



Depression in the Face of Racism: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Short Story "The Thing Around Your Neck"

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Abstract

The short story "The Thing Around Your Neck" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie encapsulates the escapade of a migrant American Visa Lottery winner from Nigeria. A poor Nigerian, her image of America used to be influenced by some socio-cultural stereotypes promoted by Hollywood and various types of political and commercial media institutions. Soon, she finds no truth in what she used to believe about America as an economic heaven. She learns about America's immoral give-and-take policy from her surrogate uncle who makes sexual advances towards her. She finds higher education extremely expensive and engages in the rat race to support herself as a waitress at a restaurant, a part-time student, and a breadwinner for her family in Nigeria. Constantly subjected to acute depression and loneliness, she feels stifled and suffocated in bed every night. Thanks to her white American lover, she recovers from it. Yet, so sensitive in mind, her body reacts to even the slightest emotional disappointment by getting frozen and unresponsive. Often, her dark complexion proves highly detrimental to her happiness as a black American. Although she is accepted by her lover's parents, in her daily life, she experiences insults from both blacks and whites she meets in the streets. Such realities appear dark and negative and repulse her faith in the so-called sophistication of the American people. However, by the time she decides to visit Nigeria to commiserate with her mother bereaved by her father's demise, her white American lover proves to be an inseparable tour de force.

Keywords: American Visa Lottery, Migration, Afro-Americans, Depression, Exploitation, Nigerians, Racism, Black-and-White Cohabitation, Catharsis, Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

This is a socio-psychological analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "The Thing Around Your Neck". It treats the short story as a window to racism in America, especially in the context of black-and-white relationships, and thereby analyses how it psychologically affects the individuals concerned. Those who have been ordained into such relationships are victims of the cynicisms of both blacks and whites in society. The blacks react to them as humans of no character and dignity and the whites as animals of no identity. The insults the blacks make at them are tinted with hatred and those by the whites are tinted with loathing. They express their apathy to them in all possible ways, verbally, gesturally, facially, and ocularly, inculcating feelings of angst, frustration, insecurity, deprivation, discrimination, and degradation. The paper is divided into 15 sub-sections: 1) American Stereotypes Embedded in Nigerian Society; 2) A Womaniser in the Guide of a Surrogate Uncle in America; 3) Orientation to American Society; 4) The American Give-and-Take Policy; 5) Acculturation to Migrant Lifestyle in America; 6) Being Muffled in Depression; 7) Observations Made on

Americans; 8) Encounter with a White American Client; 9) A Perseverant Lover; 10) Reflections on Roots, While Wrapped in Romance; 11) Intercultural Threats to Coexistence in America; 12) Exposure to American Culture; 13) Public Resentment Against Black-White Interracial Cohabitation; 14) Catharsis under American Parental Love; and 15) Return to Nigeria for an Uncertain Future. The trajectory formed by these 15 sub-sections, leads to the development of the theme of depression and loneliness aggravated by racial discrimination exercised through hypocrisy. In accordance with Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory that stresses the importance of the reader in making meaning from a text (Lumen-Learning), the paper conducts its analysis in the form of a transaction between the reader and the text based on personal associations as it allows readers to create interpretations by using not only personal connection but also the aesthetic response of all five senses and emotions (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978).

AMERICAN STEREOTYPES EMBEDDED IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Adichie begins her short story "The Thing Around Your Neck"

with an allusion to a few stereotypes of America generally held by the Nigerians for several generations such as that "everybody in America had a car and a gun". It is surmised that these stereotypes are inspired mainly by Hollywood movies full of car races and gun fights. The setting portrays an atmosphere where many Nigerians apply for "the American visa lottery" with the aspiration of migrating to America. Adichie reveals how their well-wishers always encourage the lottery winners to start a new life there like the Americans with "a big car" and "a big house". They also advise the lottery winners not to "buy a gun like those Americans."

The same situation emerges when the protagonist Akunna wins an American visa lottery. The room in Lagos where she lives with her father, mother, and three siblings receives many visitors. The unpainted wall and the scarcity of chairs in her dwelling to accommodate the visitors suggest poverty. Adichie achieves humour through the adjustments the visitors make to their voice ranges in their communication with Akunna. Accordingly, they use "loud voices" to "say goodbye" to her and "lowered voices" to describe "what they wanted" her to send them. Items such as "handbags and shoes and perfumes and clothes" that they wish to receive from her are all meant to add to their assemblage of stereotypes inspired by the American fashion industry. Akunna's answer to every request is "... okay, no problem." Adichie concludes the ritual of saying goodbye with an assurance from the lottery-winning protagonist Akunna that she will fulfil all their requests.

A WOMANISER IN THE GUISE OF A SURROGATE UNCLE IN AMERICA

A middle-aged Nigerian man who has managed to settle down in America acts as a surrogate uncle to every young female applicant for the American visa lottery. He not only furnishes their applications for the lottery but also accommodates the winners in his residence until they get used to the lifestyle in America. From what he would relate to somebody about himself, it is presumed that he wants to appear as a model Nigerian migrant in America respected by the white community. Adichie introduces the uncle as a resident of "a small white town in Maine". The "thirty-year-old house by a lake" that he occupies provides a clue to the conservative social setting into which he has integrated himself. The uncle's intention to create a positive picture of his predominantly white social milieu is supported by the fact that, as a token for his contribution to its desperate endeavour to maintain its image of diversity, the company he had worked for used to make him an extra payment in addition to his salary and all other benefits. As another strategy his company used to apply in its image-building campaign, he refers to the inclusion of a photo of him in every one of its brochures. Thus, he talks and laughs sounding boastful of his job and the social recognition he used to enjoy. His only complaint is that his wife must drive an hour to find

a hair salon that does black hair. With the social image of America he presents, he claims to have achieved an expert knowledge of the American community by interacting with so many white people in various capacities. "You gave up a lot, but you gained a lot, too." The cliché he uses in promoting an immoral behavioural pattern for the Nigerians to follow in integrating themselves into American society conveys an insinuation of adopting a lifestyle of debauchery, which is particularly advantageous to him.

ORIENTATION TO AMERICAN SOCIETY

He starts his orientation programme for Akunna by picking her up at the airport and buying her a "big hotdog with yellow mustard." Adichie implies the alienness of the American food culture through the nauseating impact the hotdog would have on her. "Introduction to America, he said with a laugh." The uncle's humour suggests that he derives pleasure from the discomfort she has from the hotdog. It has the implication of ragging a fresher in some university subcultures. Further, he helps her organise some preliminaries for her sustainability. By showing her "how to apply for a cashier job in the gas station on Main Street" and enrolling her "in a community college" he makes sure that Akunna has a routine to follow in her new domain. Adichie highlights the dominance of the orange-looking self-tanned girls with "thick thighs" and wearing "bright-red nail polish" within the college atmosphere as a possible source of culture shock for her. They represent a world of fashion and beauty culture rather than a quest for knowledge and research. The questions they ask Akunna about where she "learned to speak English", whether she has "real houses back in Africa", and whether she had "seen a car before" she came to America, convey their adoption of the negative image of Africa promoted by the European colonisers under their campaign to dehumanise the natives of the colonies. Their questions on the texture of her coiled-up hair, its dependence on braids, whether it can be combed and straightened, and how it is generally maintained, emerge from their genuine curiosity as beauty-conscious women. "You smiled tightly when they asked those questions." (Adichie, 2009) Adichie conveys Akunna's response to all of them in terms of a pleasant silence. The uncle's explanation for them is that it is "a mixture of ignorance and arrogance". He recalls his white neighbours' stigmatising remark that, a few months after he moved into his house, the squirrels had started to disappear, based on their belief that "Africans ate all kinds of wild animals".

THE AMERICAN GIVE-AND-TAKE POLICY

The home atmosphere Akunna experiences in the unknown land of America looks conducive for her to go ahead with her plans. "You laughed with your uncle, and you felt at home in his house; his wife called you *nwanne*, sister, and his two school-age children called you Aunty." (Adichie, 2009) The gestures of intimacy she gets used to in her new abode are

supported by Igbo spoken for communication within the household and the Nigerian staple food *garri* served for lunch. Akunna is accommodated in the cramped basement of the house crowded with old boxes and cartons. She is still content with the setting as it allows her to proceed with her plans. Yet her pleasure of togetherness vanishes during the grotesque sexual advances the so-called uncle makes towards her by pulling her forcefully to him, squeezing her buttocks, and moaning. "He wasn't really your uncle; he was actually a brother of your father's sister's husband, not related by blood." (Adichie, 2009) How Akunna is related to the man is clear in this piece of information. "You gave up a lot, but you gained a lot, too." The statement he makes on their way home from the airport recurs in different wordings when he relates, seated on her bed, how she would be rewarded by her acceptance of him as a sexual counterpart.

Smart women did it all the time. How did you think those women back home in Lagos with well-paying jobs made it? Even women in New York City? (Adichie, 2009)

He generalises that all women offer themselves to men in authority to get their work done, whether in America or Africa, no matter where it is. Akunna, after so much resistance, escapes from the man and takes shelter in the bathroom until he goes back upstairs. Threatened by his constant approaches, she leaves his house one day "walking the long windy road, smelling the baby fish in the lake". Usually, the man drops her off at Main Street but this day he quietly drives her past. Adichie demonstrates in this episode how men exploit women's helplessness by inculcating in them ambitions far beyond their reach and instigating them to commit adultery. Akunna's curiosity about what her surrogate uncle's wife would presume from her sudden departure conveys her innocence and inexperience as a girl who has never been away from her family. By and by she comes to understand what the man meant by that America was give-and-take.

ACCULTURATION TO A MIGRANT LIFESTYLE IN AMERICA

Akunna's choice of Connecticut as her next station is determined by the terminal of the Greyhound bus she accidentally gets on. It is her desperation to have a footing wherever she lands in, that urges her to strike a deal with the restaurant manager Juan, to "work for two dollars less than the other waitresses". Juan's "inky-black hair", "broad smile", and "gold tooth" are indicative of his Mediterranean origin. His comment on the foreigners employed under him as hard workers, suggests nothing other than exploitation. The deal they agree upon is that for her service she receives her salary one dollar less than that is documented. Juan's explanation is that what he recovers thereby is used for paying taxes. One can assume that this applies to all his employees.

In Connecticut, the heavy cost of living and the absence of a community college tend to challenge Akunna's academic pursuits. The "tiny room" with a "stained carpet" she resides in and the "twin bed" with a "lumpy mattress" she sleeps on are symbolic of a low-quality lifestyle, but they absorb most of her earnings. While "credits at the state university cost too much", she cannot afford to enrol for them. Therefore, she is compelled to depend on the public library to browse the Internet for course syllabi and reference materials. In the presence of these challenges, most often she feels nostalgic about her life in Nigeria. The collective lifestyle she has been used to in Nigeria flashes across her memory with all the personages she used to meet in her daily life. The aggressive women hawkers of dried fish and plantains pouncing on unresponsive customers, the drunken spendthrifts unconcerned about their families' comfort and convenience, her friends either happy or envious of her success with the American visa lottery, her parents going to church on Sunday mornings hand in hand amidst the laughter of the bystanders, her father trying to teach her brothers to read with old newspapers, and her mother bribing the teachers to have A grades for her brothers' performance altogether contribute to a theatrical social setting which contrasts with the quiet Connecticut community.

Her solution to the economic problems in her domestic situation back home in Nigeria appears in her initiative to send regularly half her monthly earnings to her mother. She addresses the mails to the pro-government public office where her mother is a cleaner to prevent them from falling into the hands of the neighbours. The brown envelopes she uses for sending money remind her of the bribes her mother used to give to the schoolteachers for the sake of her brothers. She finds the crisp dollar notes received from Juan more presentable than those received from customers as tips and collects them to send to her mother. The blank white paper that wraps them proves that there is "nothing to write about". That symbolises her uncertainty as a newcomer.

OBSERVATIONS MADE ON AMERICANS

Adichie presents her observations of American behaviours, values, practices, and outlooks in terms of what Akunna desires to write about in her letters to her family. Akunna wants to write letters not only to her parents but also to her friends, and cousins and aunts and uncles. The anecdotal accounts Akunna thus develops to relate "the surprising openness of people in America" cover people who openly talk about issues such as "their mother fighting cancer" and "their sister-in-law's preemie" which in Nigeria are privy only to their families and close well-wishers. She means here that Americans take everything lightly. She relates the extravagant lifestyle of Americans based on some of her clients who leave "so much food on their plates" and crumple "a few dollar bills down" as an "expiation for the wasted food". She emphasises thus that Americans have no idea about the

waste they commit. Then she relates about a headstrong child of about five years old who aggressively cries, pulls at her blond hair, and pushes the menus off the table. She wonders about her parents who, unlike the Nigerian parents, plead with the child and then get up and leave. Here she points out that Americans honour individualist behaviour even during childhood. She compares the rich people, who wear "shabby clothes and tattered sneakers", to "the night watchmen in front of the large compounds in Lagos" and suggests that Americans are not worried about the dress codes in maintaining their class. She is surprised about the rich Americans looking slim and the poor Americans looking obese and suggests that the physical structure is no determinant of the economic capacity of an American. While searching in this way for various aspects of American life to write on, she notices that "many do not have a big house and car". Yet she remains clueless about their gun culture which has notorious publicity in Nigeria. That means so long she has not come across a person with a gun. Ultimately, Akunna decides not to write to anybody because she finds that her poor salary as a waitress can support only her rent but not the "perfumes and clothes and handbags and shoes" requested by her relatives and friends. Her American dream gradually shatters in this way.

BEING MUFFLED IN DEPRESSION

"Nobody knew where you were, because you told no one." (Adichie, 2009) Akunna means by this statement that she has no rapport with anybody outside of her work. Her life is totally unknown to the world she moves about. Her accidents that leave "bruises on her arms" reveal her obsession with invisibility and urge her "to walk through the room wall into the hallway" despite the injuries she sustains. Her mysterious laughter at Juan's enquiry whether she has been assaulted by a man signifies a psychological tendency she has developed over the months that she cannot explain. "At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep." (Adichie, 2009) The stifling suffocation she feels when she is alone is interpreted as depression.

"The loneliness and depression she experiences is the "thing around her neck" and, notably, it comes from her silence. Adichie writes about depression in other works as well—and particularly depression among immigrants coming to America—and the image she creates here is particularly vivid and powerful." (Brock, 2023)

Adichie conveys the generalisation people have made about black people with a foreign accent through the question they often ask her whether she is Jamaican. She presents some people's love of elephants and dreams of going on a safari conveyed to Akunna has the implication that they suspect her as an African. Overall, all their remarks and comments are full of condescension. Adichie indicates thus that her

African identity tends to cause Akunna great agony in her daily life.

ENCOUNTER WITH A WHITE AMERICAN CLIENT

In a mood of discomfort, she encounters at the restaurant a white American client in his late twenties. He shows an interest in her. From her forebodings during the encounter, it is evident that Akunna has already been tired of the narrations she has heard about their dealings with Africa. Very often people talk about donations they have made for various causes in Africa such as the prevention of AIDS in Botswana. Through such stories, they show their awareness of poverty among the African communities. She is happy that the present client does not rouse her with such stories. His enquiry whether she is Yoruba or Igbo because of her not having a Fulani face astonishes her. Thereby she becomes curious whether he is a professor of anthropology at the State University of Maine. When she replies that she is of Igbo origin and that her name is Akunna, he admires her name. She is relieved that he does not ask about its meaning. In Swahili 'Akunna' means 'Father's Wealth'. She is sick of how people ridicule her as a commodity to be sold by her father to a man who would marry her.

He told you he had been to Ghana and Uganda and Tanzania, loved the poetry of Okotp'Bitek and the novels of Amos Tutuola and had read a lot about sub-Saharan African countries, their histories, their complexities. (Adichie, 2009)

Although the subjects of African matters he talks about are of some intellectual and cultural value, Akunna does not get flattered by them at once because of the condescension she has experienced over the months at the hands of many of those white people who claim either to like Africa too much or too little. She finds him different, compared to Professor Cobbledick in the Maine Community College who, affected by a superiority complex, used to shake his head in a superior way during a class discussion on decolonization in Africa. She notices that he does not wear the expression of a person who thinks of himself as superior to the people he knows about. His unassuming nature makes him passable to her.

From that day on, he visits the restaurant on four consecutive days. Each day he does something to convey his inclination to her. The next day, instead of answering her businesslike question about whether the chicken is okay, he asks her a question in return whether she grew up in Lagos. On the third day, without ordering anything, he starts talking about his visit to Bombay and his desire to visit Lagos. He conveys that his sole intention is to see how real people live, like in the shantytowns, and that he had never done any of the silly tourist stuff when he has been abroad. To stop his talking, Akunna feels compelled to tell him that he has violated restaurant policy. He gestures his liking of her by

brushing her hand when she sets the glass of water down. On the fourth day, when Akunna notices him arrive, she tells Juan that she does not want that table anymore. Akunna's indifference to all his gestures implies her discomfort about the condescending type of Americans on the one hand and her caution not to get entangled in a romantic relationship with a man.

A PERSEVERANT LOVER

Her strategy proves futile when she finds him after her shift that night, waiting for her outside the restaurant. He invites her to go out with him, claiming that her name rhymes with Lion King Junior's motto *hakuna matata* in the only maudlin movie he has ever liked *The Lion King*.

"Hakuna Matata! What a wonderful phrase

Hakuna Matata! Ain't no passing craze ...

It means no worries for the rest of your days..." (Rice & John, 1994)

Without knowing what the hero in *The Lion King* is like or how *hakuna matata* means "No trouble", Akunna looks at him in the bright light and notices that his eyes are "greenish gold", the colour of extra-virgin olive oil. "Extra-virgin olive oil was the only thing you loved, truly loved, in America." (Adichie, 2009) Akunna's fascination with the man is implied in her general liking of extra-virgin olive oil which is of his eye colour.

He introduces himself as a senior at the state university. "A senior is an undergraduate student in their last year of college" (2023 Uni-Experts). He reveals his age and explains why he has not graduated yet. Adichie uses this point to comment on the student unrest in the universities in Nigeria. She reveals that, in Nigeria, the graduation period is prolonged by continuous strikes launched by frustrated academics. He reveals the luxury of an American university education which allows him to take "a couple of years off to discover himself and travel, mostly to Africa and Asia". The conversation acquires an element of humour from the question she asks him as to where he ended up finding himself. Yet her indifference to his laughter suggests, according to Adichie, Akunna's ignorance of the possibility of considering education optional and the independence one enjoys in organizing one's life to one's own taste. It also exposes her awareness of her destiny as a Nigerian born to a poor family to accept what life gives and follow what life dictates. The intensely erotic and sensual expression in his eyes frightens her and compels her to say goodbye to him and avoid him for four days despite her reluctance to walk away from him. The American's perception of women's sexual instincts proves sound in the trick he plays on the fifth day, by hiding somewhere around instead of standing outside right at the restaurant entrance, while waiting for her. Panicked when she does not see him that night, Akunna understands that

in her subconscious she likes him. While she prays for his return, he surprises her by greeting her from the dark. This time, even before he invites her, she offers to go out with him. "You were scared he would not ask again." Adichie, means that she is so attached to the man that she does not want to lose him.

REFLECTIONS ON ROOTS, WHILE WRAPPED IN ROMANCE

The following day, Akunna and her lover both go to dinner at Chang's. They find the two strips of paper in the fortune cookies presented to them at this Chinese restaurant blank. The blankness and the lucklessness they experience with the fortune cookies, according to Chinese tradition, can be symbolically interpreted in connection with their first dinner together. By highlighting it, Adichie endeavours to symbolically connect it to the disparity and incompatibility in their relationship.

She feels comfortable when she talks with him about her interest in watching the American quiz program "Jeopardy" on the restaurant TV and ranking the contestants in the order of women of colour, black men, and white women, before, finally, white men while applauding for them. She means that she would never root for white men. His response to her stand about white men sounds pragmatic. He means that, while his mother is a teacher of women's studies, he knows what women are like and does not bother about being cheered at by them.

Akunna portrays her home environment with reference to the road situation in Lagos on rainy days.

"The traffic was heavy, the traffic was always heavy in Lagos, and when it rained it was chaos. ... The roads became muddy ponds and cars got stuck and some of your cousins went out and made some money pushing the cars out." (Adichie, 2009)

In this way, Adichie portrays the poor condition of the city. While recalling how it affected her family, she narrates to him in intimate terms, how she has started loathing his father, referring to a sad day in his life, who used to be "a junior driver for a construction company". That day when it is raining heavily, her father drives his "rickety Peugeot 504" with a "rust-eaten hole in the roof" which allows streams of rainwater in. Distracted by the swampiness on the road, her father loses control of his car. It collides with a wide and dark green foreign car, "with golden headlights like the eyes of a leopard". On seeing the damage caused to the expensive-looking brand-new car her father starts to cry and beg, even before its owner gets out of it, and lays himself flat on the road, causing a noisy traffic jam. "Sorry sir, sorry sir," he chants, "If you sell me and my family, you cannot buy even one tire on your car. Sorry sir." The way in which her father pleads with the car owner implies that Akunna's family is

extremely poor. While the Big Man in the hind seat remains silent, his driver comes out, examines the damage, cunningly enjoys the surrender of her father besmeared with mud, waves him go, and leaves. Ashamed of what happened in the eyes of many, Akunna interprets her father's performance there as pornography. When her father returns to the car, he appears to her *nsi* (shit), like a pig that wallows in the marshes around the market. The man's reaction to the story is quite sober. Very ironically, his sympathy for her feelings does not boost her morale, rather it provokes her anger. Mistaking his empathy for naivness, she tells him that there is nothing to understand but that is how the world works. What Adichie conveys here is that the man does not change her attitude toward her because of her pathetic past conveyed in the story. In a way, Akunna, still sceptical about his love, tests him with this type of appalling narration. She is irritated by his sense of equanimity which is not perceived in her domain where people fight each other for material acquisitions.

INTERCULTURAL THREATS TO COEXISTENCE IN AMERICA

Once Akunna has accepted him as her lover, the American becomes unimaginably generous to her. Having found the African store in the *Hartford Yellow Pages*, he drives her there. There he confirms with a smile that he is a white African naturalised to America to the Ghanaian store owner who is surprised by his familiarity with African palm wine. At home, his long-term orientation to American food culture causes his system to react negatively to the African specialities *garri* and *onugbu* soup, cooked that evening. He throws up in her sink. He abstains from eating, admitting that he did not approve of the method of slaughtering animals by means of injecting fear toxins into them. His explanation is that fear toxins make people paranoid. On hearing that, she keeps quiet about the large pieces of meat her mother cooks in Nigeria with MSG-based *Dawa Dawa* cubes that substitute for the expensive natural spices.

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a flavour enhancer often added to restaurant foods, canned vegetables, soups, deli meats and other foods. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has classified MSG as a food ingredient that's generally recognized as safe. But its use is still debated. For this reason, when MSG is added to food, the FDA requires it to be listed on the label. (Zeratsky, 2023)

The American sounds specific about what he eats. He claims that MSG causes cancer. Then he justifies his choice of Chang's with the fact that Chang does not cook with MSG.

Once at Chang's, he speaks some Mandarin to a waiter, telling him that he recently visited Shanghai. There he does not react to the waiter's speculation that he has a girlfriend in Shanghai. The conversation between him and the waiter gets registered in Akunna's memory. It causes some

emotional issues for her. She loses her appetite in a state of being deprived, scandalised, and deceived. As a result, she feels a contraction in the lower depths of her chest. That night, during their sexual intercourse, she does not scream in response to his penetration of her vagina and tactfully pretends not to have received any clitoral stimulation or reached any orgasm. Later she explains to him why she remained non-cooperative in coitus that night. However generous and loving he has been, she is worried because the Chinese man does not assume that Akunna could be his girlfriend, and the American has not said or done anything to nullify his position. The American apologizes to her for causing her agony. His blank gaze at her means nothing to her but only his lack of understanding of female sentiments. Overall, what is obvious in this scenario is a clear cultural disparity between the two of them. Generally, the Nigerians are explicit in every sense while the Americans are subtle. When it comes to Akunna and her lover, she is emotional and extroverted, and he is impassive and introverted.

EXPOSURE TO AMERICAN CULTURE

The first thing she realises about American culture through her lover is the exorbitant prices the Americans pay on exotic presents which have no relevance to their real-life needs. She finds them only mystifying her. The fist-sized glass ball that one shakes to watch a tiny, shapely doll in pink spin around, the shiny rock whose surface takes on the colour of whatever it touches, and the expensive hand-painted Mexican scarf, are some of the items that irritate her rather than please her. Her negative remarks on them have no impact on him at all. He only laughs "long and hard" when he hears her ironic comments on them. By and by she realizes that, in his life, he buys presents that are just presents and nothing else, nothing useful. He even does not check her likes and dislikes when buying clothes, books, etc., and she keeps them all to distribute among her cousins, uncles, and aunts, one day she manages to fly home. Ironically, he spends so much money on presents despite his knowledge that his grandfather in Boston who had been wealthy has lost a significant slice of his trust fund by giving away presents. In a market economy, most people are affected by various items that emerge in terms of fashion. So frequent purchases of presents are a symptom rather than a character trait in American culture. The competition urged thereby is one symptom of the American dream.

In her subconscious, the American appears to be a flamboyant philander. So, she does not endorse the trip to Nigeria that he wants to make in her company. Her idea is to prevent him from "gawking" at the lives of the poor people there who cannot in return gawk back at his life because of their poverty. Gawking means "to look at something or someone in a stupid or rude way". She presumes that, like those fancy gift items he buys, he tends to collect fancy experiences of people's lifestyles by unduly goggling at them. They openly argue

with each other about his tendency to be "self-righteous" while walking along the calm water at Long Island Sound. When she points it out, he denies it. What she implies is that he enjoys seeing the poor in their poverty-stricken status. In the same vein, she projects her criticism of his acceptance of only the poor Indians in Bombay as the real Indians. In the meantime, she wonders subliminally whether he meant once he was not a real American because he is not like the poor fat people seen in Hartford. They both, bare-bodied now, calm down in a romantic embrace of each other in the sunny open air and make love in deep silence in terms of reconciliation. Adichie implies their ethnicity through the texture of their hair, "his soft and yellow like the swinging tassels of growing corn" and hers "dark and bouncy like the filling of a pillow" that they run their hands through. In exposure to too much sun, his skin turns the colour of a ripe watermelon, and she kisses his back before she rubs lotion on it.

The thing that wrapped itself around your neck, that nearly choked you before you fell asleep, started to loosen, to let go. (Adichie, 2009)

While coming to terms with her American lover, despite all his disagreeable peculiarities, she feels relieved of her depression. She finds a companion at least to fight with. She is relaxed. She integrates herself into the American culture and leaves behind her Nigerian mindset. She has full exposure to the fundamentals of American culture through her American lover whom she has observed carefully during her association.

PUBLIC RESENTMENT AGAINST BLACK-WHITE INTERRACIAL COHABITATION

A typical sociological survey arises from the people's reactions Akunna and her American lover face in public. On one side, old white men and women muttering and glaring at them, black men cynically shaking their heads at Akunna, and black women apathetically pitying and loathing her under the impression that she has no self-esteem altogether torture her feelings in an explicitly negative light. On another side, black women smiling contemptuously swift solidarity smiles at Akunna, black men threatening her American lover with a provocative "hi", and white men and women hypocritically vociferating their sarcastic remarks about the couple in sweet terms such as "What a good-looking pair" do the same but in an implicitly negative light.

Like the prevailing experience of American-born black people, the best explanation for this disparity is the fact that these immigrants are black. When they arrive in the United States, to the broader society, black immigrants lose their individual and national identities. They are no longer Ghanaian, South African, Jamaican, Haitian, or Nicaraguan. They are simply black and, in this society, their lives do not matter. (Neal, 2020)

Adichie puts in effective terms how their behaviours towards them reflect on them.

You knew by people's reactions that you two were abnormal—the way the nasty ones were too nasty and the nice ones too nice. ... as though to prove their own open-mindedness to themselves. (Adichie, 2009)

The implication is that the American public is not different from the others on the scale of parochialism. Although they undermine the other communities in the world considering them as not sophisticated as they are in their thinking, they are no different from those fishmongers in Nigeria. The American dream that raises hopes about living an individualist life gets shattered under this kind of unnecessary interference in the black-white couples living together.

CATHARSIS UNDER AMERICAN PARENTAL LOVE

Akunna's American lover does not limit their relationship to his private life. He confides about her to her parents and introduces her to them in good faith. They don't care about Akunna's complexion but welcome her to the family as any other girl. The American's mother's revelation that her son has "never brought a girl to meet them" and his facial and physical gestures confirm it should elevate Akunna's ego in some way as it helps resuscitate her self-esteem amidst the hostilities she faces in public. However, despite the squeezes they secretly exchange with each other, in her subconscious, she has a query as to "why he was so stiff and why his extra-virgin-olive-oil-coloured eyes darkened as he spoke to his parent." (Adichie, 2009) The topics his parents chat about with her suggest that they are interested in other cultures. The Nigerian author Nawal el Saadawi and the Nigerian opinion about Indian food are harmless topics that provide good material for chit-chat. "You looked at them and felt grateful that they did not examine you like an exotic trophy, an ivory tusk." (Adichie, 2009). She is relieved in their company as she is free from all those cynical remarks she is supposed to hear in the streets. He complains about his parents that they do not give him as much money as he wants because he did not fulfil their wish that he goes to law school and relates his refusal "to go up to Canada with them for a week or two, to their summer cottage in the Quebec countryside". The pictures of their cottage he shows to her amaze Akunna because in Nigeria it can be compared to a bank or a church because of its size. She sides with his parents here because of her Nigerian upbringing where children are supposed to obey their parents. When she hears that her visit to his parental home is his parents' idea, she becomes clear of the long-prevailing doubts and suspicions of him. In her regret, she symbolically drops a glass on the hardwood of his apartment floor to repulse her agony. Adichie symbolises her shame about her own limitations.

"Later, in the shower, you started to cry. You watched the water dilute your tears and you didn't know why you were crying." (Adichie, 2009)

Adichie presents her catharsis in graphic terms, illustrating how her emotional regrets get washed away along with her tears under the shower to ensure her physical as well as emotional ablution. Irrespective of their ethnic difference, she finds in the parents of her American lover people like her real parents and is confident that in her relationship with her American lover, his parents will stand by her as they are genuine people. So, the catharsis she achieves by crying away her tears in a comforting hot shower would last long because of the relief she feels after it.

RETURN TO NIGERIA FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Having found a job to do, a lover to associate with, and two parents to look up to, Akunna writes home a letter as usual to accompany a stack of crispy dollar notes, but this time with a return address. She receives a reply by courier. It is from her mother. Details of the text such as "the spidery penmanship" and "the misspelt words" suggest that her mother is not like the educated mother of her American lover. She is basically illiterate. The information is mainly about her father's death in a car accident five months ago and his funeral. It strives to acknowledge how the money became useful in burying him in a decent coffin and giving the guests a meal with mutton from a goat killed at home. No sooner than she finishes reading the letter, the thing that used to be around her neck suddenly emerges and muffles around her neck again. Seated in bed, in a curled-up position with her knees pressing her chest, she starts walking down memory lane, to figure out where she should have been when her father died five months ago. She cannot determine in what state she spent the moments of his death. She is not sure whether it was when her whole body had been covered in goosebumps, or when she took a drive to Mystic watched a play in Manchester or had dinner at Chang's. She bursts out sobbing and crying. Her American lover keeps company with her. Trying to pacify her, he holds her while she cries, smooths her hair, and offers to buy her a ticket and to fly with her. She discourages him, saying that she wants to go alone. He asks whether she would come back and reminds her that her green card would expire if she did not within a year. He reiterates that she should come back.

You turned away and said nothing, and when he drove you to the airport, you hugged him tight for a long, long moment, and then you let go. (Adichie, 2009)

Adichie writes the concluding sentence to dramatise their separation at the airport. The "tight and long" hug between them allows them to feel how each other's pulse works deep in their blood veins. Although it is not stated, there is a clue about her return because they look to be inseparable.

CONCLUSION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie narrates her entire story in the second person although it is meant to be a first-person narrative. By adopting the second person to represent herself, the protagonist Akunna tries to sound intimate

with the reader. Thus, while simulating an informal live conversation conducted in intimate terms, the second person pronoun "You" is used here instead of "I" to introduce Akunna. "You" can be obviously applied to Akunna as well as everybody or anybody else, in general. Thereby, Adichie confers on Akunna, an identity representative of all Nigerians or Africans in America. While analyzing the short story from a socio-psychological perspective, the discussion conducted through the 15 sub-sections culminates with an emphasis on Akunna's success with her white American lover and his family. Although, towards the end, it talks about death, bereavement, and separation, it raises hopes in the reader that they may meet again as Akunna's American lover consoles her in a generous way and reiterates that she should come back to America before her American visa lottery expires. Thus, Adichie does not paint a totally dark picture of America concerning Black immigrants there. The story is an eye-opener on the challenges black people have in America as immigrants. Certain sections in the discussion contain adult language with sexual connotations because of the requirement to demonstrate how depression interferes with sexuality. In an effort to treat the author's representation in explicit terms, it is difficult to avoid such language. In a reader-response approach, the reader should digest the text with its full meaning. Therefore, the paper thereby attempts to do justice to the contents of the story.

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