and The Thing Around Your Neck. And you may also have enjoyed her work in the New Yorker magazine in The Guardian. She's joining me right now in advance of her evening presentation at 8 pm at RIT's Webb Auditorium. Miss Adichie, thank you very much for taking the time to be with us today. We appreciate it.

>> Miss Adichie: Thank you for having me.

>> Bob Smith: Now, I know you divide your time between Nigeria and the US. You've done a lot of your education. How does each country, they're very different places, how do they each influence your work and your outlook?

>> Miss Adichie: That's, I think I need to hold these answer that question.

>> Bob Smith: That's OK. We have at least an hour. But I'd be curious to know.

>> Miss Adichie: I think I like to say that my sensibility is Nigerian. So I look at the world through eyes that are conditioned. I having grown up in Nigeria and America for me is, it's a country I have a lot of affection for, but it's also a country that I know isn't mine in that deep way. And so I look at America through Nigerian eyes, as in sometimes I observe things and I think, only in America

[laughter] And.

>> Bob Smith: Believe it or not, a lot of us think the same way and sometimes scratch our heads. Where we find ourselves puzzled at our own country, at our own community from time to time certainly. But that, that is interesting in the sense that I think many people who don't know that much about Nigeria, except some people know oh yes, they export a lot of oil or they may know something about where it is in west Africa, but otherwise don't know much about it, don't know much about the culture, the complexity of it. And I'd be curious to know, what should somebody who wants to approach your work, know about the land where you were born?

>> Miss Adichie: Actually I think the best thing is nothing. I think that.

[laughter] I think that when you mentioned oil, but I think we're also quite popular as such things as internet fraud. Nigerians.

[laughter] Nigerians are famous for writing those emails that ask people for their account numbers so that they can transfer tons of money to them.

>> Bob Smith: Yes well, of course a lot of people have watched Chris Hanson's reports on NBC Dateline.

>> Miss Adichie: Exactly.

>> Bob Smith: And that's probably where they got a lot of that from.

>> Miss Adichie: Right.

>> Bob Smith: But you know, that's interesting. But it doesn't tell you everything you need to know about a country.

>> Miss Adichie: No it doesn't. Actually it tells you very little. Because it's you know, obviously very small percentage of Nigerians who are involved in that and also very often the victims are Nigerians as well. I think for me it's and the reason I say nothing, which I say half jokingly is that sometimes people know one thing about a place and so they approach your work with that in mind. And when your work doesn't confirm that one idea, it can be interesting in disconcerting ways. So I think really for me is that Nigeria obviously is a very complex place. It's multi-ethnic, it's the simple story is that northern Nigeria is Muslim and southern Nigeria is Christian, mostly and that we have about 200 different ethnic groups. That we are English speaking, because we were colonized by the British But you know, inside [inaudible] simple stories, there's so many things going on and I think the wonderful thing about literature is that it just sort of makes you realize how different we are, but also how similar we are.

>> Bob Smith: Well, in a way, you talk about a history that has a lot in common with the history of the US, which of course, began as and then rebelled from, English colonial rule. Started out as largely an English speaking country, although there were a whole lot of highly sophisticated civilizations that had nothing to do with the English language that were here hundreds of years before the European got here. Nonetheless, they were there and they still are and I guess in way, it sounds like there's a lot in common.

>> Miss Adichie: Yes and no. I think, I think that colonialism is experienced by, by the United States as quite different from, from what it was in not just Nigeria, but in many sub Saharan African countries. And I think that the obvious difference of course being that the British came to the US and then you know, after many years decided you know, maybe we're not really British anymore. While in Nigeria, they sort of came on thought, we don't really care who you are, we just want your raw materials and we are going to build railways to facilitate our taking away of these materials and we're going to impose on you our own idea of how government should run and all of those things. I think, so I think that they're you know, sort of some similarities, but there are also huge differences.

>> Bob Smith: And that's, is that in a sense kind of some of the creative fuel that you use, that you draw on? All those differences.

>> Miss Adichie: I think so. I'm fascinated by, I'm just fascinated by how, by how living in a particular place, conditions and informs the choices people make and how they live their lives. So in Nigeria for example, in Legals [assumed spelling], which is the commercial capitol, which is as vibrant and interesting, colorful, frustrating city, I just love to watch people. I just love to watch people who are just living their lives and the choices they make. I love to watch for example, how people negotiate things like you know, their jobs and how very often we, Nigeria produces oil as you mentioned, but very often we have long lines at the petrol stations, because while we export oil, we don't actually refine oil. And so it means sometimes there are shortfalls. And but for me what's interesting is how people have turned this into jokes, people have

turned this into a source of political engagement. How you know, how petrol, that little thing called petrol, just gives birth to so many things. And so that's a small example of the things that I, I just am fascinated by.

>> Bob Smith: It's also, I think maybe this is something it has in common with the northeastern United States, I guess a very large population put in a relatively tight space, in terms of area. So I've heard that Legals is a huge city, maybe twice, three times the population of New York. Is it really that crowded? That many people in one place?

>> Miss Adichie: It is quite crowded. I was and I've been reading these sort of apocalyptic articles about how Legals is going to be a mega city in fifty years and how it's you know, some people write about how it's going to collapse into the sea. A lot of Legals is reclaimed land and this is really because the population is expanding and so the government is finding ways to create more land mass. It is quite crowded. But also what's interesting is because we haven't had the proper census in so long, because the census is such a political thing and it gets very, you know, it gets very contentious, we really don't know how many people live in Legals. We just really don't know. But this is in Legals, you're very much aware of how, how crowded it is. But again, it depends on what area it is. So when you go to the wealthy areas, there's lots of space, but then you sort of drive through the slums and it seems incredibly crowded.

>> Bob Smith: Again, there will be a ring of familiarity to a lot of what you said, but, but even, even leaving that aside, every country's issues and politics and social struggles are different and kind of unique, even though we can relate to them, find some points in common. How does that figure into the things that you write? How do you like to use that kind of creative tension and all those contradictions?

>> Miss Adichie: I you know, again I don't, I don't think I consciously make the effort to use them. But because I'm interested, because I like to think of myself as a very keen observer of the world, I just sort of, I just like to watch and listen and learn. And all of those things somehow come together in my head, somehow, in ways that I cannot explain. And sometimes give birth to fiction that you know, sometimes is readable.

>> Bob Smith: And obviously it's very widely read. So it's obviously a very successful work so. Does that success gratify you?

>> Miss Adichie: I does. It also terrifies me sometimes.

>> Bob Smith: That's an interesting comment. I don't think I have ever heard a successful writer say that they're apprehensive about their success before. But that's fascinating in and of itself. What makes you apprehensive about it?

>> Miss Adichie: It's, it's a very strange thing to, because on the one hand I very much want to be read and I'm very, I feel really grateful to be read. I, you know, sometimes I'm startled that somebody in, you know, in Finland, is reading my work in translation. And but then on the other hand, it just, there's something about it that it is and you know, and I say terrifying and I'm sort of joking, but, but there's something about it that, just thinking about all of these people reading your work, there are times when I just want to close my mind to that. I don't want to know, if that makes sense. There are times when, yes, there are times, it's, it's one of those things where on the one hand you

want to be read, but then when you are read, it comes with a lot of other baggage. Where you suddenly just think something has been not desecrated because that's a strong word, but something, it's no longer yours. It's quite strange. And so in the same way I don't read reviews of my books because I want to keep myself safe from them.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: You don't read the reviews.

>> Miss Adichie: No.

>> Bob Smith: The reviews are extremely positive. So you don't even like to read the praise?

>> Miss Adichie: But see, that's the thing. I mean, there's praise, but it's not all praise, of course. I wouldn't even want it to be all praise. But it's just something about even the praise, I want to, yes I just, I just want to be away from, in a sense.

>> Bob Smith: And I'm curious about this, too. When people read your work, do you worry about what they're going to take out of it?

>> Miss Adichie: Yes. Yes.

>> Bob Smith: What makes you worried?

>> Miss Adichie: Oh, I worry all the time. And I wish, I probably should learn not to worry so much. But I worry about what, because in some ways to write a book it's something very close to your heart, it's something that's in some ways, intensely private. But then you make the choice to publish it and then it becomes something that is no longer in your control. And I have, for example, done events where people have come up to me to say, you know, your book really is about ABC. And I'm sitting there thinking, really? That's not at all what I imagined the book was about.

[laughter] And that people take all of these different interpretations, which in some ways I think is the magic of literature. Because I read one book and you read the same book and we have really different interpretations of it. But when it's your own book that people are doing these things to, it's, it's a bit disconcerting. And so I'm always worrying, I'm worrying about and I think to be more specific, because I know I'm writing about Nigeria and Africa in a larger sense, I worry about people who don't know very much about where I write about. Assuming for example, that you know, generalizing, assuming that if I write one character who's nasty, that somehow it means Nigerians in general are nasty. So things like that concern me. They don't necessarily effect what I write, but they concern me.

>> Bob Smith: Is that something that every writer who maybe becomes, wittingly or unwittingly, a representative of an emerging country worries about? Because.

>> Miss Adichie: I think so.

>> Bob Smith: It all sounds so like you're saying some of the same things that Nathaniel Hawthorne used to worry about when he was writing about America

>> Miss Adichie: I think so. I think that when you and I think it's not just an emerging country, I think it can also be a community that isn't very well sort of known or hasn't been written much about. I can see for example, a native American writer having concerns, having similar concerns. I think that to a large extent, African American writers can have similar concerns. So I think that when you're writing about a group that isn't considered mainstream, whatever mainstream is really, that there's that. And you know, I have so many stories of people who have, who've said things to me about my work or actually one of my favorite are people saying, oh your characters are so relatable, which great surprise and you realize there's some [inaudible] that they wouldn't be relatable and I would think well why.

>> Bob Smith: People are people.

>> Miss Adichie: Exactly.

>> Bob Smith: But we kind of assume that because it's geographically separated or culturally separated there's going to be some kind of a difference which doesn't happen. But writers from emerging cultures have always worried about that, I guess. Early American writers worried about it and I guess contemporary African writers worry about it in the same way. Because they're being read now in a way they never have been before.

>> Miss Adichie: Yes. Yes.

>> Bob Smith: There's been a lot of writing going on in Africa for hundreds of years, but in the west we weren't reading it until recently.

>> Miss Adichie: Yes. Yes.

>> Bob Smith: Because it wasn't getting published.

>> Miss Adichie: That's right. But so hopefully in about a hundred years, things will be different.

>> Bob Smith: Well yes and you'll and your, your descendants will write the same way that Phillip Rath [assumed spelling] writes about America

[laughter] Not worrying about what the world thinks, just hoping they get their message right, I guess. Speaking of which, writers in the English language, of all of them that you've read and you grew up in an academic family and probably started reading from a baby onward, writers in the English language, who really made the strongest impression on you and maybe made you want to write?

>> Miss Adichie: I think that, I started, I think I, I don't know that a book made me want to write. I think that books, books effected how I wrote. Because my mother says that I was writing when you know, my mother makes up these stories. I think she says I was writing when I was one or two. But I also was a very early reader and I remember reading many children's books that were British and when I started to write, because that's what was available you know, when I started to write, I was writing books in which all the characters were British Because I just felt that that's what books were. And so here I was in the small town in southeastern Nigeria, I had never been outside Nigeria and my characters

were playing in the snow and eating apples. I had never seen snow, I have no idea what apples tasted like. But in the books that I read, this is what they did. So I did.

>> Bob Smith: Let me just say for the record, that apples are delicious, but as far as snow is concerned, you haven't missed much.

[laughter]

>> Miss Adichie: Oh well, I have since discovered that. However, when you're you know, six years old and you in the small dusty town in southeastern Nigeria, snow is the most exciting and the most exotic thing. And but it wasn't even that. I think it was simply that because everything I read was about that, I felt that was what a book was. A book was something in which white people played in snow. And then eventually I sort of read more books and I started to realize you know, it's actually OK to write about Nigerians who eat mango's, which is what I was familiar with. And so the Nigerian writer Chinion [assumed spelling] Chippia [assumed spelling] is a writer who I've often said was very important to me, because his work made me start to realize how I could tell my own stories. But Graham Green, was a writer that I loved and still love. I just, there's so many writers I love. I had a period of intense love for the Russians, which somehow I sort of got older and lost that love.

[laughter] So [inaudible] I read when I was maybe twelve or thirteen and loved. Now I just sort of think it's good literature, but I don't want it by my bedside. But, Father's and Sons, is the one Russian book that remains a favorite of mine. And then I had my, I didn't really read many American writers until I came to the US and I suddenly started to read American fiction as a way of trying to make sense of America And so I've sort of fallen in love with Phillip Roth for example, although my feminist friends are furious with me for loving him. But I do. Tony Morrison, I love. James Baldwin, I think is my favorite American writer. Mary Gipskill [assumed spelling], I very much admire. I you know, I think in general I just like good writing, but I have a particular preference for writing that is sort of grounded in what I like to call a version of reality.

>> Bob Smith: Are there writers with whom you'd like to have an argument?

>> Miss Adichie: Oh my lord, yes. I think all of these people that I've mentioned, I would love to just have a fierce argument with about you know, [inaudible] to Tony Morrison, why do you look pain in the face so often, why are you so unflinching in the face of pain. And to Mary Gipskill I would, no I think I better stop.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: What? No, this is interesting. I, this is fascinating. Are there, are there some writers who you think to yourself, how did this person get such a wide audience? I don't understand the appeal and I would like to confront this person and try to find out what he or she is doing?

>> Miss Adichie: I think a novel that I felt that about quite strongly is the novel, Naked Lunch. I just thought, who published this and why. And but seriously. I mean, there is some books that I just don't, there are books that I don't like in a personal way, but I see why it's worthy and then there are books that I don't like and I don't see why it's worthy.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: So if you had ever met William S. Burroughs while he was alive, you probably would have loved to debate him and he probably would have taken you on, too.

>> Miss Adichie: I think I would have, yes. I don't know about debate, I think I would simply rant.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: Well, he did that very well, too. As a matter of fact, he once appeared on Saturday Night Live. I'm not making that up. William S. Burroughs actually appeared, in character of one of his characters in Naked Lunch, on Saturday Night Live and did a riff in a scene of a surgery, played Doctor Benway.

>> Miss Adichie: Oh my lord.

>> Bob Smith: It really happened and if you ever see the reruns of Saturday Night Live, you'll find it.

[laughter] He may be the only American author who's ever appeared on a late night comedy show, playing a character and playing a skit. They all appear sooner or later to plug their books, talking with Jay Leno or David Letterman or the rest of them, but that's been part of the culture ever since Merv Griffin invited them on, started inviting them on 40 years ago, but. Oh yes.

[laughter]

>> Miss Adichie: Very interesting. I think I'm going to need to go look for it now.

>> Bob Smith: It's there. It's, it was the most incoherent bit I'd ever seen on television.

[laughter] Just like that book. The book is one of the most incoherent books I ever read. But I got through it somehow.

>> Miss Adichie: Well done.

>> Bob Smith: Yes, but I tried. I never give up on anything. That's sort of my way. But when you talk about finding a voice, every writer I've talked with, talks about finding his or her own voice, talk to me about the process of finding your own voice.

>> Miss Adichie: I don't know. I really, sometimes I'm not even sure what it means to find one's voice. I think that for me writing, I often tell, I teach writing sometimes and I tell my students that my sense of writing is that it's never finished. So perhaps I'm still searching for my voice or perhaps each new book requires a different voice. I don't know. But I do know that when I started to write when I was much younger, it took me a while to feel, to feel comfortable about my own writing and you know, I don't, I don't even think I feel entirely comfortable yet. But so maybe that's what voice is. I don't know.

When writers say that, I just sort of think, it sounds very interesting, I don't know what it means really to find one's voice.

>> Bob Smith: And at the same time, when you're writing a novel, how do you being, every particular book? Where does it begin? Does it begin with maybe an idea of a character or a plot outline or maybe just some incident or some piece of dialog that sticks in your mind? Because I've heard it described all kinds of different ways by all kinds of different writers. Where does it usually begin for you, if there is a pattern?

>> Miss Adichie: All of them. No there isn't. It depends on the book. My first novel really begun from intense homesickness. I was in Connecticut, I hadn't been back in Nigeria in four years. I was just intensely homesick. And I remember just and I lived with my sister at the time and I remember being in the kitchen cooking, because we mostly in Nigerian food when we're here and there was just something about the smell of the stew that just made me intensely long for the kitchen in the house where I had grew up. And that's where Purple Hibiscus came from. And of course, in the end it became a novel that wasn't about my life at all, but, but that's really what he genesis of it was.

>> Bob Smith: Thoughts of home.

>> Miss Adichie: The smell of food.

>> Bob Smith: Does each novel begin with a different kind of kernel of experience or character or how?

>> Miss Adichie: Yes and also, and also my short stories. They just begin, sometimes it's an image. So yesterday I was talking to a woman who told me a story about feeding deer with cuts of apples and that's stuck in my head and I'm thinking, I love that image of somebody feeding deer and the deer eating out of their hand cut up apples. And I'm thinking, maybe that will lead to something. So now it's in my head and I don't know what that will be, but it might be something.

>> Bob Smith: Will it be a story in some way about something happening in the northeaster US?

>> Miss Adichie: It would have to be, since there are no deer and no apples in Nigeria So I would have to find a way to, but just to say that sometimes and recently I was in India and a woman was telling me a story about her aunt who eats roses. So she'd go to the garden and pluck a rose and eat the petals. And that just stayed in my head and I thought, how interesting and what do they taste like. So that too, I thought. I wrote that down. I thought you just never know. I might use that.

>> Bob Smith: What does a rose taste like? I've never had one.

[laughter] Will you, will you try it in order to find out what it's like?

>> Miss Adichie: I think I might taste one. Yes, I think I might taste one if I end up using it. It's good to know these things.

>> Bob Smith: And other life experiences just sort of jump at you and say I have to write about this?

>> Miss Adichie: Oh yes. Sometimes I'm talking to my family members, my second novel, *Half of the Yellow Sun*, is actually very much based on my family. It's about the Nigeria [inaudible] the 1960's and I grew up being haunted by this war, which I didn't experience, but which my family did. And I remember my father talking about his, my father graduated from Berkley in the early 60's and then went back to Nigeria and I remember he talked about his graduation gown once and he said, oh I lost that in the war. And for me, that became, that stayed in my head and I thought, I'm going to write about this period and of course I never did write about the gown itself, but it was learning about the little things that my parents had lost that made me want to write about the big things that they didn't really talk about.

>> Bob Smith: I will talk more about that in a moment. I have to take a short break. We have to take a short pause. But we will be back with more of our conversation with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who is the latest in a series of speakers, *Visionaries in Motion*, the Carline Warner Gennett lecture series at RIT. She joins me right now in advance of her evening presentation at 8, at the Webb Auditorium. I'm Bob Smith, back in a minute on WXXI's 1370 Connection.

[music] 1370 Connection on WXXI AM 1370. I'm Bob Smith. We are talking with novelist, writer, storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the most acclaimed young writers of the English speaking world and the latest in the series of speakers in the Caroline Werner Gennett, *Visionaries in Motion* series. She's going to be speaking this evening at 8 pm at RIT's Webb Auditorium. She's here with us right now. And just before the break, we were talking about how the civil war in Nigeria in the 1960's, had impacted your family and I remember hearing media reports about that war, which came across to us here in America, like a tremendous human tragedy. A humanitarian tragedy. We didn't know much about the politics of it, we didn't know much about, about the nationalistic and cultural tensions that caused it, but we knew about the human dimension and it was painful. I'd be curious to know from your point of view, from your family's point of view, how it resonated with you and maybe also how it affected in some way your perspectives in your work.

>> Miss Adichie: My, both my grandfathers died in that war and yes, it was, I mean it was a huge humanitarian disaster and this is actually the [inaudible] started because of the effort and the International Red Cross apparently says that, apart from the second world war, [inaudible] was it's biggest operation and it was mostly because they were trying to save civilians who had been blockaded in Biafra [assumed spelling], by the Nigerian government. So really the war started because, as the region of Nigeria wanted to secede and become independent and called itself Biafra and the rest of Nigeria said no. You know, you can't secede. And the major reason they said no is because oil had just been discovered in the part of Nigeria that wanted to secede and now the reason that that part of Nigeria wanted to secede is because they had been religious and ethnic tensions. Southern Nigeria is mostly Christian, northern Nigeria is mostly Muslim There had been massacres of Christians in the north and a lot of other complicated things, many of which I think had their roots in the way the British had administered Nigeria during the colonial government My father was a university teacher and he was part of a generation of Nigerians who were very excited, very hopeful, very optimistic about the future of the country. He got his degree in the United States and the week, week after he got his degree he was back in Nigeria He, because he wanted to join in the sort of building the country. And then you know, two years later the war starts. His father dies in a

refuge camp. My mother's father died in a refuge camp. But I think in general, my father's generation lost their innocence. Because they stopped believing in the idea of Nigeria and Biafra lost of course and Nigeria became reunited again. We're still living with the consequences of the end of the war. Nobody really talks about it. When I wrote the novel, lots of people said to me, why are you doing that? You should let things be. It's in the past. But of course, it's not in the past, because it's still very much alive in the memories of people who, particularly people who are Biafrans. You know, people who lost their, I mean and also just that, sometimes that the deep, deep sadness of it that people lost their children to simple illnesses that ordinarily would have been cured, but because you're in the situation of war, you don't have access to medicine and you watch your child die. And my mother nearly lost my brother, who was born during the war. And there are things that she still finds difficult to talk about. So when I was interviewing them for the book, sometimes I would have to stop because my mother just would you know, just go silent.

>> Bob Smith: This is eerily familiar to people who are aware of far enough back in American history, to know how our country tore itself apart in the 1860's. We are observing the 150th anniversary of it of course now, but I don't know whether this will be consolation or not, the memories are still there, the discussion is still ongoing, both in fiction and non-fiction and you never forget.

>> Miss Adichie: No you don't. I think, I was just, I think that for me, the American civil war, which by the way I'm quite fascinated by, I've been watching Ken Burn's documentary, I think for me what's even more interesting in the US is how even the story of what happened and why it happened is so contested. And that, that I find fascinating. And also, it's quite similar to the case in Nigeria where for the Biafran's the reason the war happens quite straightforward. But mostly for, for people who are not Biafran's it isn't as straightforward and I find that one of the things that happened after my novel came out was that particularly Nigerians of my generation, so we knew a war had happened shortly before we were born, but we didn't really know no, because they don't teach you in school. Because we're just really keen to be silent about that period of our history. And for me, what was interesting was how people started to talk and trade stories and how, how the stories were so different. So the person from the north, who's parents had told him, oh the war was really about some crazy man who wanted to destroy Nigeria and the people from Ibuland [assumed spelling] who had been told, the war was really about self preservation. And how the stories are so different and but on the other hand, I felt very happy because it started a conversation and I think it's very important to not forget.

>> Bob Smith: But remember, once that conversation starts, our experience is, it's never going to stop.

>> Miss Adichie: Which is actually not such a bad thing. Because I think that you know, because on the other hand and for me one of the things that, I've just found myself, I'm so intensely pacifist on the subject of war, because of having learned about Biafra and just how you know, I just think wars are just really awful things and, and I think one of the ways to make sure that we don't do that is if we know what happened. You know, I think that, that people now who, sometimes Nigerians will say things like, oh we really shouldn't be one country. The British invented this country, it's a, we shouldn't be one country. And then somebody will say yes, but do you want to break us apart and have war, do you

remember Biafra, do you really want that to happen again? I think most people don't.

>> Bob Smith: So, you move on. Just like we moved on.

>> Miss Adichie: Moved on in quote.

>> Bob Smith: Yes. Well at the same time, continually reminding yourself of what happened and what kind of lessons you derived from it.

>> Miss Adichie: Yes. And also how the present is conditioned by that. How a lot of the things that are happening today we can explain by going back to the war. And then I think that's also the case in this country, in the United States.

>> Bob Smith: In which everything is overlaid with all the issues that divided us once upon a time. Still are playing out in other ways today. So, will your country come to even the degree of peace, imperfect peace that we finally reached 150 years after?

>> Miss Adichie: I think so. I think so. I think that Nigerians, I mean when the war ended, a lot of the, the story in the international press in particular, was that Nigeria had, had sort of shown itself to be you know, this wonderful brotherhood, sisterhood. Because the official story was no victor, no vanquished. And there's a peace of sorts. I mean Nigeria, in many ways it is a united country, but it's also a country that has the divisions that any country with the kind of history that it has, would have.

>> Bob Smith: That's what Lincoln thought in his second inaugural address. When he said, with malice toward none and with charity for all. I hope it works out. I hope it works out. So I guess in the meantime of course, as you look ahead, what kind of influence do you think you're having on other contemporary writers, your peers and those that are even coming in in the next generation after you? You know, writers in their twenties right now.

>> Miss Adichie: Oh lord, I don't know. I try not to think about that. Because I you know, I, what I do know and what I find myself feeling very grateful for is that my, my first novel when it came out, we had a lot of literary published in Nigeria in the 1960's and then when we had military dictatorships from the 80's to the 90's, you just had you know, destruction. A gradual destruction, not just of education, but also of, of culture. So nobody was writing anymore. People left Nigeria And I think that what Purple Hibiscus did, my first novel, was that it started a kind of resurgence of literary writing in Nigeria and that makes me very happy. And for me, it's very exciting that you know, I meet women for example, at the airport and they say to me, because of you my daughter wants to be a writer. And that's very exciting for me. And now there's a lot more writing going on. Books are being published. Small publishers are setting up and that sort of thing.

>> Bob Smith: And you've got a reading public in a lot of different places. In west Africa, in Europe, especially in the English speaking countries, Britain and Ireland, in North America, the US and Canada and in the pacific in the English speaking countries there. Global. It's widespread. How does each of those reading publics read you?

>> Miss Adichie: I think even more interesting is why do they read me?

[laughter] I don't, I think it's quite different. I mean, I think that Nigerians and I think [inaudible] Africans and I think [inaudible] Africans also read it in the French translation. But there's a different, there's a sense in Nigeria and I think in west Africa that if it's read differently, it's their story. There's a sense in which people take ownership of it and people can get very infested in it and sometimes I do events and people are sort of giving me lectures about what I should have done or what or how they reacted to something I did or how the story was their story. There are people who have come up to hug me, because I wrote their story. So there's a sense in which it's a much more intense kind of I'm taking ownership of. In the US I think that, I think in many ways in the US, I'm still very much sort of the person who brings news of this place that's still hardly known. In a way that isn't in England or the in UK in general, because I mean obviously for historical reasons, Nigeria is a lot more familiar to British readers. And so I think in England I am less the African writer. I'm just simply sort of the writer. I don't bring as much news. I think that in places like India and Sri Lanka where I just was really thrilled to realize that I had quite a readership, there's also the similarity of having sort of similar histories. So Indians will say to me, well that's just like us or you know, we have the same issues or you know, that's familiar. And yes and for me, it's always fascinating to see what people you know, how people read it or to get emails from readers who have stories that are similar but not quite the same and who are from you know, Malaysia and, and yes, it's.

>> Bob Smith: It will be read somewhat differently in Lagos's [assumed spelling] from how it's read in London, from how it's read in New York or Toronto or maybe even Los Angeles.

>> Miss Adichie: Possibly.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: Because everything is different in Los Angeles.

[laughter] But, but even leaving this, I'm curious to know how you, how you actually craft a book from another aspect. And because every writer likes to do it differently. I know there are writers who like to just sit down at their desk every morning, like they're checking in at the office, at a particular time and they'll work for a set time each day. However much they get done, however little they get done, however much they write, however much they rewrite, they clock in, take a little bit for lunch, then clock back in again, then clock out at a particular time and go off. Hemingway did that. And then there are others that just sit down and let her rip. I remember hearing a story of Jack Carrowack [assumed spelling], who apparently, who told a friend of mine who had met him, the way he wrote on the road was, get a hold of a long reel of associated press teletype paper, load it into one end of the typewriter, one day in the 1950's, started up and didn't stop until he finished the book. And then turned in, apparently he was, he was fueled by some sort of stimulant or other, I don't want to know what.

>> Miss Adichie: Right.

>> Bob Smith: But he wrote it all and then turned in the reel of paper to his publisher, as the book. And it pretty much was published the way he had written it out on that teletype reel. And that's how he did it.

>> Miss Adichie: Oh my lord. I wish I had a story half as exciting.

>> Bob Smith: And so, which comes closest to your approach or is there anything like either one? Either the businesslike approach of Hemingway or the do it all in one shot, god knows how of Jack Carrowack or something else?

>> Miss Adichie: I think this is second romance to that Jack Carrowack story that you know, that.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: It could have, well I'll tell you, the guy I knew, who happened to be the guy who supervised my dissertation, he thought it was a work of creative fiction and it sold right. He wasn't sure. He took it with less than a pound of salt. But there is was. That's his story and his stuck with it.

[laughter]

>> Miss Adichie: That's interesting. Also I don't think stories of that sort are possible today because you know, now there's the computer and it's all sort of bland. But you know, the first example about the writers who clock in and clock out, I just sometimes wonder what do they do. I mean, when they clock in every day, what are they doing? Because there are times when even if I wanted to write, I couldn't. Because it's just not there. And I like to think of it as literary spirits who visit me from time to time and sometimes they just don't visit. So I don't have that clocking in everyday sort of thing. I do have moments when the writing is going well and I'm obsessive. I spend really the whole day at my table. I don't shower, I eat at the table, I just am obsessive. I take break sometimes to read things that I've done or to read something else that I think will nurture the writing. So when I was writing Half of the Yellow Sun, which took about four years to do, I had about a year of what I like to call intense obsession. I didn't, I mean I was living in a small apartment at the time in Baltimore and because I was in graduate school and sometimes I would not leave my apartment for weeks and sometimes, sometimes just stepping outside I would think oh, this is what the world looks like, this is what people look like. Because I, I had sequestered myself. So I don't, sometimes I wish I had that kind of ritual. Sometimes I, also writers have these sort of elaborate, sometimes I wish that I would kind of you know, light a red candle and do an evil chant and you know, sort of do extreme yoga before starting out. But, but no, I just.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: It comes when it comes?

>> Miss Adichie: Yes and sometimes one wishes it would come more often. But.

>> Bob Smith: Can you force the issue at all when you get frustrated or you feel blocked?

>> Miss Adichie: When you force it, it doesn't work. At least it doesn't work for me. I know when I'm writing rubbish. I know and so I've just learned not to force it. It's very frustrating. It's easy to sit here and talk about, but it's actually something that can lead to you know, depression and anxiety and self

doubt. But in general, increasingly what I'm trying to do now is when it's not working I read and I find that in just immersing myself in something I enjoy reading, it just helps me have hope. So I'm thinking if, so the book that I was recently reading when it wasn't working, oh lord I've just completely blanked. Styron [assumed spelling], Sophie's Choice. And I remember thinking hm, if Styron wrote these lovely sentences, there's the possibility that one can write [inaudible] and that it will happen at some point.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: So, that kind of unblocked you, in a way.

>> Miss Adichie: It didn't. But I was hoping it would and there's still hope that it will.

>> Bob Smith: Oh, do you feel sort of stymied in your, in your project right now or, or?

>> Miss Adichie: Actually [inaudible] not right now, no. And I better not say anymore, because I'm incredibly superstitious.

>> Bob Smith: That's something I hear from most writers I talk with. They don't like to talk very much about the work that's in progress, at the very most. Love to talk to you about things that maybe further in the future, but they're just beginning to think about little kernel is about to germinate in their minds, love to talk about what they have done. Don't like to talk about what they're in process on and trying to refine. So what is that about just about every writer I think I've ever met?

>> Miss Adichie: It's good to know I'm not alone. I think when it's fiction in particular, I mean I think it's different when you're sort of doing something that's research based and you're just organizing facts, but when it's fiction you worry that and sometimes you start off thinking I'm going to write a book about pink and blue, but then it ends up being about you know, silver. It's, it's that the process itself is so, that you can't entirely control it and then you worry that you talk about something and it ends up being something else or even worse, you worry that you spent so much time talking about it that you actually don't do it.

>> Bob Smith: Well, you make it in a way, I don't want to say the word supernatural, but it sounds in some way sort of metaphysical.

>> Miss Adichie: I think the reason metaphysical aspect to writing to me. I think there are some writers who may not feel that way, who are such a very clinical about it and who consider work in the same way you would build a chair. But even building a chair I think, has a metaphysical component to it. But for me it isn't. I do feel that there are times when, especially when the writing is going particularly well, I feel elevated, I feel transformed, I feel that the characters take over. And sometimes I want the character to do something and the character doesn't and of course, when I tell my family members, because they look at me as though I'm crazy because they think what are you talking about. But it is true, it is true.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: So characters sometimes get a mind of their own?

>> Miss Adichie: Yes. They really do. They really do.

>> Bob Smith: Is that the sign that the character is really real and not just a creation of imagination divorced from reality?

>> Miss Adichie: I like to think, I don't know what it is. I just know that it's one, for me one of the best parts about writing, when that magical thing happens.

>> Bob Smith: When the character all of a sudden comes to life and says, oh you have to do this with me.

>> Miss Adichie: Right.

>> Bob Smith: I'm going to have to deal with this situation that you've presented in this way.

>> Miss Adichie: Exactly. Yes.

>> Bob Smith: Do you have a dialog with your characters?

>> Miss Adichie: In some ways I let them lead and I follow.

>> Bob Smith: How do you, once you've got, I'm going to presume you go through a few drafts. Would I be right on that? That you go through a few drafts before you're ready to send it to the publisher and say, this is what I'm going to declare to the world. As my statement, my next statement. How many drafts, how much revision once the basic kernel of the story or the novel is done?

>> Miss Adichie: Oh my lord, I revise endlessly. For Half of the Yellow Sun, I don't even know. Maybe, maybe ten revisions and when I finally sent it to my editor in London, she you know, she'd received it and then the next day I called her and I said, I want it back. I want to do one more revision. I just, I wasn't ready to let go. I felt that things were still, you know, things needed work. I'm actually an obsessive and reviser. I sometimes look at work that's published and I want to change some things.

>> Bob Smith: Have you ever thought seriously of issuing a revised edition of a book?

[laughter] Just to say I think, I think, I'm not quite happy with the way I phrased this, I've got to issue a revision. Next time you come to another printing of it, this is how I want it to read.

>> Miss Adichie: Now that you mentioned that, I think I just might. But also I'm not sure I want to allow myself that kind of, there's a certain indulgence to it. You know, it's done, leave it alone and try something new.

>> Bob Smith: Because some writers have actually done that. Dickens did that and he got away with it.

>> Miss Adichie: Yes, he's Dickens.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: Well yes, but I mean, let's face it. I think.

>> Miss Adichie: Also I would edit him even more now.

>> Bob Smith: Hm, yes I've heard that, you're not the only person I've heard who has said that about him. That he, that he might have got out too far. That he got paid, that he treated like he got paid by the word.

>> Miss Adichie: Wasn't he paid by the word?

>> Bob Smith: Yes he was.

>> Miss Adichie: Yes. So, I mean, you sort of read, yes, I would.

>> Bob Smith: He did write like he got paid by the word, because he did.

[laughter] He was a little verbose and he had a reason for it. But speaking of, speaking of work, obviously we don't pay by the word. Those of us who read, people who publish and everything else, they pay and they commission new work based on simply the quality of the work and the quality of the previous work. Which certainly has got to be good news for someone like you with an established reputation now, as a top shelf writer. Does it make it easier to have that kind of reputation to be a name writer?

>> Miss Adichie: Does it make it easier to publish I suppose so. But does it make it easier to write, certainly not. I think, I'm not sure it makes, if it makes any difference it may be, I think that sort of, there's a certain pressure that comes with it, which and I try very hard not to have. But what just is there. It's there because you know, it's there because you have readers who, it's just there because you know that it's no longer about you and the work alone. When I was writing my first novel, I didn't think anybody would read it and it was different. Because you know, I was just doing my thing. Now, working on the present novel, although I try very hard to push that realization away, there's a part of me that knows that this will be right.

>> Bob Smith: Does it intimidate you knowing that when you publish it, the hardcover sales are going to be in the six figures and the soft cover sales, the paperbacks, are going to go in the seven figures and billions of people are going to read it?

>> Miss Adichie: Oh god, I hope that happens.

[laughter]

>> Bob Smith: Does that, does that worry you? Is it intimidating? Does it give you a burden or does it kind of energize you say, I've really got to connect with this?

>> Miss Adichie: Well it, the idea of the selling, book selling, because I'm not sure that it will. Because nobody ever is sure that a book will do well. The idea of at least five people for example reading it, there's going to be the mean spirited review in Nigeria reading it, there is the reviewer in England reading it, there's perhaps an American reviewer reading it. That and also just readers. I find that I care a lot more about what one might call the ordinary

reader who isn't necessarily a specialist. I care about that and I sometimes wonder will these characters connect with people, will people find them believable, will people you know, be charmed by them, be annoyed by them, which is always the hope that I have with some of my characters. And all of that is, it's an intimidating thing. Yes, to an extent. It's almost frightening in a way. It's, but not in, it's I'm aware of it, I'm aware of it and sometimes I wish, I don't want to be. I wish there was sort of a tablet that I could take that could erase that knowledge.

>> Bob Smith: Do you worry? I tell you one thing, Phillip Roth's name came up earlier. I had a conversation with him some years ago and he said at the time, people who are listeners to this show will remember this, because it was right on the air. That he wondered if by the year 2050, there would be 10,000 people in North America who would have the ability and the patience to read through an entire novel. He thought we had become so conditioned to short bites, television, on cable and he saw the internet starting to come up. These were the early 90's when the first web browsers were out there and he was already online and sampling it and getting scared by it. And he wondered if 10,000 people would be willing to sit down and read a novel. And I told him I thought you'd find a good novel would find 10 million readers. And he said, I'll bet you a quarter and I'll bet you, if we're still alive in 2050, and you're right, I'll pay you a quarter. If I'm right, you come and find me and pay me a quarter. Who do you think is going to win that bet?

[laughter]

>> Miss Adichie: I think you will.

>> Bob Smith: I hope so.

[laughter] From your mouth to gods ears and I'm absolutely convinced that there will always be an audience for good fiction. And thank you very much for providing it to millions of readers around the English speaking world. My thanks to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who is the latest speaker in the Visionaries in Motion lecture series at RIT's Webb Auditorium. She's going to speak at 8 o'clock tonight and she's shared her perspectives on the writers art with us in this hour, 1370 Connection, here at WXXI AM and FM HD to Rochester. For Dave [inaudible] our technical director, I'm Bob Smith. It's been a pleasure.

[music]

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