

Documenting Black Voices: Re-inscription of Black Womanhood in the Selected Short Stories from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Mizanna Khan & Rimika Singhvi

Abstract

The paper examines the widely recognized and highly regarded Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie through her first short story, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). It aims to understand the development of female characters drawn from memory, placed in the context of patriarchy, and analyze them in terms of gender domination and marginalization. They are translated to describe the signs of their own content and thus their status. The paper also touched on Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013), which tells the story of Ifemelu, an African American woman who refuses to accept two cultures. Therefore, our attempt will be to examine the cultural hybridity that affects the hero's life. The reporter explains that he is often influenced by his own experience as a "low-income person." Additionally, her characters' journey across the Atlantic demonstrates the transition between different languages and cultural backgrounds, leading to the relabeling of their femininity. The paper also identifies and explores the strategies that Adichie's characters adopt to join men as friends or companions in their journey to freedom. This analysis will therefore prove the new author's intention to treat men as important partners in Nigerian women's quest for freedom.

Keywords: Gender; Hybridity; Identity; Marginalization; Patriarchy; Subjectivity.

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents a fresh female voice from Nigeria, whose work presents a fusion of tradition and modernity. Adichie refers

to the work of her male predecessor - Chinua Achebe - and "continues his practice of writing as an Igbo and Nigerian, while maintaining thematic lines of conversation with the United States. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Adichie goes in novel and intriguing directions and expands Achebe's storytelling-legacy rather than just following it. She makes connections between a number of dichotomies, including traditional Igbo beliefs and Christianity, Igbo and the English language, and traditional rural life and the contemporary city scape . The author, however, does not favour one over the other; rather, she recognizes the value of combining tradition and modernity. Adichie gives the reader a fresh perspective on Nigeria by describing her complete self-awareness without divulging any of her knowledge, allowing the reader to see Nigeria with a completely different attitude.

In her works, she often portrays a virtuous young woman who is knowledgeable, representing the African woman in a very different light—as powerful, independent, and self-assured. Because Adichie's writings present a positive image of herself and enable the author to depict Nigeria from two angles, her background is extremely significant. Being an Igbo Nigerian from a well-educated middle-class family with deep roots in her ancestors' village life, she has an insider's perspective on Nigeria; her primary focus being immigration, exploring the experiences of both black Nigerians and immigrants in the United States. Adichie's characters frequently live on two continents, just like her. After coming to the US, began to embrace who she really was; White people had either informed her who she was or had rejected her due to the color of her skin.

The Thing Around... by Chimamanda Adichie Is a potent collection of tales connected by recurring themes including gender, identity, culture, and family. The title itself appears to be a recurring motif in all of the stories. There is a "thing" around the necks of the characters in every story. Anxiety may be represented by some of the items. Sometimes, the "thing" might also stand for gender-related problems, and other times, it might indicate a sense of alienation. There are numerous connections between the characters in the anthology. The unavoidable struggle to preserve their African culture and values while attempting to integrate into American society unites many of them. It highlights a number of social and political topics while taking readers on an emotional journey.

Adichie's description of gender issues in *The Thing Around...* is one of the book's most intriguing features. Although gender is a sensitive subject, she illustrates how very different life is for women and men in her ele-

gant prose. Patriarchal societies still exist in Africa today, which hinders women's advancement. We get a glimpse of that very thing in every story. For instance, the narrator in 'Cell One' is anonymous. Given that we don't know much about the mother or narrator in the story, the fact that the female narrator is anonymous serves as more evidence that women are viewed as "less than." The mother's jewelry was taken, she makes excuses for her kid, and she takes pride in his appearance because she gave him his complexion. That's all we truly know about her. Other than the fact that she seems to be living in her brother's shadow while attempting to find her identity and voice, we don't learn much about the narrator. Furthermore, her brother, Nnamabia, has accomplished a great deal, but it seems like both of his parents are always there to support him. In my view, this behavior reinforces the idea of patriarchy since his parents, particularly his mother, solve all of his issues only because he is a guy. To obtain him better treatment while he was in prison, his parents tried bribing him with cash, steak, and Jollof rice. Would the female narrator likely receive the same treatment from her parents if the situation were different and she were in the same situation? Not likely. The narrator's frustration with Nnamabia's circumstances is heightened, in my opinion, by her knowledge of it, His parents are treating him like a king despite the fact that he has caused so much havoc.

As a first-generation immigrant looking to make a living in America, in *Americanah* the protagonist Ifemelu, her father became interested in English and developed an appreciation for the language and culture important to the American people. Ifemelu loves to write and enjoy life, her interest comes from studying at a university in the US. People around him were interested in British and American culture because they thought that America was the "dream of the West" and that gave freedom to all people. Ifemelu also won a scholarship to the United States and was impressed by the similar images of British and American people described by her father and his lover, and moved to the US to learn more maybe because it belongs to a third world country. While living there, he was attracted to the American free lifestyle but also felt discriminated against by racism. Adichie's characters unquestionably have a sense of reality and authenticity because of her ability to incorporate her experiences into her writing.

In *The Thing Around...*, Adichie, who is herself an immigrant, puts the reader in the position of a struggling immigrant by drawing on her personal experiences. The difficulties faced by immigrants are thus effectively brought to light by her comparison of Western society's expectations with actualities. Her work is a great illustration of how authors may use

their own experiences to investigate subjects and develop fully realized characters that readers will be able to relate to.

This is a socio-psychological analysis of “*The Thing Around...*,” a short story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It examines the short story’s psychological effects on the characters by treating it as a window into racism in America, particularly in relation to black-and-white interactions. The cynicism of both black and white people in society affects those who have been ordained into such partnerships. The white people respond to them as identity less beasts, while the black people view them as human beings devoid of morality and dignity. White people’s comments are tinged with contempt, while black people are tinged with hatred. Through verbal, gestural, oral, and visual means, they convey their indifference to them, fostering feelings of anxiety, irritation, insecurity, deprivation, discrimination, and degradation.

Black women are affected by white supremacy and patriarchy, two systems of oppression that target people of color and women, respectively. Feminist relabelling-politics and intersectionality theory inform Adichie’s research, which raises questions about how black women narrate their struggles against oppression. Adichie explains that her characters face the script and there are many variables that influence them, including gender, age, culture, race/ethnicity, and more. The framework of Critical Race theory is a bulwark against racism around the world, especially in the US. This principle emphasizes the cultural diversity of the host culture and the local culture of international immigrants. It promotes the stigma of racism and targets schools that promote colorblind advertising. This idea is an important step towards reforming the system and questions racial discrimination in social, political and economic life. This is not an independent way of thinking about the world, but rather the opposite, the meaning that has become the standard in many people’s readings of hate.

One such example of alienation in Adichie’s story is the feeling that many Nigerians have of striving to hide their Nigerian identity in order to fit in with American society. Adichie’s brilliant use of sarcasm and caricature to explore the concept of war is acknowledged by Abalogu and Onyerionwu. She accomplishes this by offering critiques. Nigerians are so taken aback by American customs, culture, and behavior that some even suggest substituting their own identities for them (241) Actually, the term “America” an idiom from Nigeria that describes those who want to shed their Nigerian identity in order to blend in with American society is *Americanah*. For instance, Adichie explains Ofodile in the declaration *The Thing Around...* and is titled “The Arrangers of Marriage”. Adichie talks about

a character named Ofodile, whose life's work is to stop being a Nigerian and being around other Nigerians. Chinaza tried to "Americanize" her after her marriage in Nigeria, once she reached the United States. Ofodile was instructed to select names for each of them that felt "appropriate" in the American setting, such as Dave and Agatha.

In "Guns" and "America", readers can feel the tension between them. The dialogue between the world and neighbors and the world and local characters is used in the text, based on the Nigerian language and symbol culture. Adichie describes herself as belonging to Nigeria's Anglo-Igbo technology, which is reflected in her work that uses technology in a way that can be interpreted as "changing the culture of the English language": "I want to capture a sort of Nigerian Englishness". Mine. Adichie and others of his time thought of English not as a national heritage but as an extension of culture, which is now an Integral part of the Nigerian language panorama and an important factor in international writing. Adichie was born into the Igbo community and often uses the Igbo language to express various thoughts regarding Igbo characters, love, conflict/culture, loss of morality, and Nigerians in the diaspora. Hence, in her special "And of the Body," this essay also interrogates existing evidence in order to create a volume for the author's book focusing on women's issues and those that hinder them. The representation of women in Adichie's short stories is the subject of this study.

The Thing Around.... attempts to comprehend how Adichie reinterprets women's roles that pit "around your neck." It has been pushed in recent years that postcolonial practices and ideas need to be modified to meet our cultural requirements. In this context, Adichie's short story was analyzed and it was seen to exceed the boundaries of post-literature. Her current story is not just about "the fundamental political point of who should write the testimony of Africa" (Adichie, interview), but it speaks to a real culture whose voice reflects how we are all united and equal human beings. In Adichie's character study in *The Thing Around....*, this paper focuses on language use, gender norms for fictional characters, fictional characters that can be produced, and the culture of power. This paper also sees women as important members of society and explores their gender commitment and misbehavior. Boshego (2007) states that authors play a significant role in propagating certain cultural elements of speech and can exert influence over readers through the characters they create.

Despite the recognition and success, *The Thing Around....* has received less attention compared to her other works due to its lack of scholarly articles

and major work. It's feasible that Adichie is stepping outside of her comfort zone because this is her first short tale since rising to fame as a journalist. The three above-mentioned award-winning stories by Adichie appear to have contributed to her reputation. *Yellow Half Sun*, *Purple Hibiscus*, and *American Flower*. As is typically the case with exceptional journalists, they are largely preoccupied with the plot and are not overly concerned with the inventiveness of other genres of writing. Since its introduction into the written world two centuries ago, it is considered the most important and challenging work in embroidery writing due to its volume. Secondly, no other writing can reflect the cultural, historical, economic and cultural aspects of a country's experience as a novel. Adichie's novels, despite their beauty, the power of the novel and the short stories are equally intense in terms of their emotional impact, skill in storytelling, and penetration.

The writer uses three resistance strategies at the same time: recontextualizing their intersectionalities in various discursive contexts to legitimize and elevate their identity; reformulating their intersectionalities by invoking privileged positions to counterbalance marginalization; and re-envisioning by transcending their intersectional subordination to create opportunities for change. The writer is engaged in re-inscription to deconstruct intersectional controls and rework hegemonic scripts in situated activities. Thus, rather than emphasizing identities and pre-existing, fixed power structures in intersectional resistance-control processes, the study will show how black women's feminist solidarity is a way of being ingrained in cultural traditions and movements that oppose patriarchal power and women's socioeconomic inequality. Women are united by, among other things, an unwillingness to acknowledge the continued occurrence of sexism and misogyny, the exploitation of women's labor, bodies, and emotions; financial and physical abuse of women; unequal prospects for employment; and persistent inequities in gender pay.

The main focus of critical race theory is on manufactured racial identities, in which some people identify as black and others as white. Conversely, postcolonial theory looks on the effects and ramifications of colonialism on those who were colonized. The theory also focuses on reframing cultural history and opposing prejudice in all its forms in order to counter-narratives of colonial negativities, due to their race and color, African American immigrants face racism and other forms of prejudice as they establish themselves in the Western diaspora. When extreme disparities in privilege, wealth, and possessions divide marginalized groups from dominant ones, social-political power inequality is especially pronounced. In a racialized society, when the social-political power structure perpetuates

the misconception that the white race is more advantageous or privileged, people of color face discrimination.

The book examines British, American, and Nigerian cultures and societies, revealing the ways in which discriminatory factors impact border-crossers' ability to survive in unfamiliar settings (Amonyeze 2017). Adichie offers a compelling narrative that refutes the stereotypes associated with Africa and its immigration while delving into the complex interplay of race, identity, and spatial zones in modern Western society. As demonstrated by Adichie's African border-crosser characters, the black identity is problematic for its bearer against the theoretical backdrop of Critical Race Theory, which emphasizes the direct and indirect implications of race on people of color. It causes them to feel uncomfortable or unhomely in a racialized society. As a result, Adichie explores issues of color that arise globally due to international migration.

In its broadest meaning, transnationalism refers to the endeavor of studying countries and cultures within a global framework. Transnational literature is created by immigrants or exiles, read by people all over the world, and transcends national borders. In literary and cultural studies, nationalism is an essential tool for revealing the deep and as-yet-undiscovered consequences of the massive global movement of people, texts, languages, translations, art forms, and artifacts. We are able to investigate and highlight the exchanges, flows, and multifaceted relationships between textual and cultural movements across and between borders, boundaries, regions, countries, and continents through the study of transnationalism. Adichie alludes to African feminism and nego-feminism as defined by Steady and Obioma Nnaemeka in her book *Americanah*. Adichie examines transnationalism through the experiences of three characters: Ifemelu, her aunt Auntie Uju, and Aisha, who strive to uphold the morals and ideologies of their native countries while pursuing the goals of white America. The immigrant status of the three characters in *Americanah* is further complicated by their dual awareness. Prior to their arrival in America, none of these characters identified as black.

The feminist-cognitive viewpoints serve as the study's analytical framework. This is due to the investigation's assessment of the allure of feminism as a tool for examining the rights of men and women, as well as the psychological idea to establish the nuanced nature of oppressed women and the manner in which they come to terms with their oppression and eventually achieve liberation. What's more startling is that we think feminism and psychology work well together when it comes to interpreting lit-

erature. The psychological perspective, as a strong collection of research, tackles the difficulties raised by the significant changes in women's standing. Conversely, feminism acts as a catalyst for the advancement of women's understanding. This paper examines female sexuality in *The Thing Around....* from a feminist psychology standpoint, it studies Adichie's female characters, who are prominently featured in the anthology and play a variety of roles, including those of objects and victims of sexual abuse, homosexuals, and strong, independent women.

Adichie also supports regional artists and works of art. She spends a lot of time dressing up, defying the preconception that women who identify as feminists are not particularly "feminine" in their behavior. Naturally, she takes her time choosing her outfits and styling her hair. In her book *Americanah*, Adichie explores the topic of African women imitating Western culture and cutting off their natural hair. Her explanation of the political significance of hair caught the attention at the time, Adichie's hairstyle serves as a metaphor of accepting oneself for who you are, exactly as you are; her wardrobe selections are feisty and sassy. She typically supports and wears clothing from regional stylists and designers in her nation, which is another way she promotes the idea that people should accept and feel at ease in their own skin.

Adichie's collection of short stories also features various feminine tactics for opposing patriarchal dominance. Recreated strong female characters who regain their voices, identities, and affirm themselves, pursue important means of liberation and empowerment are among the memorable strategies used by female characters to assert themselves from male-constructed social structures and the realization of their full liberation and independence. Giving female characters a voice and a central place in their own lives is Adichie's main goal. Adichie's literature features protagonists who leave their married households in search of their uniqueness and self-realization. As it happens, Chinaza from "The Arrangers of Marriage" leaves her married house after learning that her spouse is still legally married.

Adichie ascertains that the *characters* explore challenging subjects like identity, cultural critique, and racism. Nevertheless, it does so while telling a compelling love tale that takes place across three continents. Adichie gets to examine and discuss the many problems black people in these nations confront as the story's characters travel from Nigeria to the US, then to the UK, and back to Nigeria. The author's criticism can be severe at times, but it's frequently laced with just enough humor to make it sim-

ple to read and still thought-provoking. The protagonists set off on a trip through the challenges of life, including changing relationships, issues arising from their skin tone, and miscommunications between cultures.

Adichie's uses the symbol of "hair" to discuss race, she describes how natural hair is frequently seen by black and brown women as a flaw that must be addressed in order for them to blend in, aside from the emphasis on hair, race and prejudice are major story points in *Americanah*, before leaving for Nigeria, the main character Ifemelu visits an African hair parlor to get her hair braided. This is how the story starts. This suggests that Ifemelu lost her braids when she was living in America, maybe to avoid drawing attention to herself from white Americans' "racist gaze." When Ifemelu's Aunt Uju passes her medical exams in America and needs to get ready for job interviews, she learns for the first time that African natural hair poses an obstacle. "If you have braids, they think you are unprofessional," Uju informs her niece. Later on, Ifemelu's career consultant advises her to cut off her natural hair in order to improve her chances of landing a job.

The patriarchy and subjugation of women that now exist in African society, particularly in Nigeria, must be taken into consideration in order to fully comprehend the interpretation of Adichie's actions. The question of whether this phenomenon already existed in African society at the time of colonization or if it was influenced by Western culture, is one that is still being debated. Catherine Frank feels as though there is a "long-standing culture of sexism" in African societies. Regarding the root causes of the oppression of women in Africa, Minek Speer made the observation that it has been shown to be ineffective for women's development to substitute Western concepts for traditional ones.

Instead, they may merely reinforce ideas already present in many African creation and history myths. Sexism has always existed and still exists in today's African society, and the reference to sexuality is very strong in Adichie's novel. The theme of many of the female characters, in particular, can be traced back to this issue. The author offers important insights into the Nigerian reality in his narrative and reveals gender issues in Nigeria through these characters. The actions and thoughts expressed by many characters in *The Thing Around...* make it clear that marriage and submission are their only options. For example, in *Imitation*, the main character Nkem, after resolving internal conflict brought on by unfavorable ideas about her personal circumstances and her cuckold husband, she chooses to relocate to Nigeria to pursue her married career. Women are targets of

sexual assault and as objects of sex.

In many of the short stories in the anthology entitled *And of the Body*, women are treated as sex objects. It is clear that Adichie wants to discuss the humanity of her characters—especially the heroines—because she speaks so openly and honestly about sexuality. The majority of African literary works tend not to assign sexuality to women. In *The Thing Around...*, Akuna suffers from sexual abuse at the hands of her so-called uncle and family acquaintance. Because she had always believed that a girl in a distant country without relatives should be hopelessly lost without the assistance of a male, she had let this man to mistreat her. – Your uncle in the United States entered your family's names in the USA immigration lottery and invited you to stay with him.

It is important to highlight the fact that Adichie works with a truly unique identity: being an Igbo, being a Nigerian, being an African, being an African female, an immigrant living in areas such as Nigeria and the United States, he now mastered not only many words about Africans or translations as “stories” but also standards involving identity, status, and more. In this case, practices that occur in the lives of some people may be cultural shocks for others. Through the positioning of different symbols, Adichie asks questions about how Africans are viewed and interpreted in the West, while also allowing her to think about culture, from Nigeria to her own history. Therefore, in addition to translation in story and novel writing, there will also be a “cultural interpretation” that serves the reader at different levels and allows a better understanding of each other through storytelling. But as an African American.

Conclusion

Considering everything that has been said so far, it is critical to emphasize that Adichie speaks from a variety of identity positionings, including that of an Igbo, a Nigerian, an African, an African woman, a migrant residing in both Nigeria and America, and through these numerous shifting locales, she is able to challenge ideas about identity, nation, home, territory, and African literature, in addition to a variety of preconceptions and what she refers to as “single stories” about what it means to be African.

Many of Adichie's readers must comprehend familiar things in their daily lives through the eyes of a foreigner because parts of the stories in *The Thing Around...* is set in the United States. In this sense, something that some people may take for granted in their daily lives may come as a

cultural shock to others. Through the perspectives of several and varied characters, Adichie deftly challenges Western conceptions of the African Other while, at the same time, using her distance from Nigeria to consider her own culture. As a result, there is “cultural translation” in addition to language translation throughout the novel and collection of stories. This presents a challenge to the reader on several levels and, via narrative, promotes mutual understanding. Adichie’s art demonstrates how African transnational migrants’ access to social benefits is directly hampered by variations in skin tone. Being Black creates barriers to one’s perceived visibility and competency, thus exhibiting these traits consistently is necessary. As shown in *Americanah*, where the very professional characters must violate who they really are in order to accomplish what they want.

Adichie thus explores African history that did not entirely begin with the slave trade; She exposes stereotypes about Africans in Western society, specifically referring to the historical background of racism, conquest and marginalization. This resulted in the double colonization of the black people at the hands of the colonizers, thus creating hatred against the black people. She is a witness not only to racial hatred but also to the culture and hatred between Africans and Westerners. According to him, colourism is the result of Western hegemony and prejudice. For this reason, most of his characters are constantly trying to find themselves in a Westernized world. This is the “third place” situation for immigrants in Western society, where they are always caught between two conflicts and resistance. *The Thing Around...* has many forms of mixing, including the mixing of races, cultures, and languages. The protagonist of the story, goes through many pains and struggles to accept the Western way of life.

Therefore, the United States is known as a multi-ethnic country where there is discrimination against different ethnic groups in the country. Immigrants like Ifemelu face discrimination across America at the hands of Native Americans. Adichie has a straightforward yet elegant style. Thousands of women worldwide who suffer continuously from the hegemonic masculinity ingrained in today’s patriarchal society have found inspiration in her. She is a key figure in the movement encouraging women to speak out against hegemonic masculine norms and to challenge them. Her feminist-reformist strategy has been tried and tested, and it works to persuade males to stop discriminating against women. It is safe to conclude that the future is bright for eliminating prejudice based on gender when and where Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is involved.

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