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MOURNING AND INNER EXILE: A POETICS OF SELF-STRANGENESS IN *NOTES ON GRIEF* BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

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Abstract : In *Notes on Grief* (2021), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie transforms the intimate experience of mourning into a profound exploration of otherness. The death of her father deeply rooted in Igbo memory and culture reveals grief as both an individual wound and a site of existential displacement. This study examines how Adichie constructs grief as a foreign territory, where language falters, rituals dissolve, and identity becomes estranged from itself. The central problem guiding this research is how mourning, beyond its emotional dimension, generates a condition of inner exile that reshapes both the self and linguistic expression. The main objective is to analyze how Adichie's writing transforms loss into a poetics of self-strangeness, turning vulnerability into an aesthetic and philosophical form.The study relies on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework combining psychoanalytic approaches to mourning (Freud, Kristeva), postcolonial reflections on exile and displacement (Said, Mbembe), and aesthetic theories of fragmentation and testimony (Barthes, Derrida, Caruth). Methodologically, it employs a close textual and narratological analysis of *Notes on Grief*, focusing on narrative fragmentation, linguistic disruption, and representations of bodily and cultural alienation. Findings reveal that Adichie's fragmented prose mirrors the ruptures of bereavement: the dislocated syntax, silences, and ellipses embody the impossibility of linguistic mastery over loss. The author becomes a stranger to herself, to her language, and to the rituals denied by distance. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that *Notes on Grief* constructs grief as both a personal and collective exile a poetics of vulnerability where writing itself becomes a fragile form of survival.
Key words: grief, alterity, mourning, exile, strangeness

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Résumé: Dans *Notes on Grief* (2021), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie transforme l'expérience intime du deuil en une profonde exploration de l'altérité. La mort de son père, marquée dans la mémoire et la culture igbo, révèle le deuil à la fois comme une blessure individuelle et un lieu de déplacement existentie. Cette étude examine comment Adichie construit le deuil comme un territoire étranger, où le langage chancelle, les rituels se

désagrègent et l'identité se trouve étrangère à elle-même.Le problème central qui guide cette recherche est de comprendre comment le deuil, au-delà de sa dimension émotionnelle, engendre une condition d'exil intérieur qui reconfigure à la fois le moi et l'expression linguistique. L'objectif principal est d'analyser comment l'écriture d'Adichie transforme la perte en une poétique de l'étrangeté de soi, faisant de la vulnérabilité une forme esthétique et philosophique. L'étude convoque un cadre théorique pluridisciplinaire combinant les approches psychanalytiques du deuil (Freud, Kristeva), les réflexions postcoloniales sur l'exil et le déplacement (Said, Mbembe) et les théories esthétiques de la fragmentation et du témoignage de (Barthes, Derrida, Caruth). Sur le plan méthodologique, elle s'appuie sur une analyse textuelle et narratologique de *Notes on Grief*, en se focalisant sur la fragmentation du récit, la dislocation linguistique et les représentations de l'aliénation corporelle et culturelle.Les résultats révèlent que les fragmentes de proses chez d'Adichie reflètent les ruptures du deuil : la syntaxe disloquée, les silences et les ellipses incarnent l'impossibilité d'une maîtrise linguistique de la perte. L'auteure devient étrangère à elle-même, à sa langue et aux rituels que la distance lui interdit. En définitive, l'étude démontre que *Notes on Grief* construit le deuil comme un exil à la fois personnel et collectif, une poétique de la vulnérabilité où l'écriture elle-même devient une fragile forme de survie.
Mots-clés : deuil, altérité, perte, exil, étrangeté.

Introduction

Published in 2021, *Notes on Grief* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a hybrid text, somewhere between autobiographical narrative, essay, and poetic meditation. Written in the wake of her father's sudden death, the book bears witness to the shock of a daughter who, in the midst of a global lockdown, finds herself deprived of the final farewell and community rituals that traditionally accompany loss. Behind this intimate experience lies a universal dimension: grief, while always unique, reveals in each of us a fracture, a shift into radical otherness. Adichie thus adds her voice to a literary tradition in which personal experience becomes a gateway to shared human truths, transcending the individual to become part of a collective reflection on vulnerability, memory, and internal exile. In this fragmented and breathless text, grief is presented not only as a private pain, but as a true experience of "inner strangeness." Adichie confides: "I felt unmoored, afloat, a stranger to myself" (p. 38). This confession shows that the loss of a father leads to a profound destabilization of identity, a tearing away that makes the subject herself a stranger.

The central question of our reflection is: how does Adichie transform grief into an experience of strangeness that reconfigures both identity and language? In other words, how does grief, in her work, cease to be merely a feeling and become a new existential space, a

territory where the intimate meets the collective and where writing attempts to translate the unspeakable? We hypothesize that Notes on Grief deploys a true poetics of internal exile, in which the stranger is no longer the external Other who comes from a different culture or a different place, but the wounded self, rendered unrecognizable by the ordeal of grief.

To analyze this poetics of strangeness, we adopt a cross-disciplinary approach that is at once narratological, aesthetic, and postcolonial. From a narratological perspective, we examine the way in which the discontinuity of the narrative, temporal ruptures, and the fragmentation of discourse reflect the destabilization of identity. On an aesthetic level, we will study writing about grief as an attempt to give form to the unspeakable, in line with theories of "literature of loss" and "dispossession" (Derrida, Barthes). Finally, from a postcolonial perspective, we will consider Adichie's experience through geographical and cultural distance: the impossibility of traditional funeral rituals refers to a diasporic condition where exile is not only spatial, but also internal.

I-Figures of the intimate stranger: mourning as inner otherness

The first face of the stranger in *Notes on Grief* emerges from within: it does not come from outside, from a cultural or geographical elsewhere, but lies at the heart of the intimate experience of mourning. Adichie recounts not simply the loss of a loved one, but the radical disorganization that it entails: the loss of temporal reference points, the breakdown of language, the feeling of strangeness towards oneself. What the author depicts is the way in which grief makes us strangers to our own identity.

1.1. The grieving body as a territory of strangeness

For Adichie, strangeness begins with a sensation that needs no theory: the body becomes disordered, becomes something else. Grief is not just an idea or a feeling, it is first and foremost a somatic experience shortness of breath, inertia, heavy limbs, sleeplessness that expels the subject from their sensory habits. Hence the opening phrase, both simple and relentless: "Grief is a cruel kind of education" (p. 11). "Cruel" because it conveys nothing through signs; it is

inculcated in the flesh, forcibly "adjusts" the body schema, and breaks the tacit pact between oneself and one's gestures. In Freud's terms, the work of mourning divests the lost object, but this divestment does not immediately liberate the subject: it produces tensions, inhibitions, an affective economy that converts into bodily symptoms. The body then becomes the primary scene of a radical otherness: we inhabit it as we would inhabit a house that has had its locks changed. This otherness thickens into a new envelope a second skin. Adichie writes: “My grief has become a part of me, its own skin that covers me” (p. 36). The image is decisive: grief is no longer a simple “state” to be passed through, it becomes a milieu of existence, a sensory membrane through which everything is now perceived. Like a foreign skin placed over oneself, pain filters light, disturbs the temperature of the world, alters contact with the ex f others. We no longer touch, we are touched by a veil. It is in this sense that the "education" of grief is a reconfiguration of sensory thresholds: nothing has changed "outside," and yet everything is perceived differently, strangely. From this skin, a rhythm emerges. Adichie's text gasps, fragments, resumes: the prose takes on a physiological quality. The bodily experience dictates the prosody short sentences, pauses, repetitions as if the narration were breathing with difficulty. This scansion conveys a knowledge that cannot be expressed but must be felt. Elaine Scarry showed how pain resists language; here, it recomposes it from within, imposing a syncopated cadence on the discourse. The style does not illustrate the strangeness of the body: it performs it.

Finally, bodily strangeness opens up an identity gap. When the body withdraws, it is the continuity of the "I" that falters: "I felt unmoored, afloat, a stranger to myself" (p. 38). The subject no longer recognizes their automatisms, their supports, their impulses; they float. Kristeva would speak of an “inner stranger”: not the enemy, but the unassimilable that now coexists with oneself. This forced cohabitation forms the basis of the poetics of internal exile that Notes on Grief unfolds: before being social or ritual, the experience of the "other" is somatic. The body, once familiar, becomes the first foreign country.

1.2. The dislocation of language

In Adichie's work, mourning initially operates as a crisis of naming: it forces us to express the unrepresentable and, in doing so, cracks the language that claims to order it. The decisive admission “I am writing about my father in the past tense, and I cannot believe I am doing this” (p. 27) lays bare the grammatical violence of grief. The shift to the past tense is not a simple syntactic operation; it is an ontological conversion. The verb tense becomes proof, almost a performative act of death: each “was” reiterates the absence, forcing the consciousness to consent to what the body refuses. Language is no longer an instrument of control; it becomes a place of assignment to reality.

This assignment, however, stabilizes nothing: it fractures. Adichie writes in a prose that gasps, breaks, resumes, multiplying fragments, brief notations, suspensions. Punctuation becomes breath: dashes, short periods, crumb-like paragraphs impose a prosody of breathlessness, as if the sentence could not contain the emotional charge that runs through it. The writer does not "express" pain; it is pain that sculpts the sentence. Thus, stylistic economy joins psychic economy: the syntactic cut materializes the intermittence of mourning, that return in waves that Roland Barthes noted as the "ponctum" of existence in mourning. The narrative does not progress linearly; it returns, stumbles, recants all writing gestures that mimic rumination and bewilderment.

This prosody is compounded by a crisis of enunciative categories. The “I” finds itself alien to its own voice, sometimes on the verge of “you” or a fragile “we,” searching for the missing community island: the “I” vacillates between self-address (talking to oneself to hold on) and an implicit apostrophe to the father (talking to him as if he could hear). This oscillation is not decorative; it reveals the instability of a subject deprived of its original interlocutor. To name the father in the past tense is to undo the chain of enunciation that founded identity: we used to talk to him, now we talk about him a tiny shift in language, an earthquake in being.

The dislocation also affects the referential order. The "ordinary" words home, call, funeral take on an excess of density, as if the domestic lexicon, saturated with habits, had suddenly become untranslatable. Hence the emergence of meta-discursive formulations in

which writing comments on its own act: writing becomes a witness to the impossibility of writing. “The act of writing this is a way of bearing witness” (p. 33) signals this twist: the text knows that language fails, but it decides to exhibit its failure as a form of truth. Performativity is no longer assurance but exposure: publishing the break, turning absence into structure. We also see a poetics of ellipsis: truncated scenes, fragmented memories, prosaic details placed in the foreground (a missed call, a screen, a date), as if micro-materiality were replacing the total narrative. This granularity protects and reveals: unable to embrace the totality of loss, writing clings to the fragment that can be grasped. Detail becomes a reliquary: a tiny sign that carries the infinity of absence.

Finally, this dislocation is not only an individual crisis; it has a diasporic dimension. Writing about death from a distance means writing in a language that must double down to make absent ritual gestures present. Language acts as a substitute ritual; but this ritual of words remains haunted by inadequacy. Hence Adichie's ethical approach to style: not filling in, not smoothing over, allowing the sentence to bear the gaping wound. The text thus assumes a paradoxical truth: it is by recognizing the powerlessness of language that writing regains its accuracy. Discourse does not heal; it preserves. And in this vigilant preservation, mourning becomes legible without being absorbed.

1.3. Fractured identity: becoming a stranger to oneself

Grief, as Adichie describes it in Notes on Grief, is not limited to localized physical pain or a crisis of language: it creates a fissure at the heart of identity. The intimate experience of loss is not only felt as an emptiness, but as a reconfiguration of one's relationship with oneself. The narrator comes to feel like a stranger in her own body, uprooted from her past and disconnected from her present. Identity, far from being a stable given, appears as a fragile construct, vulnerable to the shocks of death. Adichie explicitly expresses this feeling: "I felt unmoored, afloat, a stranger to myself" (p. 38). This confession reflects the drift of the bereaved subject. The word "unmoored" evokes a ship that, detached from its port, drifts with the currents. Grief thus tears the individual away from the continuity of their own life. It is no

longer just the other who disappears, but the part of oneself that had been formed in the relationship with that other. As Paul Ricœur has shown, personal identity is always narrative and relational: we define ourselves through the stories we share and the bonds we forge. Death breaks this fabric, revealing a fragmented subject, deprived of the thread that held it together.

This identity fracture is accompanied by a dislocated temporality. The past becomes foreign because it is now inhabited by an absent figure; the present, saturated with pain, seems uninhabitable; as for the future, it slips away, deprived of any projection. Adichie writes: "Grief is a place none of us know until we reach it" (p. 15). The term "place" here refers to an unfamiliar space, but it also signals the loss of temporal reference points: grief places the subject in a "non-place" where time stands still. Identity, which is constructed through movement, finds itself suspended. The "me" before and the "me" after no longer meet; between the two lies a chasm. This feeling of strangeness to oneself is compounded by a conflict between memory and the present. Remembering one's father means conjuring up an image saturated with absence, a figure who no longer responds. Adichie experiences the painful gap between the vividness of memory and the brutality of loss: writing about her father means finding him again while confirming his disappearance. Memory does not connect us to the past; it highlights the break that separates us from it. Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988), describes this experience of intimate otherness as a confrontation with "the unassimilable" that lies at the heart of the subject. Mourning brings out this "inner stranger," not as a metaphor, but as a psychological reality: the author no longer recognizes herself in the person she has become.

Furthermore, this fractured identity finds particular resonance in the diasporic condition. Adichie writes from the United States, far from her native Nigeria, and her inability to return for the funeral accentuates the experience of dispossession. She is not only separated from her father, but from the community that should have surrounded her in mourning. The "self" is thus doubly fractured: by the loss of the other, and by the distance that prevents social recognition of this loss. The strangeness of the self is fed here by geographical exile, which reinforces the inner exile.

Finally, writing becomes the place where this identity fracture is worked out. But writing does not repair: the act of writing underscores in every sentence the gap between what the subject is and what she was. The author oscillates between two irreconcilable identities, and it is in this back-and-forth, in this tension, that a new subjectivity is born. Identity is not resolved; it is recomposed in the painful awareness of its fragmentation. Thus, Notes on Grief reveals that grief is not only the loss of a loved one: it is also the loss of a version of oneself. The subject becomes a stranger in their own life, exiled in a body they no longer recognize, speaking a language that betrays them, inhabited by a memory that constantly reminds them of their irreparable fracture.

2. The exile of grief: absence of rituals and cultural differences

While grief disrupts the inner world the body, language, identity it also unfolds in a broader, cultural, and collective dimension. In Adichie's work, loss is not just a matter for an isolated consciousness: it takes place in a symbolic universe that is itself fractured. Geographical exile, linked to the pandemic, prevents traditional farewells and deprives the author of the funeral rituals that give meaning to death. Mourning then becomes a dual experience: intimate pain and ritual dispossession.

2.1. The absence of rituals: symbolic dispossession

In *Notes on Grief,* Adichie emphasizes the value of rituals: “There is value in the rituals of mourning, and we are denied them” (p. 23). Far from being a mere custom, funeral rituals provide a structure that frames grief and gives social and symbolic form to the unspeakable. To be deprived of them is to be exiled from the very experience of mourning, as if the loss could not be fully acknowledged. Anthropology has amply demonstrated the importance of these rites. In The *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim (1912) reminds us that funeral ceremonies are not only for the deceased, but also for the survivors, because they ensure continuity between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Their absence condemns the individual to experience grief in isolation, which intensifies the pain. Adichie thus finds

herself alone with a grief that, in her culture of origin, would have been shared by the community.

This deprivation creates a feeling of illegitimacy: how can the reality of loss be affirmed if the gestures that confirm it the wake, the communal prayer, the shared burial have not taken place? Geographical exile becomes symbolic exile: to be far away is to be kept at a distance from one's own pain.

2.2. The diasporic divide: between two worlds

Added to this absence of rituals is the weight of the diasporic condition. Adichie was living in the United States when her father died, and global lockdown prevented her from returning to Nigeria. She therefore experienced her grief in a foreign place, far from the site of her loss. This spatial disconnect intensifies the feeling of internal exile: not only is the other person gone, but "home" is also moving further away. Edward Said, in *Reflections on Exile* (2000), emphasizes that exiles live in a constant tension between two worlds, neither of which can be fully inhabited. This tension is reflected in Adichie's grief: America is too foreign to offer adequate rituals, Nigeria is inaccessible. She finds herself suspended in a "liminal space" where loss has no place of recognition. Grief becomes a wandering, a journey without destination.

This situation illustrates what Achille Mbembe calls, in ‘‘Sortir de la grande nuit’’ (2010), the "experience of crossing": living in a suspended time, between two territories, where the subject no longer has a fixed place. In Adichie's work, grief follows this model: it has no anchor, it floats between continents, like the narrator herself.

2.3. Fractured identity: becoming a stranger to oneself

One of the most striking effects of grief, as Adichie describes it in *Notes on Grief*, is the radical transformation of identity. The narrator no longer recognizes herself as she was before the loss, as if a chasm had opened up between her "yesterday self" and her "today self." She confides: "My grief has become a part of me, its own skin that covers me" (p. 36). Grief is not

experienced alongside identity: it becomes grafted onto it, forming a new envelope. The bereaved person finds themselves altered from within, clothed in a foreign skin. This idea, echoes Paul Ricoeur's reflection in *Soi-même comme un autre* published in 1990. For him identity is never immutable, it is always in the making, shaped by the relationships that constitute us. Losing one's father means losing a vital reference point in the narrative fabric of the self. A part of one's personal history disappears, leaving the subject incomplete, amputated from a portion of themselves. Strangeness then arises: not so much in relation to the outside world as to one's own being, which has become unrecognizable. The relationship to time accentuates this fracture.

Writing about one's father in the past tense, Adichie notes, is an unacceptable experience: "I am writing about my father in the past tense, and I cannot believe I am doing this" (p. 27). The syntax itself becomes a witness to irreversibility: the use of the past tense forces the subject to accept what he rejects. Identity falters because language, usually a guarantor of continuity, here records the rupture.

Finally, the writing itself bears witness to this fractured identity. The fragmented, disjointed narrative reflects the impossibility of unifying the "I." As Julia Kristeva has shown in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* 1988, the stranger can emerge from the most intimate: it is this strangeness to oneself that *Notes on Grief* reveals. Thus, mourning is not only the loss of the other: it is also the loss of oneself, an experience in which one discovers oneself divided, transformed, alien to one's own history.

3. Wounded memory and temporalities of strangeness

In *Notes on Grief*, mourning is not limited to inner pain or cultural dispossession. It has a profound effect on our relationship with time and memory. Ordinary temporality is shattered, giving way to an experience of suspension, rupture, and disorientation. At the same time, memory, instead of consolidating the subject, becomes a paradoxical space: it preserves the

traces of love while constantly reminding us of loss. Strangeness thus manifests itself in the painful articulation between fractured temporality and wounded memory.

3.1. The temporal fracture

In *Notes on Grief*, the loss of the father introduces a radical rupture in the experience of time. Temporality, usually linear and coherent, shatters into pieces. Adichie no longer evolves in a continuum, but in a diffracted time where past, present, and future constantly collide. Grief imposes a foreign chronology that is beyond control. This rupture is first manifested in the difficulty of living in the present. The narrator writes: "Each day comes as a surprise, and not a good surprise" (p. 18). The ordinary nature of time its repetition, its daily rhythm becomes hostile. Each day is nothing more than a reminder of absence, a renewal of pain. Where time should support existence, it becomes aggression, intrusion. The continuity of experience is replaced by a succession of shocks, as if each moment brought a new wound.

The past then becomes foreign territory. Adichie confesses: “Memories slide into my mind unbidden, sharp and quick, and they leave me breathless” (p. 22). Memories do not come as comfort, but as unpredictable attacks. They arise without warning and plunge the narrator into renewed distress. Instead of connecting, memory disarticulates: it tears the subject away from the present and traps them in painful repetition. As Maurice Halbwachs (1950) explains, memory needs collective frameworks to be stabilized; deprived of rituals and support, Adichie suffers from an erratic memory that weakens her.

As for the future, it becomes an impossible enigma to contemplate. She writes: "The thought of tomorrow feels unbearable, a stretch of time too vast for my sorrow" (p. 24). The future no longer appears as a horizon but as a threat: it represents an unbearable period of time to get through. This inability to project oneself into the future corresponds to what Françoise Dastur (1994) calls "the experience of finitude," where the death of others reveals the impracticability of the future. The bereaved do not live forward, they survive from one day to the next. The temporal fracture in Adichie's work is therefore not reduced to a feeling of slowing

down or speeding up: it is a genuine strangeness. Time, usually an ally of identity, becomes an adversary. Past, present, and future no longer form a continuum, but three contradictory forces that disorient the subject. Finally, the writing makes this fracture palpable. The text adopts a fragmented form, made up of ellipses and repetitions, which mimics the fragmentation of lived time. Each fragment is like an attempt to record a moment of pain without managing to connect the whole. The aesthetics of discontinuity reflect the fragmented temporality of grief.

3.2. Memory and vulnerability

In *Notes on Grief*, memory occupies an ambivalent place: it is both a resource and a wound, a source of consolation and torment. For Adichie, remembering her father does not mean rediscovering an intact past, but confronting an image cracked by absence. Memory becomes a space of vulnerability where the bereaved comes face to face with what she can no longer reach.

Adichie writes: "I want to remember my father as he was, but grief colors every memory with its own hue" (p. 31). Here, memory is always already altered: it is not a reflection of the past, but a reconstruction permeated by pain. Each evocation is "contaminated" by grief, which acts as a filter. Memory no longer provides access to a pure image of the loved one, but imposes a distorted view, saturated with loss. This reconfiguration illustrates what Paul Ricoeur (2000) called "impeded memory": a memory that, instead of liberating, traps us in a cycle of contradictory emotions. Vulnerability is also reflected in the unpredictability of reminiscences. Adichie confides: "Grief comes suddenly, in waves, in the middle of ordinary moments" (p. 35). Memory does not obey conscious will; it imposes itself intrusively. Everyday life is punctuated by unexpected flashes: a gesture, a place, a word is enough to rekindle the pain. This invasive memory undermines psychological balance, as it constantly reminds us of absence without offering any real control. Judith Butler (2004) emphasizes that loss reveals the fundamental dependence of human beings: we are vulnerable to what escapes us, exposed to memories that govern us more than we control them.

But this vulnerability is not entirely negative. It also testifies to the depth of the lost bond. Adichie writes: "The immensity of my grief is the immensity of my love for my father" (p. 37). Here, painful memory becomes proof of a vital attachment. Suffering is not only a loss, it is a sign of love. Vulnerability thus reveals itself as a constitutive dimension of identity: to be able to remember, even in pain, is to recognize that one has been shaped by the presence of another. Writing plays a decisive role in this articulation between memory and vulnerability. By recording her memories, Adichie does not seek to fix an immutable image of her father, but to inhabit the very fragility of memory. The text becomes an attempt to come to terms with impermanence, to give form to what threatens to dissolve. As Aleida Assmann in *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 2011, asserts, memory is not a simple reservoir, but a process of constant rewriting. For Adichie, writing means accepting that memory is never intact, but always shaped by loss.

Thus, memory, far from being a simple place of refuge, becomes a battlefield. It reactivates the wound while maintaining the link. It exposes the subject to their most radical vulnerability, but it also offers the possibility of rediscovering, in the very tremor of pain, the strength of a persist.

3.3. The future in ruins

In *Notes on Grief*, grief does not merely haunt the past and saturate the present: it also destroys the possibility of projecting oneself into the future. The death of her father robs Adichie not only of a beloved figure, but also of a stable reference point that structured her horizons. From now on, the future no longer appears as a promise, but as a devastated space, impossible to inhabit. From the very first pages, the author emphasizes the brutality of this shift: "Nothing prepares you for the pain of loss, not even the expectation of it" (p. 7). This statement reflects the futility of any anticipation: anticipating death is never the same as preparing for it. Lucid expectation offers no protection, because when the event occurs, it shatters all projections. The future is struck by radical unpredictability. As Françoise Dastur reminds us (*La mort: Essai sur la finitude*, 1994), the death of others highlights the absolute uncertainty of the future and

reminds us that all existence is subject to finitude. In Adichie's work, this realization is coupled with a feeling of abandonment: the future is there, but emptied of meaning.

This emptiness can be seen in another confession: “I cannot bear to think of the years ahead without my father in them” (p. 21). Here, the future is seen not as an opening but as an unbearable duration. The time to come does not hold promise; it is perceived as a burden, too heavy for a life that is now mutilated. The horizon is ruined because it is irretrievably amputated from the presence of the father. This perception recalls what Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (*Perdre de vue*, 1991) identified as "the time of mourning": a time that moves forward despite oneself, but without plans or desires, reduced to mere survival. This inability to plan for the future translates into a visceral fear of the future. Adichie writes: "The thought of birthdays, of anniversaries, fills me with dread" (p. 25). The temporal landmarks that once structured family life become cruel reminders of absence. Far from opening up new perspectives, each date heralds a painful return to loss. The calendar becomes a trap, a device for forced memory. The future is not empty: it is saturated with anticipated wounds.

Yet this ruined future does not mean the total disappearance of the horizon. Adichie subtly suggests that the act of writing allows her to draw a fragile line forward. "The act of writing this is a way of bearing witness" (p. 33). By writing, she does not reconstruct a bright, un e future, but establishes a form of continuity: bearing witness today means inscribing a memory of pain in the future. The project is no longer about inventing new possibilities, but about preserving the imprint of the past in the time to come. Writing thus becomes a way of surviving from day to day, of giving a minimal coherence to an otherwise uninhabitable future.

Thus, in *Notes on Grief*, the future appears as the most ravaged aspect of the experience of mourning. The future offers neither promise nor hope; it stands as an unbearable duration, haunted by the repetition of loss. But in this ruin, writing sketches a fragile way out: it does not restore a horizon, but traces a thread of survival, allowing the bereaved to continue moving forward, even without a destination.

4. An aesthetic of brilliance: writing the foreign

The experience of grief is not only expressed through an intimate, cultural, and temporal otherness. It also takes shape in the writing itself. In *Notes on Grief*, Adichie invents a fragmented aesthetic, made up of fragments and silences, which recreates the dislocation of the experience. Far from masking the pain, the style becomes its privileged locus. The foreign is no longer just experienced or thought about: it is inscribed in language, which itself becomes foreign, unable to express but compelled to bear witness.

4.1. Fragmentation as a form of mourning

When grief strikes, it disrupts the continuity of life. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's work, this experience is reflected in a fragmented, disjointed style of writing that mirrors the discontinuity of emotion. *Notes on Grief* is neither a linear narrative nor an orderly confession; it is rather a succession of notes, brief thoughts, and suspended sentences, as if language itself were breaking under the weight of loss. This fragmentation is not simply a stylistic choice, but an existential necessity: it is the form that pain takes when it attempts to find expression in words. The narrative fragmentation reflects the difficulty of maintaining coherence in the face of the shock of death. As Roland Barthes points out in *Journal de Deuil* (2009), "mourning disorganizes," and this disorganization affects both language and the perception of time. In the same way, Adichie composes her text in disjointed fragments, where thoughts are constantly interrupted, resumed, and diverted. Each fragment becomes an attempt to say the unspeakable, but immediately silence imposes itself, and the next sentence seems to emerge from another time or place, as if continuity had become impossible. This fragmentation also has a physical dimension. The grieving body, marked by exhaustion and shock, cannot sustain continuous speech. Writing in fragments is therefore a way of mimicking breathlessness, reduced energy, and a voice broken by sobs. Adichie conveys this painful cadence, this irregular rhythm, which inscribes the physiological truth of grief into the very aesthetics of the text. Far from being an artifice, this fragmentary poetics recreates the chaos of lived experience.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the narrative avoids closure. A linear narrative would give the illusion of a gradual progression towards a resolution. However, in Adichie's work, grief is not resolved; it is experienced in the gaping openness of an absence. The fragments express the impossibility of total healing, the impossibility of "closing" the wound. Each fragment of text thus becomes the trace of an aborted attempt, of writing that stumbles upon the reality of loss. This fragmentary aesthetic places *Notes on Grief* in a tradition of stories about grief where form mirrors the experience of rupture. One thinks of Joan Didion (*The Year of Magical Thinking*, 2005), whose text is also punctuated by repetitions and interruptions, mimicking obsession and the impossible return to the normal flow of life. But Adichie, by choosing brief notes rather than a continuous narrative, radicalizes this fragmentation: her writing becomes a kaleidoscope of pain, where each isolated fragment refers to a missing whole.

Finally, fragmentation serves an ethical function: it forces the reader to experience, in the act of reading itself, the discontinuity of grief. To read *Notes on Grief* is to accept being confronted with interrupted sentences, abrupt transitions, and a flow that cannot be captured by traditional narrative logic. The reader thus shares the ordeal of fragmentation and is plunged into an aesthetic experience of the inner stranger. Fragmentation is not a stylistic accident, but the very heart of Adichie's poetics. It shows that grief can only be expressed in shards, in fragmentation, in impossible unity. Far from being a weakness, this fragmented writing becomes the most accurate and faithful form for bearing witness to the violence of a loss that fractures the subject and reconfigures their relationship with language.

4.2. The aesthetics of ellipsis and silence

If fragmentation reflects the fragmentation of experience, ellipsis and silence mark what cannot be expressed in words. In *Notes on Grief,* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie does not seek to say everything: on the contrary, her writing is characterized by sudden interruptions, un d sentences left hanging, and gaps that testify to the impossibility of circumscribing pain in language. Grief, as Maurice Blanchot notes in L’écriture du désastre (1980), is above all an

experience of interruption: it opens up a gap that words cannot fill. These silences have expressive value: they mean more than words . Where the statement is interrupted, the reader perceives the weight of the unspeakable. Thus, each omission becomes a sign, each suspension marks the irruption of the reality of death into the fabric of discourse. Silence is not absence, but excess: excess of pain, excess of emotion that language cannot bear. Through the use of these gaps, Adichie turns ellipsis into an instrument of truth. This technique also draws on a long literary tradition in which the unsaid expresses more than what is said. Julia Kristeva, in *Black Sun* (1987), reminds us that melancholy is characterized by a "loss of language": the bereaved subject finds themselves faced with a speech that is full of gaps, unable to unfold fully. In this sense, Adichie's silences embody melancholy: pain lodges in them like hollows, recalling the absence of the father. Ellipsis becomes the very form of absence.

The ritual dimension of these silences should also be emphasized. In many traditions, mourning is accompanied by a period of silence, where speech gives way to meditation and the presence of loss. Adichie transposes this into her writing: each blank space is a moment of contemplation, a space for the absence to resonate. The aesthetic of ellipsis is therefore not just a matter of an inability to speak, but also a way of respecting the gravity of the event. Sometimes, silence is a form of tribute.

Furthermore, silence and ellipsis allow the reader to participate in the experience of mourning. Where the text falls silent, the reader must fill in the gaps, imagine, feel. The work does not deliver a complete narrative; it engages the reader in a co-creation, inviting them to enter the space of loss. The effect is twofold: on the one hand, it reinforces the universality of the story everyone can project their own experience of grief onto it and on the other hand, it accentuates the feeling of strangeness, because the reader, confronted with silence, experiences the rupture and disarray themselves.

In reality, Adichie's silences have an aesthetic significance: they give the text a poetic density. Where ordinary prose aims to connect, explain, and argue, *Notes on Grief* is closer to poetry: brief images, fragments, suspensions. This poetic aesthetic emphasizes that writing

about grief cannot follow the rules of classical narrative; it requires a new, disjointed, elliptical form, where beauty arises from incompleteness. Ellipsis and silence appear as essential modalities of Adichie's aesthetic of mourning. They express the impossibility of saying everything, the need to leave areas of shadow, but also the dignity of absence. By remaining silent, the text speaks in a different way: it makes the reader feel the depth of the loss, while opening up a space where mourning becomes shareable.

4.3. The unspeakable in fragments

One of the strengths of *Notes on Grief* is that it makes visible what cannot be expressed in words. Grief, in its brutality, confronts the subject with an indescribable experience: there is a pain that cannot be fully articulated. Adichie therefore chooses fragmentation to convey the silence imposed by loss. Instead of constructing a continuous narrative, she accumulates fragments: isolated sentences, fragments of thoughts, fleeting memories. This formal fragmentation is a strategy for approaching the unspeakable, as if only discontinuous writing could suggest what words cannot express. The quote "Nothing prepares you for the pain of loss, not even the expectation of it" (p. 7) illustrates this paradox well: even anticipating death does not make it possible to come to terms with pain. This observation requires no lengthy explanation or narrative development: it emerges as an aphorism, a raw fragment of truth. Here, the fragment becomes a form of brilliance that condenses the unspeakable. This aesthetic echoes Roland Barthes' reflection in *Journal de Deuil* (2009): faced with the loss of his mother, Barthes does not compose a linear narrative but a series of fragmentary notes, often reduced to a sentence or an image. Like Adichie, he senses that grief imposes a broken writing style, incapable of order. The fragment is not a flaw, but the right form for approaching the elusive.

Furthermore, Adichie's fragments testify to an effort to survive through writing. By breaking up the pain, she makes it bearable. The fragment acts as a breathing unit: write a little, pause, resume. It is a way of giving rhythm to an unbearable experience. The formal

fragmentation thus conveys not only the unspeakable, but also a strategy of psychological resistance. As Cathy Caruth points out in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), trauma manifests itself in fragments of memory and speech that cannot be ordered. The fragment thus becomes a sign of an ever-present trauma, but also a space for an attempt at control. Finally, the choice of the fragment has ethical implications. Adichie refuses to smooth over or domesticate pain with a well-constructed narrative. She offers the reader pieces of truth, without pretending to unify them. This echoes Derrida's conception in *Memoires: for Paul de Man* (1986), where he shows, with that all writing about mourning is haunted by aporia: to speak of loss is always to betray what has disappeared. The fragment accepts this impossibility; it leaves the fracture visible.

The effect on the reader is powerful: faced with these shards, the reader perceives the absence, feels the emptiness surrounding each fragment. The unspeakable is not only read in what is said, but in the gaps between the pieces. It is in the interstices that the pain resonates. The fragment is not only a constraint imposed by mourning; it is an aesthetic form in its own right. It allows us to approach the unspeakable without reducing it, to show the tear without pretending to stitch it up. In Adichie's work, fragmentary writing thus becomes a poetics of brilliance: each fragment is a spark that illuminates the abyss of grief, while acknowledging that this abyss remains gaping.

Conclusion

Notes on Grief unfolds as a narrative in which the experience of grief brings to the surface a radical inner otherness. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's text highlights the way in which loss fractures the body, language, and temporality, instilling an irreducible strangeness. Grief is not only experienced as an intimate wound: it reconfigures the perception of the world and brings forth a "stranger" lodged at the heart of the bereaved subject. This analysis allows us to understand that *Notes on Grief* is not limited to a personal testimony. Drawing on a fragmentary aesthetic and exploring the universal dimension of pain, Adichie transcends her own experience to universalize grief. The work shows that loss, far from being a purely individual experience, confronts every human being with a radical otherness: strangeness to oneself, a fracture in time,

an inability to speak. In this sense, the text constructs a poetics of internal exile, where grief becomes a shared space of human vulnerability.

Grief, as Adichie describes it, can thus be thought of as an internal migration inscribed in a diasporic poetics.

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