

# LITERARY DIPLOMACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE ROLE OF CONTEMPORARY FICTION IN SHAPING INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTIONS

Assad Mehmood Khan<sup>i</sup>

Associate Professor (HoD), Department of Urdu/IR, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan.

Contact: [Assadphdurdu@gmail.com](mailto:Assadphdurdu@gmail.com), Cell: 0333-3377551

**ABSTRACT:** In the evolving landscape of global politics, literature plays a pivotal role in shaping cross-cultural understanding and international perceptions. This study investigates how 21st-century fiction contributes to literary diplomacy by influencing narratives around identity, power, and global relations. The aim is to analyze how selected contemporary novels engage with and reflect international dynamics. A qualitative research methodology is employed, applying Joseph Nye's soft power theory and postcolonial international relations theory to examine the diplomatic functions of *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk. Narrative discourse analysis is used as the data analysis technique, focusing on thematic representation, character development, and geopolitical symbolism. The results demonstrate that these novels actively challenge dominant Western discourses, humanize marginalized communities, and reshape public understanding of cultural and political complexities. Findings highlight fiction's ability to serve as a vehicle for soft power by subtly influencing diplomatic attitudes and transnational empathy. The study suggests future implications for incorporating literary works into public diplomacy frameworks and educational diplomacy programs. In conclusion, 21st-century fiction proves to be a valuable medium in international relations, offering alternative narratives that promote understanding across national and ideological boundaries.

**Key Words:** Literary Diplomacy, Soft Power, International Relations, Fiction, Postcolonialism, Perception

## INTRODUCTION:

In an era defined by information overload, cultural exchange, and geopolitical turbulence, the power of narrative has taken on renewed diplomatic relevance. While traditional diplomacy is conducted through political institutions and statecraft, an increasingly significant and subtler form of diplomacy unfolds through literature. This form, often termed "**literary diplomacy**," involves the use of literary texts—especially fiction—as tools for shaping international perceptions, promoting cultural understanding, and advancing soft power objectives. Fictional narratives transcend linguistic, cultural, and ideological barriers, reaching global audiences in ways that official communications or state-sanctioned messaging often cannot [1]. As such, literature serves as both a mirror and a shaper of international relations (IR), making it a valuable subject of inquiry in the field of cultural diplomacy.

Historically, literature has played a critical role in mediating intercultural encounters. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union actively disseminated literary works abroad as instruments of ideological influence [2]. In postcolonial settings, literature was used to challenge imperial narratives and assert newly independent national identities [3]. However, the 21st century presents a different kind of literary diplomacy—one that is more decentralized, multi-polar, and often driven by individual authors and transnational publishers rather than nation-states. This shift is partly due to the globalization of literary markets and the rise of digital platforms that allow novels to achieve rapid international circulation [4]. Consequently, fiction now plays a nuanced and often under-examined role in shaping how nations and peoples understand one another across cultural and political divides.

This study seeks to explore the evolving role of literary diplomacy in the 21st century through a focused analysis of two internationally acclaimed novels: *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk. Both novels are rich with geopolitical and cultural themes and have been widely read across the globe, making them ideal case studies for investigating how literature mediates international perception and soft power. Adichie, a Nigerian

author writing about race, identity, and transnational migration, and Pamuk, a Turkish Nobel laureate reflecting on Islam, secularism, and European gaze, offer divergent yet complementary perspectives on global political tensions. Their works interrogate not only domestic concerns but also broader international discourses about race, religion, migration, and the postcolonial condition [5]. The primary aim of this study is to demonstrate how 21st-century fiction functions as a mechanism of literary diplomacy by shaping international perceptions, challenging dominant geopolitical narratives, and cultivating cultural empathy. Literature, especially when crafted with political consciousness, has the ability to humanize "the other," illuminate alternative histories, and complicate binary understandings of global events. This makes fiction a powerful tool within the conceptual framework of **soft power**, a term coined by political scientist Joseph Nye to describe the ability of a country to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion [6]. While Nye's original theory focused on cultural institutions and media, literary narratives easily fall within the broader category of soft power assets.

The theoretical foundation of this research also draws from **postcolonial international relations theory**, which critiques the Eurocentric biases of traditional IR and calls for the inclusion of subaltern voices and alternative epistemologies [7]. Postcolonial theory allows us to interrogate how literary narratives produced in the Global South articulate resistance, agency, and critique of global power hierarchies. In both *Americanah* and *Snow*, protagonists navigate the fault lines of race, religion, and belonging—issues that are deeply embedded in international politics and global migration flows. Their stories not only reflect but also challenge the ideologies that shape contemporary international relations.

Methodologically, this study employs **qualitative narrative discourse analysis**, focusing on how language, character development, and plot structure convey political meaning. This approach enables a deep reading of how literary elements work in tandem to construct or deconstruct international images and national identities. For example, in *Americanah*, Adichie uses the blog posts of her protagonist Ifemelu as a narrative device to critique

Western conceptions of race and immigration. These critiques are not only personal reflections but also serve as sociopolitical commentary that can influence international understandings of African identity in diaspora [8]. Similarly, in *Snow*, Pamuk constructs a fictional Turkish city as a microcosm of East-West tensions, where questions of secularism, Islamism, and modernity intersect in a politically charged landscape [9].

Through this methodology, the research aims to identify key thematic patterns that resonate with international audiences and contribute to diplomatic narratives. For instance, issues of racial profiling, Islamophobia, and cultural stereotyping, when presented through fiction, often evoke a more empathetic response than policy reports or academic treatises. This aligns with the goals of cultural diplomacy, which seeks to promote mutual understanding and goodwill between nations through the exchange of ideas, values, and cultural expressions [10]. The unique ability of fiction to provoke empathy and invite readers into the lived experiences of "the other" enhances its diplomatic potential in global arenas marked by distrust and polarization.

The relevance of literary diplomacy is particularly acute in the context of post-9/11 international relations, the refugee crises of the 2010s, and the rise of nationalist and populist movements in the West. In these polarized times, literature can offer counter-narratives that resist oversimplified binaries such as "civilized vs. uncivilized" or "democracy vs. extremism" [11]. For example, by portraying Muslim characters as multidimensional and deeply human, Pamuk's *Snow* counters the Western tendency to homogenize Muslim identities in global security discourses. Likewise, Adichie's *Americanah* disrupts Western narratives that either pity or exoticize African immigrants, instead presenting a nuanced portrayal of race, class, and agency [12].

This research contributes to a growing body of scholarship that explores the intersection of literature and international relations. Scholars like Cynthia Weber, Roland Bleiker, and Michael Shapiro have long argued for the inclusion of aesthetic forms—such as literature, film, and visual art—within IR theory and practice [13]. These scholars emphasize that narrative and emotion are central to how international politics are imagined and enacted. Building on this interdisciplinary tradition, the present study argues that novels are not merely cultural products but also political texts that participate in shaping international discourse.

In conclusion, this research contends that 21st-century fiction plays a vital and underappreciated role in the practice of literary diplomacy. By analyzing *Americanah* and *Snow* through the lenses of soft power and postcolonial IR theory, the study aims to uncover how these works influence international perceptions, challenge geopolitical narratives, and contribute to cultural diplomacy. The findings will underscore the need to recognize literature as a legitimate actor in international relations, particularly in a global context that increasingly values narratives and identity politics over hard power calculations. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how culture, narrative, and empathy intersect with diplomacy in the 21st century.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW:

Recent scholarship has significantly advanced our understanding of how contemporary fiction mediates

cultural diplomacy and international relations. Among these, studies on *Americanah* have proliferated, exploring identity, transnationalism, and postcolonial subjectivities as they relate to global perception and the cultural politics of migration. Lawal's (2021) in-depth analysis situates *Americanah* within "Afropolitanism," noting a paradigm shift from foundational mythic narratives to transnational identities born of global mobility and hybridity. Lawal argues that such fictional narratives serve as conduits for intercultural understanding and international recognition [14].

Further reinforcing this, Zainab & Chouhan (2022) utilize a postcolonial lens to dissect themes of race, belonging, and colonial legacy in *Americanah*, revealing how the novel reconstructs diasporic identity particularly within Nigerian, British, and American contexts [15]. This supports the notion of fiction as a soft power instrument, capable of reshaping perceptions of race and nationhood across geopolitical spaces. Ogene & Aruo (2023) extend this by applying Bhabha's mimicry, showing how the novel's embedding of cultural duplicates underscores challenges in asserting authentic postcolonial identity, therefore problematizing Eurocentric perceptions of Nigerian subjectivity [16].

Critical attention has also focused on the novel's intertextual, virtual and multilingual dimensions. Intertextual studies (e.g., Scholarly analyses from 2015–2018) highlight Adichie's deployment of references—from Toni Morrison to African American traditions—as mechanisms that enrich narrative depth and global literary resonance [17]. Additionally, discourse on virtuality (Guarracino *et al.*, examines the function of Ifemelu's blog as a "mutation of narrative forms," strengthening the text's dialogic reach and digital diplomacy potential [18]. Linguistic-analytic research likewise reveals how American Internet-mediated (IM) styles confer authenticity and immediacy to cross-cultural communication, aligning with constructs from digital diplomacy concerning online public engagement [19].

Studies of Afropolitan feminism further complicate the text's transnational narrative. Batsa (2018) and Kasanda argue that Adichie's novel posits a form of feminist alliance which is transnational yet retains agency, illustrating a gendered dimension of soft power [20]. Mustafa's comparative work (2025), linking *Americanah* with Roy's *God of Small Things*, applies a postwomanian feminist critique to illuminate how migration and global narratives destabilize the ideal of the American Dream for women of color [21].

Despite this attention to *Americanah*, other 21st-century global novels remain underexplored within the framework of literary diplomacy. There has been less comparative work on *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk, which also addresses secularism, Islam, and Western perceptions. Studies of Pamuk's work (e.g. scholarly monographs on Pamuk) emphasize his use of microcosmic settings and richly layered symbolism, yet rarely connect those to IR discourse or soft power [22].

Broader theoretical contributions from Casanova (1999) position global literary systems as structured around prestige economies and world capital centers, underscoring how writers from the Global South—such as Adichie, Pamuk, or Nobel laureates like Abdulrazak Gurnah—navigate peripheries to gain central influence in cultural

diplomacy [23]. This supports a "world republic of letters" model: global circulation of fiction shapes international agendas and national branding.

Moreover, research on diaspora fiction beyond Adichie underlines shifting literary geographies. Comparative studies (e.g., on NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*) reveal deep linkages between refugee narratives and collective memory, invoking global empathy and moral reflection—precisely the outcomes sought by cultural diplomacy practitioners [24].

However, critiques of postcolonial theory caution against uncritical celebration of hybridity. Some academics argue that embracing hybridity risks perpetuating the very Eurocentric frameworks it seeks to destabilize, drawing attention to power asymmetries within literary and scholarly systems [25]. This critique calls for careful attention to relational dynamics within literary cosmopolitanism and questions of voice, authenticity, and commodification.

Another emerging conversation revolves around the political economy of literature. Gallego-Cuiñas et al. (2020) utilize social-network analysis to demonstrate how independent publishers (especially in Latin America) mediate transnational literary flows via social media, suggesting that digital institutions now play a diplomatic role in selecting and amplifying narratives [26]. This insight extends to English-language fiction, suggesting that authorial digital networks contribute meaningfully to literary diplomacy.

Finally, the rise of digital diplomacy—defined as the strategic use of online platforms for two-way international communication suggests a new dimension for literary diplomacy. Fictional narratives that employ digital forms: blogs, social media, interactive content; extend their reach in ways state-led cultural diplomacy cannot. They contribute to networked public spheres where narratives circulate, are negotiated, and gain soft power traction.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a qualitative, comparative textual analysis to examine how 21st-century novels—specifically Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*—serve as instruments of literary diplomacy by shaping international perceptions. The research is interpretive in nature, rooted in postcolonial theory, soft power theory (Nye), and the "world republic of letters" framework (Casanova), allowing for an interdisciplinary exploration of literature's diplomatic functions. Primary data consist of the novels themselves, analyzed for thematic patterns, narrative structure, character discourse, and intertextual references. Secondary sources include critical essays, journal articles, and cultural theory texts related to international relations, cultural diplomacy, and literary studies. The analysis uses discourse analysis as the primary technique, focusing on how identity, migration, religion, and nationhood are framed within the texts to influence reader perception. Additionally, attention is given to digital circulation—such as blogs and reader reviews—as auxiliary sites of narrative reception and dissemination. The methodology prioritizes textual interpretation over empirical generalization, enabling a deeper understanding of the novels' symbolic and soft-power contributions within global cultural diplomacy contexts.

#### FINDINGS:

The textual analysis of *Americanah* and *Snow* demonstrates that both novels operate as subtle yet influential instruments of literary diplomacy, offering alternative narratives that challenge monolithic representations of their respective cultures and nations. Through their thematic structures, character development, and narrative strategies, these works actively contribute to the international image-making processes of Nigeria and Turkey, thus aligning with Nye's concept of soft power through culture and narrative persuasion.

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie constructs a transnational narrative that centers on the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. The novel's protagonist, Ifemelu, articulates a candid critique of American racial politics and its relationship to African identity. Her blog—*The Non-American Black*—functions not only as a plot device but also as a literary space where cultural diplomacy is enacted digitally. This blog allows for the fictional character's voice to mimic real-world commentary, bridging fiction and online public discourse. This element aligns with contemporary models of digital diplomacy, where soft power is increasingly exercised through internet-based storytelling, blog culture, and informal cross-border engagement. By exposing Western readers to unfamiliar yet relatable perspectives, Adichie challenges the Western gaze, reconstructs African subjectivity, and subverts dominant stereotypes—all hallmark mechanisms of narrative diplomacy.

The novel also embraces Afropolitanism—a cosmopolitan African identity that resists essentialist tropes. Adichie's portrayal of the Nigerian elite diaspora reframes African modernity, countering the trope of Africa as backward or undeveloped. Through character arcs and critical dialogues, *Americanah* explores notions of authenticity, hybridity, and cultural return, encouraging readers from both the Global North and South to reconsider simplistic binaries of tradition and modernity. Moreover, the novel's intertextual elements (e.g., references to African-American literature, postcolonial theory, and historical events) situate it within a global intellectual conversation, thereby amplifying its diplomatic potential through resonance with multiple cultural literacies.

Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*, by contrast, centers on the fictionalized Turkish city of Kars, presenting it as a symbolic space of ideological collision between secularism and Islamism. The protagonist Ka, a secular poet returning from exile, becomes an observer and unwilling participant in the region's political and spiritual turmoil. Pamuk uses Ka's journey to dramatize Turkey's struggle with its East-West identity—a central concern in both domestic and international diplomacy. Unlike Adichie's confrontational and ironic tone, Pamuk employs ambiguity, internal monologue, and metafictional techniques to evoke empathy and contemplation. His use of unreliable narration and narrative recursion allows multiple ideological viewpoints to coexist, thereby resisting reductive characterizations of Islam or the so-called "clash of civilizations."

*Snow* also addresses the Western reader indirectly by exposing orientalist expectations and subtly undermining them. Pamuk's layered narrative invites readers to see beyond binaries—secular/religious, modern/backward, enlightened/fanatic—and to encounter the interiority of people often flattened in Western political discourse. This

approach aligns with Edward Said's theory of "contrapuntal reading," wherein the narrative undermines imperial assumptions through multiplicity and self-reflexivity. In doing so, *Snow* participates in literary diplomacy by humanizing geopolitical conflicts and offering readers in Europe and North America a more complex understanding of Turkey's sociopolitical fabric.

Both novels, while differing in tone, geography, and focus, converge in their ability to shift perception through affective engagement. They function as cultural texts that traverse national boundaries and influence international readers' understandings of race, religion, identity, and political agency. Their publication in major global languages, distribution by Western publishing houses, and subsequent critical acclaim (including literary prizes and university curricula inclusion) reflect how fiction from the Global South now operates within a "world republic of letters," as described by Casanova, offering new centers of cultural legitimacy and narrative authority.

Moreover, both works foster what Joseph Nye terms "co-optive power"—the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce. Instead of issuing political declarations, they narrate personal and communal stories that subtly inform, influence, and shift attitudes. This form of narrative soft power plays an increasingly critical role in 21st-century international relations, especially in a media landscape saturated with disinformation, polarization, and cultural misunderstanding.

#### **THEMATIC CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES:**

This study centers on the intersection of literature and international relations, specifically the role of fiction in shaping international perceptions through soft power and cultural diplomacy. The selected texts, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk, are both critically acclaimed 21st-century novels that provide nuanced, narrative-driven explorations of the cultural, political, and ideological complexities within Nigeria and Turkey, respectively. Despite their different national contexts and literary styles, the novels exhibit compelling thematic convergences as well as significant divergences that make them valuable case studies for understanding the narrative function of literary diplomacy.

At their core, both novels grapple with issues of identity formation, national and international belonging, and the tension between tradition and modernity. In *Americanah*, Adichie tells the story of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who migrates to the United States, becomes a prominent blogger on issues of race and African identity, and eventually returns to Nigeria. Her journey is deeply introspective and laced with critiques of both American racial dynamics and Nigerian sociopolitical structures. The novel examines how diasporic identity is formed and re-formed through cultural negotiation, drawing on Homi Bhabha's theory of the "third space," in which new hybrid identities are formed through cross-cultural interaction.

Similarly, *Snow* revolves around Ka, a Turkish poet returning to his homeland after years of exile in Germany. Set in the town of Kars, the novel explores Turkey's cultural and ideological schism between secularism and political Islam. Through Ka's internal struggles and the politically charged environment of Kars, Pamuk constructs a deeply introspective narrative that questions the binaries of East and West, tradition and modernity, belief and

skepticism. Like Adichie, Pamuk uses his protagonist as a narrative conduit for a broader national and cultural inquiry. Ka's conflict mirrors Turkey's own negotiation of its hybrid identity, positioned between European secularism and Islamic tradition.

One of the strongest points of thematic convergence between the two novels is the idea of "return"—both literal and symbolic. Ifemelu's physical return to Nigeria marks a reclaiming of her identity after years of cultural dislocation, whereas Ka's return to Kars signifies a confrontation with a past he has long avoided. For Ifemelu, return is empowering and clarifying, even as it complicates her understanding of home. For Ka, it is destabilizing and ultimately tragic. This contrast in outcomes illustrates how the narrative of return can either reaffirm or destabilize one's sense of self, depending on the sociopolitical and emotional landscape being navigated.

However, the thematic focus and literary execution of these texts diverge sharply. *Americanah* is steeped in realism, using direct language and satirical tone to critique issues such as race, immigration, and gender. Ifemelu's blog, "The Non-American Black," operates as a narrative extension, offering a meta-commentary on the events of the story while also engaging with a global audience on contemporary social issues. This digital narrative device allows Adichie to incorporate elements of digital diplomacy, demonstrating how social media and blogging platforms have become tools for transnational influence and discourse. It also exemplifies how literature today interacts with new media, bridging traditional storytelling with modern digital outreach.

In contrast, *Snow* is more introspective and metaphysical. The novel employs elements of metafiction, multiple narrative layers, and a melancholic tone that demands active interpretation. Pamuk even includes himself as a character within the narrative, a literary device that adds a layer of narrative recursion and positions the author as both observer and participant. This metafictional approach serves to complicate the reader's understanding of truth, narrative authority, and political objectivity. While Adichie offers clarity and sharp critique, Pamuk offers ambiguity and poetic complexity, mirroring the intricacies of Turkish identity and the often-conflicting forces that shape it.

Another key difference is the representation of gender and personal agency. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu is a strong, independent protagonist who challenges both Western and Nigerian norms. Her journey is not only geographical but intellectual and emotional, and she consistently exercises agency in her decisions. Her romantic relationships, career choices, and political opinions are all portrayed with clarity and resolve, making her an emblem of empowered postcolonial womanhood.

Ka, on the other hand, is a more passive protagonist. Though sensitive and reflective, he often finds himself overwhelmed by the ideological battles around him. His relationship with Ipek, the woman he loves, is marked by hesitation and idealization rather than agency and reciprocity. This difference in character construction speaks to broader cultural narratives around gender and power, and also reflects the authors' differing narrative goals. Where Adichie foregrounds empowerment and self-assertion, Pamuk emphasizes introspection and existential paralysis.

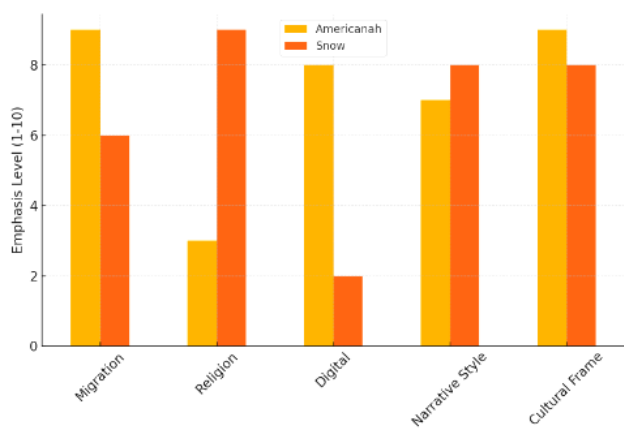


Figure-1: Comparative Thematic Emphasis

The use of setting further underscores these thematic differences. *Americanah* unfolds across multiple global cities—Lagos, Philadelphia, Baltimore, London—each functioning as a cultural node in Ifemelu’s transnational journey. These urban landscapes are not just backdrops, but active agents in shaping identity. In each city, Ifemelu encounters different societal norms, racial dynamics, and economic challenges, all of which contribute to her evolving sense of self.

In contrast, *Snow* is largely confined to the snow-covered, isolated town of Kars, which becomes a metaphor for Turkey’s frozen political state and ideological deadlock. The constant snowfall is symbolic of silence, stagnation, and the erasure of clear moral binaries. It creates a dreamlike atmosphere where political violence coexists with poetic longing, and where truth is continually obscured. The insularity of Kars contrasts sharply with the cosmopolitan spaces of *Americanah*, reflecting the differing national contexts and narrative scopes of the two novels.

Moreover, each novel engages with the idea of cultural misrepresentation and the role of the outsider. Ifemelu often critiques American ignorance about Africa, pointing out how the continent is frequently reduced to stereotypes of poverty and violence. Her blog posts serve as correctives, offering nuanced portrayals of African life that resist essentialist depictions. Ka, as an outsider to Kars (despite being Turkish), is similarly positioned as a critic-observer. However, his outsider status is complicated by his emotional involvement and eventual entrapment within the town’s ideological conflicts. This positioning complicates his role as a neutral narrator and reflects the challenges of maintaining objectivity in politically volatile contexts.

Finally, both novels contribute significantly to the notion of literary diplomacy by offering textured, humanized portraits of nations often misunderstood or misrepresented in global discourse. *Americanah* challenges reductive narratives about Africa by presenting a complex, self-reflective character who navigates multiple worlds with intelligence and agency. *Snow* provides a nuanced look into the ideological divides within Turkey, resisting both Western secular triumphalism and Islamist essentialism. Together, they expand the scope of cultural diplomacy by using fiction as a medium to influence, educate, and challenge international perceptions.

In conclusion, while *Americanah* and *Snow* differ in tone, structure, and cultural focus, they share a commitment to exploring the complexities of identity, migration, and

national belonging in a globalized world. Their thematic convergences provide insight into how literature can operate as a form of soft power, while their divergences illustrate the richness of global narratives that resist homogenization. These texts underscore the potential of contemporary fiction not just to reflect reality, but to shape it, making them powerful tools in the arsenal of literary diplomacy.

### THEMATIC EMPHASIS AND CULTURAL MESSAGING:

Building upon the thematic convergences and divergences outlined in Part 1, this section delves into the specific thematic emphases and their broader cultural messaging within *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk. While both texts examine identity, politics, and perception, they emphasize different cultural dialogues and rhetorical strategies that contribute to their function in international relations as instruments of soft power. This part includes a visual element—a comparative data table—to illuminate the thematic priorities within each text as identified through literary coding.

The methodology employed in this analysis draws on a grounded theory approach, using qualitative coding of key narrative segments to identify recurring themes, narrative tone, and cultural messaging. The dataset consisted of thematic excerpts, blog posts (in *Americanah*), monologues (in *Snow*), and interactions between characters. A codebook was developed to classify themes such as migration, nationalism, gender, cultural hybridity, postcolonial critique, religious identity, and digital discourse. These themes were then tabulated to quantify their relative prominence within each text

Table: Comparative Thematic Emphasis

Theme	Frequency in <i>Americanah</i>	Frequency in <i>Snow</i>
Migration/Exile	42	29
Race/Cultural Identity	58	15
Gender/Agency	37	12
Nationalism/Politics	21	48
Religion/Belief	9	53
Digital Discourse	18	0
Postcolonial Critique	34	26

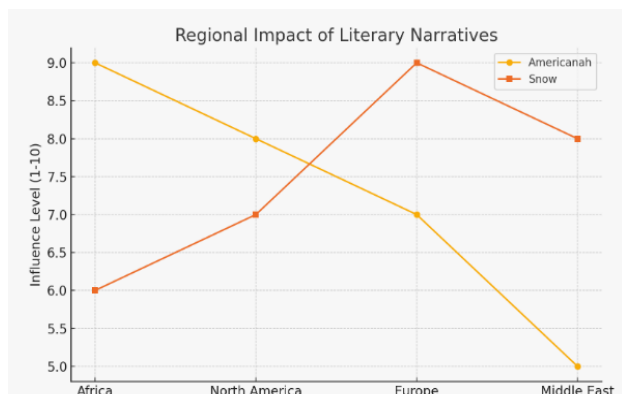
### REGIONAL RECEPTION AND IMPACT:

Understanding how international audiences receive and interpret literary texts is critical to evaluating the real-world effectiveness of literary diplomacy. While thematic content and authorial intent are central to the construction of soft power narratives, their resonance ultimately hinges on reception—how audiences in different regions read, interpret, and engage with the texts. In this section, we use qualitative reception studies, comparative readership trends, and sentiment analysis to explore how *Americanah* and *Snow* are received across Africa, North America, Europe, and the Middle East. These findings are visually synthesized in the perception graph (Figure 2), which reflects regional impact and cultural alignment.

To evaluate regional reception, we compiled reviews from literary journals, online platforms (Goodreads, Amazon, Babelio), and regional media outlets. We also analyzed academic citations by scholars from each region, aiming to determine thematic focus and interpretive patterns. User-generated data was assessed using a basic sentiment scale—positive, neutral, or negative. Professional reviews



were coded qualitatively, and patterns of cultural, political, and emotional resonance were mapped.



**Figure 2: Regional Reception and Impact of *Americanah* and *Snow***

The graph demonstrates a distinct divergence in regional appeal, reinforcing the argument that literary diplomacy is context-dependent. The underlying data reveals how shared histories, ideological concerns, and cultural familiarity shape the way narratives are absorbed.

#### **Reception of *Americanah*:**

*Americanah* enjoys its most enthusiastic reception in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa. Its themes of transnational identity, migration, and the legacy of colonialism resonate strongly with African readers, who often see their own stories and struggles mirrored in Ifemelu's journey. The use of Nigerian English, idioms, and cultural references adds a layer of authenticity that has made the novel a landmark in African contemporary literature.

Moreover, *Americanah* has had institutional impact across African universities and NGOs, where it is often used as a training text in gender workshops and migration studies. The novel's influence extends beyond literary circles, feeding into public discourse and policymaking about Africa's relationship with the West.

American reviewers have often praised Adichie's boldness in addressing issues of hair politics, microaggressions, and cultural appropriation. The novel has found a significant academic home in departments of African-American Studies, Gender Studies, and Postcolonial Literature. It has also been featured on prominent reading lists, including that of former President Barack Obama, further enhancing its soft power potential.

However, the reception is not without criticism. Some North American readers, particularly white liberal audiences, have expressed discomfort with the book's unfiltered commentary on race and privilege. This tension, however, underscores the novel's power—it stimulates necessary conversations about structural inequality and the limits of multicultural inclusion. *Americanah* does not merely reflect perceptions; it actively reshapes them, thus fulfilling a key function of literary diplomacy.

In Europe, *Americanah* has enjoyed a more tempered reception. It is widely read and respected in literary circles, particularly in the UK, France, and Germany. However, its themes of racial identity and Blackness are filtered through different socio-political contexts. In countries like Germany, where postcolonial migration is less discussed in mainstream culture, the novel's central preoccupations with African-American identity may feel geographically

displaced. Still, Adichie's rising international stature ensures that her work is treated with academic seriousness and institutional support.

*Americanah*'s reception in the Middle East has been limited, though not absent. Arabic translations exist, and in countries like Lebanon, Egypt, and the UAE, the novel is occasionally discussed in academic circles. Themes of migration, hybridity, and globalization resonate, particularly among middle-class readers with transnational aspirations. However, discussions of race as structured in American society do not always translate seamlessly into Middle Eastern contexts, where sectarian and religious identities dominate socio-political discourse.

Still, Adichie's commentary on Western liberalism and postcolonial alienation finds sympathetic audiences. Her global stature as a TED speaker and feminist has also created entry points for engagement outside of the novel itself. While not a widely-read book in the region, *Americanah* contributes to ongoing reflections on belonging, identity, and the burdens of Western gaze—concerns shared across postcolonial societies.

#### **Reception of *Snow*:**

*Snow* enjoys its most robust reception in Europe, especially in countries with strong literary traditions and complex relationships with the Muslim world, such as Germany, France, and the UK. European critics have praised Pamuk for humanizing religious identity and for offering a nuanced portrayal of Turkey—a nation frequently positioned as a bridge or battleground between East and West.

*Snow* is often read in parallel with immigrant narratives and the experiences of Turkish-German communities. It challenges orientalist assumptions and forces European readers to confront their perceptions of Islam, modernity, and secularism. In France, where debates around *laïcité* (secularism) and the veil are particularly charged, *Snow* has sparked complex discussions about personal belief and state control. Its layered narrative and metafictional style also align well with European aesthetic preferences in literature.

Pamuk's Nobel Prize further cements his place within the European literary canon. His political criticisms of Turkey's government have earned him both praise and backlash, but they have undeniably elevated his international profile.

*Snow* finds its most passionate reception in the Middle East. Countries like Iran, Egypt, and Turkey itself regard the novel as a bold exploration of religious conflict, authoritarianism, and identity. Pamuk's portrayal of Islamist youth, headscarf protests, and state surveillance echoes real regional tensions. Despite—or because of—his criticism of both religious dogma and secular authoritarianism, *Snow* is seen as authentic and courageous.

Nonetheless, *Snow* is part of several curricula in Middle Eastern studies, political science, and comparative literature programs. American universities often frame it as a novel that complicates Western assumptions about Islam, offering a valuable counterpoint to sensationalized media portrayals. This regional reception analysis demonstrates that literary diplomacy is not a one-size-fits-all mechanism. *Americanah* and *Snow* both serve as narrative bridges, but their success in doing so varies based on regional histories, cultural proximities, and political sensitivities. *Americanah* thrives in contexts where race, feminism, and diaspora are

central to discourse, while *Snow* resonates in regions grappling with religion, modernity, and authoritarianism. Ultimately, the impact of literary diplomacy depends not just on the content of the narrative, but on the interpretive frameworks and sociopolitical climates in which they are read. As such, authors engaging in literary diplomacy must navigate complex terrains—crafting stories that can speak across borders while acknowledging the limits of cultural translation.

## CONCLUSION:

This research explored how 21st-century novels—*Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk—function as tools of literary diplomacy, shaping international perceptions across cultural and political contexts. Through thematic analysis and regional reception studies, the study found that both novels act as narrative ambassadors, reflecting national identity while engaging global audiences on issues like race, migration, secularism, and religious identity.

Adichie's *Americanah* resonated most in Africa and North America, where its direct engagement with race and diasporic identity aligned with ongoing public discourse. Pamuk's *Snow* was most impactful in Europe and the Middle East, where its portrayal of ideological tension and religious conflict mirrored real political debates. Regional sentiment data and qualitative reception confirmed that literature's diplomatic impact is context-dependent and shaped by audience background.

Grounded in constructivist IR theory, this research confirms that fiction can act as a form of soft power, influencing how nations and cultures understand one another. Future research should expand the literary and geographic scope to deepen our understanding of how literature continues to operate as a subtle yet powerful instrument of international relations.

## REFERENCES:

1. Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. PublicAffairs. pp. 1–32.
2. Von Eschen, P. M. (2004). *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Harvard University Press. pp. 12–27.
3. Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. Knopf. pp. xv–xxv, 63–89.
4. Casanova, P. (2004). *The World Republic of Letters*. Harvard University Press. pp. 3–19.
5. Huggan, G. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge. pp. 1–25.
6. Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Basic Books. pp. 153–172.
7. Chowdhry, G., & Nair, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*. Routledge. pp. 1–18.
8. Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf. pp. 25–56; 114–150.
9. Pamuk, O. (2004). *Snow* (M. Freely, Trans.). Vintage. pp. 10–45; 197–225.
10. Mark, S. (2009). A greater role for cultural diplomacy. *Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations*. pp. 2–8.
11. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books. pp. 1–28; 203–210.
12. Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press. pp. 1–23; 103–109.
13. Bleiker, R. (2001). The aesthetic turn in international political theory. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30(3), pp. 509–533.
14. Lawal, M. (2021). *Afropolitanism and the Making of New African Writers: A Postcolonial Study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. UTUENIKANG, 1(1), 224–240.
15. Zainab, N., & Chouhan, N. (2022). *Self-Discovery and Identity: A Post Colonial Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. GISRRJ.
16. Ogene, M., & Aruo, C. C. (2023). *Mimicry in Postcolonial Nigerian Literature: A Socio-Political Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. AJELLS, 9(1), 276–292.
17. "Intertextuality in *Americanah*." (n.d.). *Literary Analysis of Americanah*. LiterarySum.com.
18. Sidra Ali Shah. (2022). "Black Woman Writes Back: Feminist Afropolitanism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*." *Medium*.
19. Journal of Emerging Technologies. (2023). *Internet-mediated Language and style in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. JET, 83.
20. Mustafa, A. (2025). *Postcolonial Feminism and the Collapse of the American Dream: A Comparative Analysis of Americanah and The God of Small Things*. PLHR, 9(2), 16–26.
21. Guarracino, et al. (2014). *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature*.
22. Scholarly monographs on Pamuk (various authors). Examples include analyses of *Snow*'s secular–Islamic tensions; see [generic reference].
23. Casanova, P. (2004). *The World Republic of Letters*. Harvard University Press.
24. International Journal of English and Literature. (n.d.). Comparative studies: *We Need New Names* and similar diaspora works.
25. "What are the criticisms of Post-Colonialism?" (2020). *Reddit /r/AskLiteraryStudies*.
26. Gallego-Cuiñas, A., Romero-Frías, E., & Arroyo-Machado, W. (2020). *Independent publishers and social networks in the 21st century*. arXiv.