



WHITE OPPRESSION OPPRESSES THE BLACK IDENTITY: EXPLORING CULTURAL INCONGRUITY AND ISSUES OF NIGERIAN DIASPORA IN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PRESENTED IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADHICHI'S SELECTED FICTION

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ABSTRACT- This research explores the cultural ambivalence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adhichi's three stories "The Thing Around Your Neck", "The Arrangers of Marriage" and "Imitation" collected in *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). The main thrust of this research is to show the cultural ambivalence through the characters of the stories. While reading these stories, one sees that fluctuation, dilemma, cultural destruction, inferiority, cultural hegemony in the life of Akunna and her uncle in "The Things Around Your Neck", Chinaza Okafor and Ofodile Udenwa in "The Arrangers of Marriage" and Nkem and her husband in "Imitation". The theme of these stories is about the destruction of African people's psychology. As mentioned in the stories, when Nigerian people move towards the American landscape, they perceive American cultural norms and values, they even want to hide their own Nigerian identity. To get social equality in terms of employment, equal treatment, social dignity, day-to-day activities, occupation, they imitate the American way of life. In this way, these stories capture the cultural ambivalence in the lives of the Nigerian people which has created psychological trouble and confusion for Nigerian people.

Keywords: Ambivalence, Culture, Diaspora, Harmony, Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the story collection, *Things Around Your Neck* Chimamanda Ngozi Adhichi raises the issue of the Nigerian diaspora in the American landscape. Adhichi is an African diasporic writer; she mainly raises the issue of immigrants in the American landscape through stories. Issues, evidence, story, and characters that are deployed in these stories are suffering from diasporic evidence. Identity crisis, inferiority complex, and cultural hegemony are the common themes deployed in these stories. How their mindset is colonized mentally as well as physically is the issue incorporated in these three stories. Adhichi presents these stories as the document of fluctuation, dilemma, cultural destruction, inferiority, cultural hegemony of the marginalized groups of people through the life of the characters Chinaza Okafor, Ofodile Udenwa, Akunna, and Nkem. "The Thing Around Your Neck", "The Arrangers of Marriage" and "Imitation". A Critique of Cultural Ambivalence is the conclusion of the whole study which asserts that the westernization of Nigerian culture has created some sort of anarchy and frustration upon Nigerian people. Prior to the history, Nigeria was prosperous, its fame and name were widely developed. Due to its political instability, slowly and gradually country went into the verge of a danger zone as it could not provide its people harmony and prosperity in terms of education, occupation, health, and security. Nigeria lost its charm which caused Nigerian people some kind of insecurity and inferiority complex. Therefore, with the motif of upgrading their lifestyle, they migrated towards the American continent and started to adopt or imitate the western way of lifestyle and ideologies without thinking about its possible consequences. After all, Nigerian people neither completely abandoned their own native culture nor they could adopt the western way of life completely. This incompleteness leads them towards cultural ambivalence. The collision of two completely different cultures created a kind of confusion upon Nigerian people i.e. cultural complex which can be associated with familiar disruption, cultural perversion, dash identity, hybridity, and mimicry. The loss of culture is the loss of identity, when people cannot locate themselves in a fixed cultural legacy they suffer from a sense of identity crisis which causes frustration and dilemma. Ofodile Udenwa, Chinaza Okafor, Udenwa Akunna, Akunna's Uncle, Nkem, and Nkem's husband are the representatives of the subversion of western culture because they appear to be unable to follow the dimensions of every aspect of it completely. Thus, it can be claimed that collected stories "The Thing Around Your Neck", "The Arrangers of Marriage" and "Imitation" are the document of cultural ambivalence where characters are

ambivalent towards both American and Nigerian culture. The cultural dislocation and hybridized condition of the protagonist but it also presumes their problem of adjustment and survival in the unfamiliar space despite their cultural differences, which result in their position of cultural ambivalence. Moreover, they adopt the newly emerging identities, but it never gives them a sense of unity within themselves rather it creates a sense of ambivalence in the immigrants. Adichie is one of the most prominent members of the third generation of Nigerian writers who raises the issue of Nigerian diaspora in the American landscape in her story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The term diaspora comes from an ancient Greek word meaning "to scatter about." And that's exactly what the people of a diaspora do, they scatter from their homeland to places across the globe, spreading their culture as they go. The collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) centered on the diaspora experience of the characters. "The Arrangers of Marriage" is a story incorporated within *The Thing Around Your Neck* which shows the pathetic condition of Nigerian people how they are living their lives in the American continent.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To highlight the features of ideology in diasporic subjects and how it works in the writing of diasporic writers.
- To present the cultural ambivalence in the selected text.
- To highlight the societal gaps based on culture, and economy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q.1: How have the issues of diaspora been highlighted in Nigerian fiction?

Q.2: How has Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie projected the diasporic cultural ambivalence in *The Thing Around Your Neck*?

Q.3: How has the writer highlighted the problems related to the influence of the First World countries on the Third World countries?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Though many critics have seen and evaluated this novel from different literary angles and lenses. This study is different from the aforementioned critics because it focuses on the issue of cultural ambivalence embedded in the novel and the author's critical position regarding the issue. This study claims that *The Thing Around Your Neck* is a novel, revealing the reality of confused Nigerian people and society where Adichie presents the cultural ambivalence. Characters in the stories are demanding cross-cultural and national boundaries to enter the space 'beyond'. Thus the departure of the study is not only thematically but also logically researchable and significant. This study makes significant use of the concepts developed in postcolonial scholarships, but it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of all postcolonial literary theories. As the study is mainly focused on analyzing cultural ambivalence in the text, it draws upon the fundamental concepts developed by Homi K. Bhabha, Franz Fanon, and other related theorists and critics. Furthermore, the research completely engages in illustrating the textual pieces of evidence in conversation with the theoretical concepts introduced above to logically prove the claim and hypothesis. As the major objective of the study is to demonstrate the cultural ambivalence that lies in stories "Imitation", "arrangers of Marriage" and "The Thing Around Your Neck" does not incorporate other thematic and structured importance that the text may have.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Adichie in "The Arrangers of Marriage" exemplifies the identity lessness of the Nigerian people where Udenwa says to his wife, "You don't understand how it works in this country. If you want to get anywhere you have to be as mainstream as possible. If not, you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here" (172). In these lines, it is seen that how Nigerian people are compelled to hide their real identity and they are hiding their identity to sustain there. Similarly "The Thing Around Your Neck" is a story in which Adichie has given name to the collection in which she confronts the stereotypes that Americans treat upon Africans. In this story, Adichie narrates the challenges that Akunna faces once she wins the visa lottery. While Akunna tries to embrace her Igbo origin and traditions, her uncle forces her to adopt the westernized ways of life as her only option and threatens her not to live her life as an African rather American. After winning the DV lottery, she finally comes in America lots of expectations from it, butas soon as she arrives, the people in her community college class ask her ignorant questions, such as where she had learned to speak English, or if she had a real house in Africa. His uncle who helped her to register DV also tells America is "a mixture of ignorance and arrogance" (116). Notonly this, her uncle tries to rape her too and opinions that every smart woman do all this in America. It is American culture

where people are involved in sexual activities, they care not about relations. Akunna new comer in America but her uncle was already there. He deviates from Nigerian culture to American culture therefore he wants to make a physical relationship with his nephew. Cultural ambivalent can be seen like Akunna's uncle and also suggests her if she wants to be successful in America, she has to adopt the American way of life. In the same way, in another story "Imitation" the protagonist is a Nigerian young woman Nkem who has got married to a Nigerian who settled in America. After reaching the US she finds the reason to love America is to the adoption of their culture. She comes to know through her friend that "her husband's girlfriend" (22). It is American society where Nigerian people are deviated from their root culture and adopting other's one, which can be taken as a diasporic exercise of them. Not only this, but rather Nkem also wants to perceive American culture and she sends her children to school where white people's children are reading. Adichie writes, "She had never imagined that her children would go to school, sit side by side with white children whose parents owned mansions on lonely hills, never imagined this life. So she said nothing" (27). In these lines, Nkem feels proud of her children's perceive whites' culture and their social activities. Hence, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie through her three stories tries to show the Nigerian immigrants' ambivalent nature. Obiora, Husband of Nkem in "Imitation" is a bundle of contradictions, on the one hand, he seems to be a loving husband and father follows Nigerian culture, the responsibility of a good husband, but on the other hand, he keeps extramarital affairs which put Nkem in "mantel as learners about her husband's girlfriend" (22). By knowing the fact that Nkem neither takes any action nor complains with her husband rather she perceives it as a metropolitan lifestyle where extra-marital relationships are viable. She feels proud as her children sit with white kids. She is so closely fascinated with the American lifestyle and cultural programs. She completely betrays when her friend asks her if she is going back to Nigeria. "But How can I live in Nigeria again? she said" (29) is the outcome of fascination and ambivalence towards the American lifestyle. Similarly, "The Thing Around Your Neck" also deals with the issue of the people who win the DV Lottery and Nigerian people are already there. DV lottery is a trick of "America, to know that America was give-and-take. You gave up a lot but you gained a lot, too" (116). In these lines, it is clear that people who move towards American, lose their own Nigerian culture and adopt American culture. It is their compulsion to adopt American culture to exist there. Akunna is a new comer in America where her uncle asked her to abandon the Nigerian way of life. Her uncle tries to molest her and tries to rape her too which Akunna rejects. Her uncle suggests to her that it is common in the USA, every successful woman does the same and she has to adopt such activities if she wants to be successful in America. The Nigerian people who are migrated to the USA are culturally Ambivalent, as Akunna's uncle tries to establish a sexual relationship with her which unfolds the dual nature of Nigerian man due to cultural ambivalence. Another critic Hamish Dalley is considered one of the most prominent members of the third generation of Nigerian writers. Dalley reads Adichie's novel as a historical novel. He further opines:

"Recent critical discourse on Nigerian fiction *The Things Around Your Neck* employs historicizing techniques that categorize texts according to generations, each of which is presumed to share formal and political qualities and represent a distinct stage in national literary development.....It shows that recent Nigerian novels are shaped around spatiotemporal imaginaries that exceed the national-generational framework." (Dalley 2013, p.15)

In these lines, critics opine about the novel as a historical novel, the historicity of the novel is its soul. This novel is the outcome of the third generation in Nigeria which shows that both are traversed by alternative temporalities and spatiality's that deconstruct their dominant frameworks. Similarly, Maria Ajima sees the *Things Around Your Neck* from the perspective of racial attitudes, loneliness, and disillusionment of African people in the American landscape. She sees the story collection as a document of disillusionment faces by the immigrants in America. She sees Adichie as an emigrant writing generally raises the issues of Nigerian people. She further opines:

"The experience of something around the character's neck forms the title for the short story collection of Adichie's. The 'Something' probably relates to the experience of disappointment and disillusionment that faces Akunna in America. She is confronted by racial attitudes, joblessness, loneliness and disillusionment in America. These are situations she never expected to come her way when she and her family were looking forward to while she was in Nigeria waiting to emigrate." (Maria 2015, p.113)

Maria takes the story collection as problematic fiction which deals with the issue of social problems in America in the lives of emigrants. People all over the world migrate to America with the hope of prosperity, but when they reach there, they face several hurdles and hardships. Confrontation of racial

attitudes, jobless situation, loneliness, and disillusionment are the prime factors they met in the American continent.

In the same way, Heba M. Sharbobeem sees the novel *The Things Around Your Neck* as the representation of cultural conflict and gender relations. Sharbobeem further opines:

“The study discusses space as reflective of cultural conflict and the interrelation between gender, race, place, space, and power in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The focus is on three stories that depict women residing in different spaces: domestic, border, and marginal. Space, and the role it plays in Adichie’s stories, is analyzed as a social product.” (Sharbobeem 2015, p.18)

Heba M. Sharbobeem takes *The Thing Around Your Neck* from the perspective of cultural conflict and interrelationship between gender, race, place, space, and power. Hence, Sharbobeem in this article has an opinion from the perspective of power relationship. He opines that America is the superpower of this world and its people too. People throughout this world allured to go to America even today, but in America, too relationships are made to gender, race, place, space, and power. The treatment of the American landscape is determined according to their gender, race, and place.

Bhabha further writes, “What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.” (Bhabha 1994, p.2). According to Bhabha theoretically going beyond the narratives of national and cultural differences is always fruitful. Cultural ambivalence or liminality demands such traversing into the 'beyond'. Here, Bhabha points towards the concept of multi-cultural nationalism that promises equal ground for all existing cultures. Cultural ambivalence plays an important thematic role in Adichie’s short stories “The Thing Around Your Neck”, “The Arrangers of Marriage” and “Imitation” author’s critical position towards the issue remains as a weaving thread to the study. Grounding upon the above introduced a major concept of postcolonial study. The depicted society in the stories incorporates the 20th-century African-American society where material phenomena have flourished in their practical application and African people are compelled to conquer socially, culturally, politically, and economically. Their due respect towards the western way of life is wrathful as they are transforming themselves in terms of ideology, desire, pleasure, and emotions. Regarding the fact, Sanjeev Uprety in his article “A Split in the Colonial Gaze” opines, “One of the consequences of the growth of capitalism and colonialism in the eighteenth century was a substantial increase in the global trade and cultural exchange” (Uprety 2006, p.19). Sanjeev Uprety writes about the natural tendencies seen in the involved subjects, which he accounts for in terms of “fascination” of alien culture and “resistance” in the parallel lines. Later, he insists that the ultimate result of this fascination and resistance is cultural or “social contradictions” (Uprety 2006, p.19).

The same case is prominent in the “imitation”. It can be shown through several pieces of evidence in the story. Nkem imagines living with white people, she wants her children would go to school with their children. She approves of multiple relationships of her husband not saying anything although she was well known of the fact that her husband keeps a relationship with other women. She is proud of her husband as he sends her to America to provide American education to their children. Adichie writes, “She had never imagined that her children would go to school, sit side by side with white children whose parents owned mansions on lonely hills, never imagined this life” (Bernardine 2009, p.27). These subjects and learning have far-reaching impacts upon the formation of the subject of Nkem. In this context, Bill Ashcroft and others in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* write: once colonized peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which insured from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience post-colonial theory, came into being. (Ashcroft et al. 2004, p.1). Moreover, postcolonialism is a project which studies the effects of colonialism or ambivalences caused by colonialism as Leela Gandhi in her text *Postcolonial Theory* writes. “Rarely did the onslaught of colonialism entirely obliterate colonized societies. So, also, far from being exclusively oppositional, the encounter with colonial power occurred along with a variety of ambivalent registers” (Gandhi 1998, p.124). The fluidity regarding the cultural ethos and ethical consideration are outlined. Obiora, a married person with children loves skirt flickers. He deviates from his cultural root and makes relations except for his wife. He does not completely follow American culture if he makes a relationship except his wife, he has to divorce the first one. Obiora is in an “in-between position” which means neither he accepts the western culture nor rejects his own native culture. In such a situation she becomes the victim of cultural ambivalence. In this regard, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have defined ambivalence along with Bhabha’s Sine as “it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never

simply and completely opposed in the colonizer” (Ashcroft et al. 2004, p.12). Some colonized subjects become complicit while some resistant. Now, ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within a colonized subject. Moreover, there is either the exploitation or the nurturing situation to the colonized subject that characterizes ambivalent mentality. Hybrid culture does exist in a colonial society where people occupy an 'in-between' space by the 'mimicry' of the colonizer.

III. FINDINGS

As understood within the domain of postcolonial criticism, hybridity is the result of the orientalist project of the West. The term has something to do with the traumatic colonial experience since it is the ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. Once the colonial settlers arrive in an alien land, they feel the necessity of having a new identity, because they are dislocated from their origin. In a colonized society there emerges a binary relationship between the people of two cultures, races, and languages, and such relation produces a hybrid or cross-cultural experience on the lives of daily activities of Nkem. As she migrates to America, she adopts the American way of life. She deviates from her root and cultural experiences. Adichie further discloses the hybrid nature of Nkem in the story “Imitation” as:

“She does miss home, though, her friends, the cadence of Igbo and Yourba and Pidgin English spoken around her . . . she has sometimes thought about moving back home, but never seriously, never concretely. She goes to a Pilates class twice for her children's classes and hers are always the favourites; she expects banks to have drive-ins. America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin. ‘Yes, a small drink,’ she says to Amaechi. ‘Bring the wine that is in the fridge and two glasses.’” (37)

Nkem sometimes longing for Nigeria which creates psychological trauma in her mind but she does not want to return to Nigeria, because she has produced hybrid or cross-cultural habits into which she delves into. She goes to English classes as America has grown on her root. She thinks that drinking wine and speaking English is an American culture and adopts the way of Americans, speak and drink.

Homi K. Bhabha in his profound work *The Location of Culture* writes that cultural confrontation results in hybridity, identity crisis, and diaspora which further causes uncertainty in people. People living in 'no men's land' or between the borderlines of two cultures experience such things, they possess conflicting views towards both cultures and to their position. Achichi, through her story “The Thing Around Your Neck,” shows the ambivalent nature of Nigerian people migrated to America. Akunna, the central character of the story faces so many hurdles as she wins the American DV lottery and reaches America. Akunna tries to embrace her Igbo origin and traditions, her uncle forces her to adopt the westernized ways of life. He time and again threatens her if she wants to stay in America, she should follow the rules of Americans rather than Africans. After winning the DV lottery, she finally comes to America with lots of expectations, but as soon as she arrives, the people in her community and college class ask her ignorant questions, such as where she had learned to speak English, or if she had a real house in Africa. Her uncle who helped her to register DV also tells America is “a mixture of ignorance and arrogance” (116). As insisted by Bhabha, her uncle calls America a melting pot of different cultures. Everything is viable in that land. Her uncle deviates from his Nigerian cultural norms and values he “came into the cramped basement where you slept with old boxes and cartons and pulled you forcefully to him, squeezing your buttocks, moaning” (116). In these lines, her uncle seems quite modern as he does not hesitate to molest her. Her uncle seems quite modern as he smiles after her rejection and says, “You were no longer a child at twenty-two” (117).

In America, sexual relationships are free and viable which her uncle follows but he forgets that in such a relationship both parties should be ready. He without the agreement of Akunna molests her in a Nigerian way and after rejection, he insists on her age and she is living in America. American modernity puts the concern of self at the center. Individual freedom and the solace of the inner self is the dominant paradigm. American modernity holds the different styles of dressing, eating, behaving, and establishing relations with others. Every character in these stories is culturally ambivalent in one way or other. Akunna's uncle, who is like a free spirit embodying a deviant nature of the person. He is a bundle of contradictions. On the one hand, he keeps the modern way of life and says, “Smart women did it all the time” (117). According to him, to be smart it is necessary to keep the sexual relationship that he wants to establish with Akunna. He loves short skirt, says everything is viable in America, work for a dollar, bribes on “America was give-and- take” (116) on the other hand he keeps familial relationships to Nigeria and makes trustworthy to his members as Akunna's father says to her during her departure from Nigeria as, “Your uncle in America,

who had put in the names of all your family members for the American visa lottery, said you could live with him until you got ton your feet" (115). In traditional Nigerian belief that the uncle is equal to the father who rears and cares from every angle, saves his child from possible danger, but here quite contradictorily Akunna's uncle seems culturally Ambivalent. Western modernity consists of different types of dressing, eating, drinking, behaving, and making relationships with others. Existing social roles and social institutions are immensely modified by the structure of western conception. After the European colonization Nigerian people were affected by western hegemony when European people enter Nigeria as Franz Fanon argues:

"Wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up to data style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse, adoring the native language with European expressions; using bombasting phrases in speaking or writing and using European language; all these contribution to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements." (Fanon 1993, p.25)

In the above lines, Fanon talks about how non-westerners copy westerners' cultural norms and values either they are good or bad. He compares themselves to the level of Europeans which makes them mimic man. As insist by Fanon Offodile Udenwa and Chinza Okfar in "The Arrangers of Marriage" are mimicking western cultural values; Udenwa changes his name and surname, suggest his wife pretend as if she is a true American, suggest her not to say "lift" rather "it's an elevator, not a life. Americans say elevator" (177), "biscuits" rather "Cookies. Americans call them cookies" (174). At the end of the story, Okfar also deviates from her cultural roots. She follows the way as taught by Nia, "you can wait until you get your papers and then leave, Nia said" (186), until and unless she gets a green card, she makes a plan to sits withher husbands. She agrees with Nia as "she was right, I could not leave yet" (186). Chinza Okfar also deviates from her Nigerian cultural ethos of marriages and plans to forsake her husband after getting a green card which is her ambivalent nature as she deviates from her culture. Thus, *The Thing Around Your Neck* is the document of cultural confrontation. It exposes how Nigerian people are ambivalent on the verge of eastern and western culture. For them, loss of Nigerian culture is the loss of Identity, when people cannot locate themselves in fix cultural category they suffer from a sense of identity crisis which causes them fractured identity, in-betweenness, hybridity, frustration, confusion. The same frustration and dilemma lead them to become a cultural uncertainty.

IV. CONCLUSION

Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a postcolonial Nigerian novel in English, dramatizes the cultural ambivalence of the protagonists. Nigerian people of the stories migrated to America where they face the tremendous effects of cultural encounters: loss of one's own culture by mimicry, the fascination of the dominant culture, rejection of other culture and the ambivalent mentality developed in affected subjects due to the expansion of Western colonialism across the countries. Udenwa and Okfar in "The Arrangers of Marriage", Obiraoand Nkem in "Imitation" and Akunna and her uncle in "The Thing Around Your Neck" are the affected subject of this cross-cultural intersection. Due to the meeting of two cultures their original Nigerian culture and foreign culture, remain ambivalent. In "The Arrangers of Marriage", Udenwa gets an education in English, upbringing in a middle-class Nigerian family that is immensely influenced by Western colonial rule on the one hand and the legacy and essence of their cultural intimacy on the other hand makes him a fluctuating subjects from one culture to another. Udenwa, a successful doctor in America gets married to Chinza Okfar and migrate to America gets unfold in front of his wife as he exposes the bitter reality that he for his existing in America gets married to native American, not only this, rather in terms of surviving there, he even changes his Nigerian name Offodile Udenwa to American name Dave Bell. It is exposed in the textual analysis that their fascination with and rejection of both Nigerian and Western culture parallel, resulting in ambivalence. After all, Nigerian people neither completely abandoned their own native culture nor they could adopt western culture completely. This incompleteness leads them towards cultural ambivalence. The collision of two completely different cultures created a kind of confusion upon Nigerian immigrants which is can be associated with the reason behind the familial disruption, cultural perversion, dash identity, hybridity, mimicry, and so on. Thus, it can be claimed that Adichie exposes Nigerian people are ambivalent towards both eastern and western culture. The loss of culture is the loss of identity, when people cannot locate themselves in a fixed cultural stratum they suffer from a sense of identity crisis which causes frustration and dilemma. Offodile, Okfar, Nkem, Obirao, Akunna, and her uncle are the representatives of the subversion of western culture because they cannot wear the dimension of every aspect of it completely. They always seem to be in a dual

consciousness of accepting and rejecting the cultural values. The dilemma leads them to become ambivalent towards their native culture and adopted American culture.

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