



**AN EXAMINATION OF WOMEN’S VOICES IN CHIMAMANDA
NGOZI ADICHIE’S “THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK”**

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DECLARATION

I, CHRISTY AISHA OLORUNFEMI, hereby declare that “Voices of Women in Chimamnda Ngozi Adichie’s The Thing Around Your Neck” is entirely my own work, that all the sources that i have used have been properly referenced and that i have not previously submitted any part of dissertation at any other University for a degree.

Christy Aisha Olorunfemi

_____ Date _____

As the candidate’s supervisor I, DR. JANET MUTHUKI, have approved this dissertation for submission.

Dr Janet Muthuki

_____ Date _____

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's female character portrayal in her first short story effort, *The Thing Around your Neck*, an anthology of twelve short stories. The study offers an insight into a variety of female characters taken from the author's short stories. These characters, after being contextualized within a patriarchal society/environment, are analyzed in terms of gender subjugation and marginalisation vis-à-vis an African Reformist Feminist reading to explore and analyse a variety of Adichie's portrayal of female characters in the text and to ascertain how the author equips and empowers her females to fight and overcome subjugating situations and attain their liberation and freedom. The study further employs the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis model to examine the ways in which the author resists sexism in literature through her writing and her attempt to increase the awareness of the sexual politics of language and style in writing. The study also identifies and critically explores the strategies adopted by Adichie's female/women characters in the society to involve the men in their women's emancipation. This analysis justifies the author's aim to involve men as partners in the women's quest for freedom and emancipation in the development of the Nigerian society in particular and Africa as a whole. Also, possible symbols or connections to recent African history are examined in order to give domestic stories a larger meaning.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

In October 1985, the Michigan State University organised and held a conference entitled “The Black Woman Writer and the Diaspora”. A special issue of *The Black Scholar* published a selection of the presentations made at this conference which Glenna Hill introduces thus: One of the most dramatic changes in the literary world over the last decade has been the blossoming of a large corps of female writers, poets, critics. It is not that black women writers did not exist prior to this period, but historically, the black literary scene been predominantly a male preserve. On the one hand, a white male dominated publishing industry had not seen fit to publish the works of black women writers; and on the other hand, even among the black intelligentsia, only the male articulation of black experience had been viewed as worthy of literary expression. However, in conjunction with the growth of a movement for women’s liberation, this situation has dramatically been reversed in recent years and black women are currently making a valuable contribution to the United State literary landscape, bringing their own experiences as women to life in form of exciting female characters who confront not only a racist world, but a sexist one. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) points out how these changes which Hall (1985) alludes to above did not just magically happen. Rather it came about as a result of the voices of Black women/feminists in America who had raised their voices in protest against what they considered to be the politics of exclusion, bigotry, and homophobia of a predominantly white, middle-class feminist movement.

According to Nfah-Abbenyi, (1997) “these Black women/feminists sought to speak out and bring their own stories to the fore front, to express their points of view (black) of women’s culture on black women’s silence. They rejected the hegemonic and totalizing conceptualisation of “woman” by Anglo-American feminists, as well as those presented by African American men, who always claimed to speak for all Negroes and in so doing subsumed or erased the black woman’s voice. Black feminists defined and redefined the marginal position of black women as

characterised by double jeopardy, multiple jeopardy, and multiple consciousness. They called for the upliftment of black people by rejecting and combating the existent stereotypes of black women, as well as the privileges enjoyed by black male authors within the androcentric African American literary tradition. They suggested that black women bring to their work a critical self-consciousness about their position as defined by race, class, and ideology. They rightly noted the exclusion of black women writers by black feminist critics both in publications and in the classroom, insisting that not only should black women writers be read and taught, but that they must also be studied. From a feminist perspective, these women by so doing articulated the need for critics to value black women's writing. Black women's writing has thus gained a lot of grounds in academia and within (feminist) literary studies. Regarding the neglect of African women's writing, Nfah-Abbenyi emphatically points out that female African writers have had to endure the above kinds of exclusions and contempt from a male-oriented African literary scene.

The study of African literature has long been the preserve of male writers, and despite the enviable position occupied by women in the Oral Arts, African women writers and even post-feminist movement had not received the attention they deserved, as the male voice continued to be the dominant one. Brown (1981) best expresses that the dilemma of women writers' interest in African literature continues to grow and there is every reason to believe that the African writer will be heard and studied for a long time to come, as artist, social analyst, and literary critic. But in all of these, African literature has to be understood as a literature by African men, for interest in African literature, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded a space in the repetitive anthologies of the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have found significant space or time for African women writers. The ignoring of African women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless and a rather unfortunate one at that" Nfah-Abbenyi(1997) however points out also how a number of reasons have been proffered to justify why African women writers have generally been ignored, excluded, and or forgotten. One of the major reasons suggested for this exclusion is African women's late arrival on the African (written) literary scene. While other reasons according to Nfah-Abbenyi (1997), include African family systems, marriage customs, and the system of formal education that for a long time was the sole preserve of African men; African

men were the first to be educated, they were the first to write while fewer women were sent to school and still fewer women obtained the university educations that have “traditionally been the prerequisite for writing of African literature in European languages” (Brown 1985: 4).

Female authored texts offer self-images, patterns of self-analysis, and general insights into women’s world ignored by male/colonial writers. Aidoo (1996) submits that “Women writers write about women because when women wake up in the morning and look in the mirror they see women (P.163). Similarly, Dangaremba (1988) says that female writers bring into focus their femaleness/femininity in their narratives and in doing so highlight power differences between men and women. As a result, women scholars and activists have pioneered intellectual revolution built on sexual politics aimed at stamping gender and feminism into both criticism and its philosophical appendage– theory, replacing a tradition that is masculine and domineering. Showalter (1985) maintains that gender has become an analytic category whether the concerns are representation of sexual difference, (re)shaping masculinity, building feminine values or exclusion of female voice from the literary canon.

Several African female writers such as; Nwapa (1966), Emecheta (1981), Dangaremba (1988), Mugo (1988) and Aidoo (1977), among others, have written stories seeking to expunge women’s marginal position(s) and thus their texts are “spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate” (P.150) as opined by Nfah-Abbenyi (1997). In line with this, D’Almeida (1994) considers writing by women as a “weapon to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality”. In contemporary writing, African women wrestle with those problems that confront women and also shape the continent. Adichie is one of such writers; the latest Nigerian female writer to make a mark in the African literary scene and to win several international prizes within a short time. Adichie is regarded as a great artist chiefly in her art of character portrayal. It is observed that she, through her novels, is involved with the upliftment of women who are terribly suffering, highly oppressed by a social or marital disharmony. She is very sensitive and sincere which compels her to study women and their reaction to the various social, political, and cultural contexts under which they are struggling in their destitute condition. Adichie is a contemporary writer, a dedicated key novelist of international repute and a multiple international award-winner. Her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2007) was on the Nigerian Senior Secondary School Examination syllabus for Literature-in-English from 2008 – 2013, while her second novel *Half*

of a *Yellow Sun* has been adapted into a film by a Hollywood film industry thereby gaining the book more popularity. Adichie has made tremendous contributions to the literary canon as her fictive works deal with the concerns of human society as they affect both genders. She examines the social and economic status of women, championing their welfare in society. Her literary work responds to women's exploitation and marginalisation in society. She highlights the values of women's liberation, personal commitment, and integrity in post-colonial Nigerian society.

This study seeks to place Adichie's *The Thing Around your Neck* alongside those of other African female writers like Ama Ata Aidoo (1969, 1993, and 2002), Bessie Head (1968, 1971, and 1973), Rebekah Njau (1965, 1978, 2003), Mariama Ba (1981, and 1986), Buchi Emecheta (1994),(1984), Flora Nwapa (1966, 1970, 1981, and 1986), and Grace Ogot (1966,1976, and 1989). These authors positively portray the image of African women, calling for their emancipation, liberation, and freedom. In investigating character representation in Adichie's *The Thing around Your Neck*, this work focuses largely on the use of language, gender roles assigned to characters, the identities that are constructed thereafter and the influence culture has in effecting power. This work also looks at women as key participants in society and in relation to their gender subordination and cultural biases. In echoing this point, Boshego (2007) points out that authors have the ability to manipulate their readers in the manner in which they construct characters and, in the process,, play a significant role in upholding certain cultural principles with regard to what and how women and men should enact their roles. The fact that one of Adichie's books, *Purple Hibiscus* once formed part of the curriculum and another one was adapted into a film by a Hollywood film industry, contributed to my choosing her work for this study. The book was mostly used in the past years from 2008 - 2013 by senior classes of Nigerian Secondary Schools as prescribed by the Ministry of Education, thus Adichie's representation of characters must have had tremendous influence on young school children and played a significant role in formulating their knowledge and understanding about values bestowed on male and female characters by the author.

Despite the author's popularity and success, Adichie's *The Thing around Your Neck* has received very scanty critical attention in comparison to her other works. There is a scarcity of scholarly and critical works on *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009). A plausible explanation could be due to the fact that it is Adichie's first short- story attempt after a successful career as a

novelist and is therefore a departure from her usual style. Adichie's fame seems to be tied to her three award-winning novels mentioned above; *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americanah*. As is common with great novelists, little is known of their productive efforts into other literary genres. And this is due largely to the prominence the novel enjoys over and above other genres. In giving the reasons for the enviable position of the novel genre over other literary types, Allwell Abalogu Onukoagu & Ezechi Onyeruanwu (2011) argue that ... "The novel genre, since its entry into the literary scene some two centuries ago, has been consistently viewed as the most intensive and demanding task for literary craftsmanship, owing especially to its volume.... Secondly, no other form of literature captures the experiences of a people in all their socio-political, historical, economic and cultural ramifications as comprehensively as the novel. It is due to this fact that Adichie's novels have overshadowed the short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck* by the same author from prominence despite the beauty, emotional power, story-telling craftsmanship, and penetration, which the short stories share with the novel in equal intensity.

This study was also an attempt at the re-appraisal of the short stories of this internationally acclaimed novelist from a feminist viewpoint, with a view to rekindle the interest of other feminist researchers and scholars in the criticism of the Nigerian short story genre- a task which seems to have suffered considerable neglect. Iheakaram (1990), a short story enthusiast considers this expedient, because to him, "there is at the moment, a scarcity of criticism of the Nigerian short story by Nigerians. The situation is fundamentally attributable to the non-recognition of the short story as a form worthy of serious attention in our educational system" (P.280).

In the stories under study, Adichie thematically touched on gender relations within the family setting, racism, love, religious/cultural conflicts, decay of moral values, and Nigerians in Diaspora – the insatiable desire by Nigerians to live in the United States of America. Therefore, in focusing on Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*, this study also interrogated the stories therein in order to establish the extent to which the author is engaged in centring women's issues as well as those problems that impede the emancipation potentials and empowerment of the African woman, particularly the Nigerian woman. This research analysed the depiction of women in Adichie's short story collection. It seeks to examine how Adichie restructures the image of women in *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Over the last few decades the idea that

postcolonial theory and its praxis have to be appropriated to our cultural needs has gained grounds. And it is in this context that Adichie's short stories were read to understand and appreciate how her narration transcends the boundaries of postcolonial discourse. Her stories not only make "a strongly felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa" (Adichie, *Interview*), but also present an authentic cultural voice which mirrors how we all "share a common and equal humanity."

1.2. About the Author: Relevant Biography

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born as the fifth of six children to Igbo parents, Grace Ifeoma and James Nwoye Adichie, on 15th September 1977 in Enugu, South-East Nigeria. While the family's ancestral village is Abba in Anambra State, Adichie grew up¹ in the university town of Nsukka in Enugu State, where her father became Nigeria's first professor of statistics, and her mother the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria. Adichie moved to the United States at 19 to study communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Adichie is now regarded in the academia as a venerable author who holds higher degrees from John's Hopkins and Yale, as well as a MacArthur Fellowship, commonly known as the "genius grant." Her most recent novel, *Americanah* won the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award in 2014.

Adichie was an early reader. She started reading British and American children's books at the age of four and began to write when she was seven. As a very young writer, Adichie related stories about the kind of characters she knew from Western literature. Her writing changed after she discovered books written by African writers like Chinua Achebe, who has been Adichie's hero and great inspiration. Achebe was a pioneer among African authors who told stories from an African perspective. His legacy has become a source of Adichie's empowerment: "Reading Achebe gave me permission to write about my world. He transported me into a past that was both familiar and unfamiliar, a past I imagined my great grandfather lived. Looking back, I realize that what he did for me at the same time was validate my history, make it seem worthy in

¹ It may be worthy to mention that the family occupied the former house of the internationally acclaimed Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who had been employed as a senior research fellow at the University in the early 1970s.

some way” (Walder 122). Owing to Achebe, Adichie changed her perception of literature and started telling stories featuring characters she could identify with.

Adichie’s writing career began with the publication of collected poems *Decisions* in 1997 and her only play *For Love of Biafra* a year later, at the age of sixteen. In Adichie’s own words the play is “awfully melodramatic” (Tunca online). Irrespective of her teenage years and lack of authentic experience with the war, the author brought the Biafran War into focus. One of the most important factors, which led Adichie to write about this subject, was her personal experience of growing up in the shadow of Biafra conflict. Adichie had always wanted to write about the war both to pay tribute to her grandfathers, who died in Biafra as refugees, as well as to honour the collective memory of the entirety of Nigeria. As many war issues have still remained unresolved in today’s Nigeria, the writer is confident about the importance of history in forming the present. Adichie devoted her following works to the Biafra conflict as well. With her short story *That Harmattan Morning*, she won the BBC Short Story competition in 2002. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* – both the short story (2002) and the novel (2006) – the painful history of Biafra became the central focus and portrayed its disastrous impact on civilian lives. *Ghosts*, a short story which was published in the collection *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009), deals with the disillusionment and political, economic and social changes that have taken place since the dissolution of the secessionist state of Biafra.

Adichie went on to pursue a bachelor’s degree in communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University, where she graduated summa cum laude. Two years later she completed her master’s degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University and in 2008 she received her second master’s degree in African studies from Yale University. During her senior year at Eastern Connecticut State University, the author started working on her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Shortly after its release in 2003, the book received worldwide attention and wide critical acclaim. This coming-of-age novel was shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and won the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for the Best Debut Fiction and the Commonwealth Writer’s Best First Book Prize. *Purple Hibiscus* is a complex story of national and family oppression, social clashes, old traditional and new modern ways of living and thinking and most importantly, of women’s empowerment in Nigerian patriarchal society. At a young age of 28, Adichie received the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University

during her 2005-2006 academic year, which is designated for writers and non-literary artists of extraordinary promise to pursue independent projects (Princeton University online). The result of this fellowship was the publication of her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which won the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the PEN 'Beyond Margins' Award in 2007. As stated above, the book is set during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70. The historical novel was adapted for the screen in 2013, directed by Biyi Bandele, starring Thandie Newton and Chiwetel Ejiofor (Bradshaw online). Without any considerable commercial or critical success, the film was considered to be overtly didactic and missing the subtle shadowing of the characters present in the book.

In 2008, Adichie was awarded the MacArthur Foundation fellowship, known as a “genius grant”. The promising author won an obligation-free annual grant of \$100,000 for a five-year period, which enabled her to focus solely on her writing (Irvine online). With her short stories being published in anthologies and in British and American journals, Adichie also published the collection of short stories *The Thing around Your Neck* in 2009. In its twelve stories, Adichie explores the ties that bind men and women, parents and children, Nigeria and the United States. This collection is further proof of the author’s extraordinary storytelling powers which Adichie’s idol, Chinua Achebe, described as phenomenal. “We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers” (Premium Times online, 2010)). Yet, another fellowship (this time sponsored by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University in 2011-2012) enabled the young writer to finalize her third novel, *Americanah*. The book was published in 2013 and received a number of highly regarded prizes including the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction and the *The Chicago Tribune* 2013 Heartland Prize for Fiction. Furthermore, it was selected as one of *The New York Times’s* Ten Best Books of the Year. The novel concentrates on a pair of young lovers, who both migrate but are torn apart by the injustice of the immigration policy and whose experiences abroad differ considerably. *Americanah* is in the words of its author “an old-fashioned love story” and focuses on issues such as love, race, identity and most importantly, hair (Kellaway online, 2013). In the writer’s own account, hair matters and is a political thing because people make assumptions based on different styles of hair.

Concerning her recent work, Adichie's live performances at TEDx² Talk events were highly significant. In 2009, Adichie gave an influential speech entitled "Danger of a Single Story", where she drew the audience's attention to the risk of critical and cultural misunderstanding issuing from the lack of knowledge, the lack of multiple stories: The author relates the danger with the single story of Africa. It is necessary to break of the clichés and stereotypes in order to find out that there is more than one narrative of Africa. Adichie points out that people should seek diverse perspectives in various stories (Yee online). The author highlights that Africans themselves should write their own stories, not let the West to do so. Adichie is also skeptical about Westerners who come to Africa to solve their morality issues and celebrities who try to save it from poverty: "What I find problematic is the suggestion that when, say, Madonna adopts an African child, she is saving Africa. It's not that simple. You have to do more than go there and adopt a child or show us pictures of children with flies in their eyes. That simplifies Africa. If you followed the media you'd think that everybody in Africa was starving to death, and that's not the case; so, it's important to engage with the other Africa".

Apart from essays published in newspaper, magazines and journals, Adichie published one of her speeches from TEDx in a book under the title "We Should All Be Feminists" (2014). In *We Should All Be Feminists* Adichie discusses the subject of gender equality and explains why the chasm between genders and their subsequent discrimination is harmful for both sexes. At the same time, she suggests a new unique definition of twenty-first century feminism: "Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes" (Merriam-Webster.com 2018) This was the definition she had found when she looked up the word "feminist" for the first time at the age of fourteen (14), after a friend of hers had referred to her as a feminist. (Adichie, TEDx online, 2015). During her monologue, the author confidently states that she decided to call herself a "happy African feminist". According to Rupert Hawskley, a journalist from The Daily Telegraph, *We Should All Be Feminists* might be the most important book of that year (Hawskley online).

Adichie is married to Dr. Ivara Esegie and divides her life between the United States and Nigeria, where she teaches writing classes. Her heart still belongs to Nigeria for she articulates:

² TEDx is a non-profit organization devoted to spreading ideas in the form of powerful talks, covering topics from science to business to global issues.

“I belong there and the reason I care about it is that I belong. It’s very important for me to matter in Nigeria, to make some sort of difference. I want people back home to read my books, for women to feel empowered by them, and for people to be inspired to be writers”. Although married, the author insists to be addressed as Ms. instead of Mrs. Adichie. In her opinion it is responsible that people be called what they want to be called.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents a fresh female voice from Nigeria, whose work presents a fusion of tradition and modernity. As previously stated, Adichie refers to the work of her male predecessor Chinua Achebe and “continues his practice of writing as an Igbo and a Nigerian, while maintaining thematic lines of conversation with the United States”. It is important to note, however, that Adichie does not merely carry on with Achebe’s story-telling tradition, she extends it and takes new and interesting directions (Andrade, 1992). Adichie connects various dichotomies such as traditional Igbo beliefs with Christianity, Igbo with English language or traditional village life with modern city life. However, the author is not prejudiced in favour of one or the other, but she sees the strength in binding both tradition and modernity.

Adichie tells stories based on her own personal experience and enables readers to see Nigeria from a totally different perspective than they would expect from a Nigerian novel. In her work she often portrays privileged female characters, who are educated, strong, independent and confident, which is a quite unusual representation of an African woman. Adichie’s background is significant because it is reflected in her work to a great degree and enables the author to describe Nigeria from a dual perspective. As a Nigerian Igbo from a middle-class intellectual family with strong ties to the rural life of her ancestors, she is able to observe Nigeria from the inside, and as a US immigrant, the author can describe her homeland from the outside. One of Adichie’s essential themes is immigration, as she experiences the US way of living both as a black Nigerian and a migrant. Adichie’s characters often stand between two continents, as the author herself does. She started to realize her identity only after she moved to the USA - to be spoken down to by white people because of her skin colour or to be told what her country is really like. However, she loves the USA and she is grateful for the education she received there. She would never be as empowered as she is now if she stayed in Nigeria.

1.3. Statement of the problem

This study aimed to investigate female character representation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009): a collection of 12 short stories. The work examined largely the female characters' use of language, gender roles assigned to them, the identities that are constructed thereafter and the influence culture has in effecting power. The study also sought to bring Adichie's short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck* to focus by interrogating the stories therein in order to establish the extent to which the author is engaged in centring Nigerian women's issues and those problems that impede the emancipatory potentials and empowerment of the African woman, in particular, the Nigerian woman.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Investigate female character portrayal by Adichie in the short story collection: *The Thing Around your Neck*.
- ii. Critically analyse the subjugation and marginalisation of women as portrayed by Adichie through her female characters in *The Thing around Your Neck*.
- iii. Examine how Adichie challenges the male-centered outlook of authors historical presentation of women in Literature as objects seen from a male perspective
- iv. Identify and critically explore the strategies adopted by Adichie's female characters /women in the society to involve the men in their women's emancipation.

1.5. Research Questions

- i. How are female characters portrayed by Adichie in the short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*?
- ii. How does Adichie analyse the subjugation and marginalisation of women through the portrayal of her female characters in her short-story collection *The Thing around Your Neck*?
- iii. How does Adichie challenge/ critique the marginalisation and subjugation/ subjection of women under the repressive and oppressive dominant culture of patriarchy and its institutions?

- iv. What are the strategies adopted or employed by the female characters / women in the society to involve men in their emancipation in *The Thing around Your Neck*?

1.6. Significance of the Study

The study aimed to bring into perspective the short story anthology of Adichie *The Thing Around Your Neck* and to add to the narratives on gender. Findings of this research work aimed to stimulate research interests by future researchers and scholars to the Nigerian Short story genre in order to lend credence to how equally important and rich it is as the novel genre in research.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the nature of the online desktop research, the researcher had to rely heavily on secondary sources of data such as textbooks, journals articles, conference papers as well as a number of unpublished materials, most of which could not be verified.

Another limitation of the study was the inability of the researcher to conduct a personal interview with the author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to gain more of her personal insight on the research, due to the unavailability of funds for travel as well as the limited time frame for a master's degree.

1.7. Structure of the Study

The study comprised seven (7) chapters.

Chapter one contained a general introduction to the study and how the study would be conducted. Such components as background to the study, statement of the research problem, research objectives and key questions, rationale for the study, limitations of the research as well as key arguments or assumptions, were contained in this chapter.

Chapter two presented a detailed review of literature relevant to the research study. It traced and presented the history and origin of women's literature, treatment of gender globally in Africa/Nigeria, portrayal of women in male-authored texts, divergent scholarly views, as well as articles and critical works on Adichie's portrayal of female characters/women in her novels.

Chapter three provided a detailed description of the theories chosen for this study. The broad framework of the African feminist theory/reformist African feminist approach was also presented in this chapter. This chapter supplied information on the strengths and weaknesses of the theory as well as its suitability for this particular research study.

Chapter four looked at the research methods and methodology adopted by the study, including the research design, data collection method and the analysis of the data. It also presented the scope/limitations of the study. As mentioned earlier, a close, critical and evaluative reading, informed by the feminist theory of all of the twelve (12) short stories in *The Thing around Your Neck* was done, the data extracted, presented and analysed.

Chapter five focused on the presentation of findings from the analysis of the text. All the findings were presented here and explained based on the key questions raised. Findings were also outlined and discussed under three (3) major themes:

- i. The portrayal of women in traditional and sexist gender roles; these include: women as sexual objects, women financially dependent on men, subservient to men, as well as women in roles of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters
- ii. Women's strategies in challenging/resisting patriarchal domination such as: pursuing education, career and employment, engaging in same-sex relationships and migration/relocation
- iii. Women working with men in their own emancipation/complementarity.

Chapter Six: Explored the various strategies Adichie equips her female characters with in the anthology *The Thing around Your Neck*. It presented and analysed the various coping strategies employed by the female characters in the anthology to defy, subvert and overcome patriarchal structures and to become liberated and emancipated. These strategies included:

- i. Women involving men in their emancipatory endeavours-complementarity.
- ii. Using writing-literature as a strategy for surmounting and subverting patriarchal domination as well as writing as a strategy of liberation and self- emancipation.
- iii. Engaging in same-sex relations
- iv. Migration
- v. Empowerment and economic independence through the pursuit of education

- vi. Sisterhood and female bonding
- vii. Name change / resistance to name change as a strategy

Chapter Seven Was the concluding chapter of the study, where conclusions drawn from findings of the study were presented as well as the summary of the chapters. The chapter also advanced suggestions and recommendations for further research in related fields.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The chapter offers a review of salient literature on the subject matter under study. In the review of related literature, the chapter presents a brief history of Nigeria's literary tradition as well as an overview of the portrayal of female characters in literature by both male and female Nigerian authors from the historical perspective to the present, which is expedient. This gives an opportunity to establish a pattern of the biased, nuanced, and stereotypical treatment and portrayal of women in literature by male writers and gain an understanding of the general pattern of the treatment of female characters by both male and female writers in their fictional writing. In this manner, the chapter sets the stage for the in-depth analysis that follows, not only by clearly stating the focus of the study for examining women's writing and how it aims at correcting these negative portrayals of women in literature, but by giving women a voice and portraying them in a more positive light. Finally, the research narrows down to an analysis of the available literature specifically on Adichie's works. In this instance, attention is placed on what critics have written on particular works of Adichie to provide grounds for the present study. This will provide an understanding into what other critics/scholars have done in the field.

2.2. History of Literary Tradition in Nigeria

Literary history of Nigeria was basically a part of postcolonial literature which could also be termed as commonwealth literature³, given that Nigeria was one of the commonwealth nations of the world. Commonwealth literature incorporated the study of writers from the predominantly European settler communities, as well as writers belonging to those countries that were in the process of gaining independence from British rule, like those from some African, Caribbean, and South Asian nations. However, the literary tradition of Nigeria did not begin with writings in English. Ernest Emenyonu (2004) states that the first fiction in Igbo language was *Omenuko* by Peter Nwana, published in 1933. This publication not only won large number of literary prizes of

³ Commonwealth Literature was a term literary critics began to use from the 1950s to describe literature in English emerging from a selection of countries with a history of colonialism.

International Institute of African Languages and Culture, but also has a wide readership of children and adult Nigerians. Emenyonu (2004) further relates that *Omenuko* was the only novel written by Nwana and it reads more like a reportage than an artistic piece of work, because it deals with the life and times of Omenuko. Another important novel published in Igbo, was Ije *Odumodu Jere (Odumodu's Travels)* in 1963 (Emenyonu 2004:7-8).

Chinua Achebe took the stories of Nigeria to an international level with his trilogy – *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *The Arrow of God*. Such works by Achebe narrated the damages done to the complex tribal system by the encroachment of the British rulers. Raised by Christian parents in the Igbo village of Ogidi in south-eastern Nigeria, Achebe soon became fascinated with world religions and traditional African cultures, and began writing stories as a university student. It was during his studies at Ibadan that Achebe started becoming critical of European literature about Africa. He gained worldwide attention for *Things Fall Apart* in the late 1950s. His later novels include *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Achebe writes his novels in English and has defended the use of English in African literature as well. In June 2007, when Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International Prize, the judging panel included US critic Elaine Showalter, who said Achebe “illuminated the path for writers around the world seeking new words and forms for new realities and societies”; and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, who said Achebe has achieved “what one of his characters brilliantly defines as the writer’s purpose: ‘a new-found utterance’ for the capture of life’s complexity” Other significant male writers in Nigeria were Chris Abani, a poet and novelist (with prominent works like *The Virgin of Flames* (2007), *GraceLand* (2004), *Masters of the Board* (1985), *Becoming Abigail* (2006), *Song For Night* (2007)); Cyprian Ekwensi (with prominent works like *When Love Whispers* (1948), *An African Night’s Entertainment* (1948), *The Boa Suitor* (1949), *The Leopard's Claw* (1950), *People of the City* (1954), *The Drummer Boy* (1960), *The Passport of Mallam Ilia* (1960), *Jagua Nana* (1961), *Burning Grass* (1961) etc.); Ben Okri (with significant works like *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), *The Landscapes Within* (1981), *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993), *Astonishing the Gods* (1995) etc.); Wole Soyinka (with two significant novels-*The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomie*; plays like *The Lion and The Jewel*, *Death and The King’s Horseman*, *Kongi’s Harvest*, *Dance of the Forests* etc.) ; Amos Tutuola (with significant works

like *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), *The Brave African Huntress* (1958) and many more.

It is important to note that the literary fabric of Nigeria was an effort of not just the male writers, but Nigerian women writers also spun the creative wheel as early as the eighteenth century. The predecessor Nana Asma'ū (Nana Asma'ū bint Shehu Usman dan Fodiyo 1793-1864), daughter of the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usamn dan Fodio, was a groundbreaker for many of her successors because she remains a hallowed name amongst women writers in Nigeria. She witnessed many of the Fulani wars and wrote about her experiences in a prose narrative *Wakar Gewaye* "The Journey" and many other works written in Hausa, Fulani, and Arabic languages. She was an exception as women were lesser known as writers or poets because of the patriarchal set up of many states, particularly where women were not exposed much to reading or writing and domestic territory were their forte. Mala Pandurang and Anke Bartels in their book on African women writers, allude that this was chiefly due to the after effects of colonialism, seeing as the access to higher education had for various reasons been mostly limited to boys. As a result men were not only introduced earlier to written forms of fiction like the novel, but also to the respective colonial language, be it English, French, German, Portuguese or any other European tongue, which in turn allowed them easy access to European publishing houses operating in Africa.

2.3. Generations of Nigerian Female Writers

As mentioned in the forgoing section, historically, Nigerian women were not left out of the literary scene. They made tremendous contributions to the country's literary development in all the literary genres. It all began with Flora Nwapa, the first published Nigerian female novelist and the first woman in Africa to have her work published in London. Her first novel, *Efuru* (1966), redefines the place of the woman in the scheme of things and sets the tone not only for her subsequent works, but for those of other female writers like Mabel Segun, Flora Nwapa and Phebean Ogun-dipe. In the 1970s other female writers emerged, including Zulu Sofola, Catherine Acholonu, Adaora Lily Ulasi, Buchi Emecheta, and Zaynab Alkali. Zaynab is the first female writer in English to emerge from the North. She made her debut in 1984 with her novel *The Stillborn*, which was followed by another novel *The Virtuous Woman* (1985), and *Cobwebs* (short stories, 1977).

Her two novels produced in the 2000s are *The Descendants* and *The Initiates*. The new generation female writers have arguably gained more visibility than the old generation, especially writers like Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie. Both the old and the new generation female writers are so dynamic in the sense that they explore not just the feminist aspects, but also engage in issues that are of general concern, such as politics, war, and economy. In spite of the myriad of problems bedeviling the Nigerian literary scene, it could be said of Nigerian literature, that it has indeed come a long way, considering the teeming number of writers that have emerged and the immense achievements of most of the writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Zainab Alkali, Buchi Emecheta, and Adimora-Akachi Ezeigbo. New generation Nigerian writers have equally pushed Nigerian literature to the peak by winning some of the most prestigious literary prizes. Ben Okri won the Booker Prize for his *The Famished Road* (1991), Helon Habila, Segun Afolabi and E. C Osondu, have won the Caine Prize for their *Prison Story*, *Monday Morning and Waiting*, respectively. Like Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also won the Commonwealth Prize for Literature and the Orange Prize for her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which was later made into a movie by Hollywood, thereby gaining the author more fame and recognition. Nigerian feminist literature is divided into three time-periods. The first period, known as the first generation, began with Africa's first female novelist Flora Nwapa (1931-1993) whose literary work re-created Igbo life and customs from a woman's point of view. Nwapa is widely regarded as the first author who tried to develop authentic and individual identities for African women (Wilentz 43). The author devoted her novels *Efuru* (1966), *One is Enough* (1981), and *Women Are Different* (1986) to women's issues as a "pathfinder" (Akung 29) of the Nigerian feminist novel. Nwapa's female characters, although affected by British colonialism, not only seek for acceptance within their society, but also for independence, greater freedom, and full participation in society – their struggle to extend their traditional roles as mothers and wives. However, it is the work of Buchi Emecheta (1944) a second-generation Nigerian Igbo female writer, which became an early inspiration for contemporary Nigerian women writers, and is widely accepted as having established a milestone in African literature. the female characters in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Kehinde* (1994) and *The Family* (1990), do not only "challenge prescribed understandings of their roles as women, wives and mothers, but also womanist representations who achieve their agency, subjectivity, and determination through redefining their responsibilities as women, wives and mothers" (Nadaswaran, 2012, 146).

Whereas the first and second generations turned their attention to the position of women in Nigerian patriarchal society and the effects of British colonialism, the third generation discussed social, political, and economic challenges Nigerian women faced from the Nigerian state since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 (Nadaswaran, 2013). Third-generation Nigerian female writers include young talented voices such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie with her *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) or *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Unoma Azuah with *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) or *Swallow* (2008) or Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005). These young authors reconstruct the former portrayal of women in their stereotypical and subjugated positions. Their modern female characters are educated, career-oriented, and strong-willed, while remaining wives, mothers and daughters. Third-generation women destroy the usual stereotypes that a woman's place is at home. According to Koziel (2016) in an article titled: *The Afropolitanism and Portrayal of Women* in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story anthology of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, "ways of seeing and reading about contemporary Nigerian women up to the beginning of post-colonial discourse were dominated by meta-narrative of the lack of rights, neglect, on one side, and over-expressed sexuality on the other. Going further, Koziel (2016) reveals that the roots of this stereotyped metanarrative are to be located on the tenets of colonial writings, when the problems facing women were conceived as being less important or completely omitted. However, changes starting from the 1960's saw the emergence of several female writers (a vast majority from southern and eastern Nigeria, such as Flora Nwapa, and Buchi Emecheta) who consciously distanced themselves from the project of misrepresentation of women in popular literature. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is endorsed by Koziel (2016) as one of those writers concerned with 'nomadism, exile, displacement, and deracination', who emerged from an acclaimed third generation Nigerian female writers. The attention paid to Adichie's notable works explore the critical reaction to portraying Nigerian women (especially Igbo women) within fictional narrative forms and broad-based African feminism, which also includes diasporic African women's writing.

The collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), which consists of 12 short stories earlier published in magazines and journals, depicts the recent lives of Nigerian women in Nigeria and the United States of America. It explores the recurrent themes of family relations, gender issues, history, diasporic living/identity, migration, inheritance laws, racism, love, culture conflicts,

youthful exuberance and recklessness, religion, corruption, the Nigerian Civil war and experiences, corporate prostitution and many more. The stories, which are set in Nigeria, for instance, Nsukka in the Eastern part of the country, reveal the narratives of women who often find themselves at ambiguous and complicated moments of crisis, revealing their exploited and neglected status. The range of concerns interwoven in the stories are wide just like those set in the United States, where female characters struggle to reconstruct their identities in a new cultural and political setting, an example being the young girl in the *Arrangers of Marriage* who just entered into an arranged marriage with a New York based Nigerian doctor. Firstly, several of her stories uncover the cultural, social and racial variety and hybridity by which diasporic women are actively marked. Secondly, they highlight the peculiarities of African communities living in the United States and portray the problems of faced by third-generation Nigerian migrant women as represented in the short stories of *The Thing around Your Neck*. All of the stories have a female narrator or protagonist, focusing on specific experiences with relevance to contemporary gender issues. They are made up of social forms in Nigerian (Igbo, Hausa Yoruba) and American cultures and interlaced boundaries that are entangled in myriad ways in public discourse. In an Interview with Belinda Otis, Adichie explains the issue of gender, stating: “the problem with gender is that it prescribes who should be instead of recognising who we are. Imagine how much freer we would be if we did not have to live under the weight of gender expectations. Culture does not make people, people make culture. A feminist is a man or woman who says there’s a problem with gender and we must fix it”. Gender debates influenced by post-structuralism have given rise to an understanding of the dynamics, complexity and diversity of feminism, which make it necessary to speak of feminisms rather than feminism. This plurality emerges from a wide range of coordinates, with regional differences playing an important role. As a result, in her narratives, Adichie puts forward the model of femininity derived from Igbo culture, with respective portraits of wives and paternal figures, which suggests the writer’s concern about issues of gender and the on-going process of cultural practices on individual women.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents a fresh female voice from Nigeria, whose work represents a fusion of tradition and modernity. As previously stated, Adichie refers to the work of her male predecessor Chinua Achebe and “continues his practice of writing as an Igbo and a Nigerian, while maintaining thematic lines of conversation with the United States”. It is

important to note, however that Adichie does not merely carry on with Achebe's story-telling-tradition; she extends it and takes new and interesting directions (Andrade 2011:92). Adichie connects various dichotomies such as traditional Igbo beliefs with Christianity, Igbo with English language or traditional village life with modern city life. However, the author is not prejudiced in favour of one or the other, but sees the strength in binding both tradition and modernity.

In an analysis of some of the narrative devices used by Chimamanda Adichie in her short stories: *The Thing around Your Neck*, Dr Jennifer Minter points out how many of the stories in the anthology explore a generation of Nigerians whose lives have been disrupted by wars and colonialism⁴. The loss of African traditions, exposure to Western lifestyles and values, immigration and globalism present many challenges for Adichie's main characters who are often unable to define and articulate their anxieties and the "thing" around their neck (Minter, 2016). Minter's study is very relevant to this research study in the sense that this study also adopts the Feminist critical discourse analysis approach to analyse some narrative devices pertaining to language use as employed by Adichie in critiquing sexist language in literature from the short stories of the collection.

2.4. Portrayal of Female Characters in Literature by Male African Authors

In a study *Unmasking Racism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, Sajna (2014) writes that the study of African literature has long been the treasure of male writers. Since time immemorial, the African women writers were denied a space in the literary scenario. Several reasons have been offered to justify the absence of female writings. People believed that African women were forced to restrict themselves in household activities and seldom found time to come to the threshold of creative writing. The African women writers undergo gender discrimination and are forced to take up traditional roles assigned to them within patriarchal society. Yet, it is evident that women are now writing about women exploring their own lives and breaking silences. The women translate their "cry" or "drumbeat" into a universal war-cry. African women writers probe into their experience of identity, sexual and racial differences and

⁴ This is because many of her characters have to cope either directly or indirectly with the consequences of the Nigerian civil war and the ethnic conflict also known as the Biafran war, which took place from 1967 to 1970, as well as the brutal regime of Sani Abacha who ruled Nigeria from 1993 to 1998.

subjectivity. Sajna further pinpoints that in most of African traditional societies, women are commonly believed to be inferior to men. They are looked upon as feeble and fragile. African literature like most from around the world portrayed women in various shades, “as incomplete and inaccurate female characters had long littered African works”. This view is consistent with views expressed by other African women scholars, such as Lyonga (1993), Cazenave (2000), and Nwapa (1998), in relation to the gendered representation of women in African men’s writing. African literatures where the female presence is either shrouded in invisibility sunk in voicelessness or confined to symbolic representation. Ogot (1966) further buttresses this point with her concept of the ideal African wife as “compliant and submissive to her husband, clan and community in general, and devoted to non-materialist objective”.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) critically examines the issues of femininity, political affairs and the social transformation of women. She highlights the most outstanding subject of women in the African continent. She reveals her own subject position and those of other African women. Feminist critics such as Ogot (1966 & 1976), Aidoo (1977 & 1989), Njau (2003), Chukwuma (2006), and Ogundipe (2007) among others, are of the view that women are routinely portrayed by African male writers in the stereotype of an “oppressed and subjugated life with little, if any, say in shaping her destiny or changing the system which deprives and oppresses her”. It cannot be denied that most literatures in Africa of the colonial and post-independence eras, are equally guilty of the debasement of the female subject, the sexualisation of women’s roles and the objectification of women’s bodies. With its authorship and readership being almost exclusively male, the literature engenders certain chauvinist attitudes towards women. It surfaces as a prototype of the male literary tradition in African fiction which, as Stratton shows to have many characteristic features, including:

“the portrayal of women as passive and voiceless, images that serve to rationalize and therefore to perpetuate inequality between the sexes; the romanticisation and idealization of motherhood, a means of masking women’s subordination in society; ... the assignment of different roles in the anti-colonial struggle to men and women – the allocation to the former of the task of mending the breach in the historical continuum and to the latter of embodying African cultural values; the assumption of the primacy of the male subject; the objectification of women; their identification with tradition and

with biological roles; the representation of female sexuality as dangerous...”(Stratton, 1994: 172).

Although Stratton uses mainly prose narratives to illustrate her arguments on the biased representation of women in some African men’s writings, evidence of such bias can also be found in African dramatic literature as noted by Dina Amin (2002: 15). In speaking about Egyptian Drama, he notes that ‘unless the female roles depicted on stage are sacrificing mothers or highly venerated historical and/or religious figures, male dramatists have also perpetually portrayed women as mindless, irrational, jealous, hysterical, materialistic and, at times, downright ridiculous’. In its gendered construction of female characters, Butake’s *The Rape of Michelle* is no great deviation from the kind of Egyptian male-authored dramatic texts Amin had in mind when she made the above statement. This underscores Adichie’s critical rejection of uneven power relations between women and men, and especially so within the context of sexuality. It therefore illustrates narrative modes within the male literary tradition which Stratton describes as working against women. Similarly, Horne (1986) notes: “Women authors explore alternate possibilities for self-actualisation outside the sexual roles that are open to their women characters.” She discusses male portrayals of female characters, arguing that they reflect male formations or misconceptions of female sexuality, forming the impression that women have no identity outside their sexual roles. Beginning with Achebe (1960) and Coetzee (1980), female characters are depicted as: “Defined by their relationships to men; as someone’s wife, daughter, or mother...falling into a specific category of female stereotypes. African male writers portray women as “passive” mothers with neither the personality nor character or problems, accepting their condition and thus exhibiting no spirit of revolt or freedom, they routinely portray “voiceless, resigned and docile women”. Such examples include (Soyinka 1959; Achebe 1960; Farah 1960; and Coetzee 1980).

In *Patriarchal Structures and Female Empowerment in Nigerian and Taiwanese Novels*, Abiodun (2015) highlights the urgent need for a re-examination of patriarchal structures impeding and holding women down in the Nigerian society. He sees the solution as lying not in education alone, but in the re-education of the males towards accepting their female counterparts as equal partners in the task of family and nation building. Adeniji goes further to say, “the key word here is collaboration and not dehumanization of the male by the female” (P.37). Adichie’s

views in *We Should All Be Feminists*, concurs with those of Abiodun. She calls for an unlearning of all socially constructed societal values and a consciousness-raising and education of the men on the true meaning of feminism. In line with this, the American feminist in Stratton (1994), her well-known critical work *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, in a most enlightening dialogue, points out the ways in which the writings of African men have often marginalised women in its representation of African societies from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. In her critique of Achebe (1960) *Things Fall Apart*, Stratton particularly asks the pertinent question: how could things fall apart, for whom they were not together? Stratton shows that in a bid to reinstate the dignity of the African people, Achebe fails to elevate women from their undignified position in his most celebrated novel, because throughout the text women are mostly excluded from the political, economic, and judicial life of the community. Where women happen to feature, their role is so trivialized that its impact is hardly felt (see Stratton, 1994: 25). This point re-echoes how the writer has been criticised for his neglect at representing women as complete characters. Most women in the novel are flat characters who are docile and resigned to the oppressive structures of polygamy. This type of female representation, as Stratton demonstrates, has “constituted a trend within African literary expression which was dominated by male writers throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and even beyond. Most of the canonical African texts by writers such as Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi reveal a male, biased perception of women, as Stereotypical characters abound in these works, as several studies have shown” (Nkealah, 2011) (Boyce-Davies, 1986a on Soyinka; Smith, 1986 on Achebe; Stratton, 1990 on Ngugi). Stratton pertinently asks:

“How could things fall apart for who they were not together”? (Nkealah, 2011)

Stratton is of the opinion that a gendered construction of women within a patriarchal space is central to the male literary tradition and that inevitably places them on the periphery of active politics and that women’s works have for the most part been neglected within critical discourse, are views shared by many other African women scholars such as (Lyonga 1985; D’Almeida 1994; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997; and, Amin, 2002). As stated earlier, the desire to make the female voice a part of the African literary tradition is what has led African women scholars to engage in

that particular aspect of feminist criticism termed gynocriticism⁵. This has culminated in a growing body of writings by women, in both the creative and critical arts, the significance of which lies in its redefining of the African literary tradition by creating space for an African women's literary tradition (Boyce-Davies, 1986b; Andrade, 1990).

Feminist criticism does not necessarily operate from the idea or perception that *only* female writers can write literary texts that project positive images of female experience. It also acknowledges that men have the capacity to write literature that engenders female self-esteem, self-expression and self-fulfillment. An example is Sembene (1962), the Senegalese writer who is reported to believe that 'the degree of emancipation of African women is the mirror and the measure of the general emancipation of Africa from its colonial and neo-colonial fetters' (Pfaff, 1984: 160). South African novelist and dramatist Zakes Mda is reported to see women as 'being at the center of reshaping and rebuilding a post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa amidst a nationalist discourse struggling to articulate an African Renaissance' (Mazibuko, 2009: 116). Therefore, literary texts by male authors which offer unbiased recognition to women's material and spiritual contributions to the sustenance of a progressive and productive society are readily embraced by feminist critics. But the question still remains: to what extent can male writers, record with accuracy, insight and empathy women's experience of patriarchy? It is hard to accept one who has not lived the experience to be able to do so in an unbiased and accurate way. Although these days it is not uncommon to find male scholars involved in feminist studies, however, Stratton (1994) agrees with Heath (1987: 1) that "no matter how sincere or sympathetic men may tend to be towards women, they are 'always in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered'".

From the foregoing, one can deduce that in direct contrast to male writers who portray women as stereotypes, there also abound male writers such as Armah (1968), Sembene (1962) and Ngugi (1967) to mention but a few, who are known to champion the move for the promotion of African

⁵ The term Gynocriticism or gynocritics was coined by Elaine Showalter in the 1970s to describe a new literary project intended to construct "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature". Gynocritics sought to develop new models of female experience to replace male models of literary creation, and in so doing, "map" this territory left unexplored in earlier literary criticisms. Showalter, E., 1979. *Towards a feminist poetics* (pp. 125-43). na.

women and other marginalised groups in the society. These writers also make exceptions by enriching African literature through portraying female characters as strong, courageous, and patriotic, who equally and sometimes even more than the menfolk take part in the struggle for freedom.

African literature like most from around the world, portrayed women in various shades incomplete and inaccurate female characters had long littered African works. African literature like that from the West was initially written by men; educated African men who not only came from a patriarchal society but were educated by colonizers who are themselves from a patriarchal society. Feminist critics such as Chukwuma, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Isabel Hoffmeyer, Flora Nwapa, Anthonia.C. kalu, Ama Ata Aidoo, among many others, believe that women are routinely portrayed by Anglophone and francophone African male writers in the stereotype of an oppressed and subjugated wife with little, if any say, in shaping her destiny or changing the system which deprives and oppresses her. In contrast, Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1967), the internationally acclaimed Kenyan African writer and Human Rights Activist, known to champion the move for the promotion of African women and other marginalised groups in the society, makes an exception by enriching African literature by portraying his female characters as strong, courageous, and patriotic, who equally and sometimes even more than the menfolk take part in the struggle for freedom

2.5. Portrayal of Women in African Literature by Female Authors

The purpose of feminist literary criticism is to interrogate socially-constructed images of women and to propose alternative portrayals of female behaviour. It focuses on the ‘relationship between literature and patriarchal biases in society and on the potential role that literature can play in overcoming such biases’ (Booker, 1996: 89).

The relationship between literature and feminism is explained by Pam Morris (1993: 7) in the following words: It is traditionally believed that creative forms of writing can offer special insight into human experience and sharpen our perception of social reality. Literary texts may provide a more powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the disadvantage of women. In addition, the strong emotional impact of imaginative writing may be brought into play to increase indignation at gender discrimination and hence help to end it. Positive images of

female experience and qualities can be used to raise women's self-esteem and lend authority to their political demands. Feminist critics have looked at literary texts, especially those written by women, with all these possibilities in mind. Morris here shows that fictional writing is one avenue through which women can interrogate the power imbalance that governs relations between the sexes. Fictional narratives can be used to provide positive alternatives to dominant stereotypes of women that tend to infiltrate many cultures from Africa to Asia, Europe to America. Consequently, literature serves as a major outlet by which patriarchal structures that oppress women can be challenged and eventually overturned. Although claims have been made by some scholars that feminist criticism is not about dethroning men, a good deal of it often does exactly this. The target in this case is not men but patriarchy; it is about bringing to the surface those deeply entrenched patriarchal values that constantly force female human beings to play second fiddle to their male counterparts.... Ogundipe asserts that "one of the commitments of the female writer should be the correction of false images of the woman in Africa" (p. 61). She believes this approach will ease the burden of African women. She articulates the liberation of African women, arguing that it is not a kindness to be granted by sympathetic men. She affirms: "It is not the result of humanitarian or compassionate attitudes. It is a fundamental necessity for change, the guarantee of its continuity and precondition of its victory" (1994, p. 161). This highlights the objective of this study, as the analysis of the representation of and the ultimate emancipation of women is captured in the analysis of the female characters in the 12 short stories within this study. Ogundipe argues that "Observing women in their various sites, paying attention to female bonding which is absent from much of the African literature written by men would yield a more correct epistemology of women" (p.11). Part of this study aims to examine the solidarity or sisterhood of the female characters which establishes their bond and illustrates one of the strategies these women adopt towards coping with those patriarchal structures that subdue and oppress them. Therefore, Ogundipe's theory (STIWANISM-Social Transformation in Africa Including Women), brings a useful insight into this study.

Patriarchy is one of the traditional social avenues that undermine women in society. It is responsible for women's victimisation, subjugation and servitude. This study examines patriarchy and how women in the Nigerian Igbo society and in the diaspora have gone beyond it. In the understanding and analysis of patriarchy, this research borrows Kate Millett's theory of sexual politics because it is a very important theoretical precursor for this study. Millett asserts

that most world cultures are patriarchal in nature, with the family being a representative of patriarchy in the society at large. She states:

“The oppression of women is not only economic; that’s just a part of it. The oppression of women is total and therefore it exists in the mind, it is psychological oppression. Let’s have a look at how it works, for it works like a charm. From earliest childhood every female child is carefully taught that she is to be a life-long incompetent at every sphere of significant human activity therefore she must convert herself into a sex object” (1990:8)

Emenyonu’s (2004:7) *New Women’s Writing in African Literature* offers insightful ideas into more recent developments in African women’s writing. He provides a useful theoretical example of examining women writers in the context of the struggle to achieve social change in post-colonial societies. Jones draws attention to the following: “The duty of an African woman writer is to first find an objective treatment of womanhood and the problems of womanhood and to correct the misconceptions about women” (1987:2). One of the objectives of this study is examine how Adichie rejects the subjugation and oppression of women in her short story collection which ultimately aims to correct the misconceptions about women in the Nigerian society through her literature.

In Helen Chukwuma’s critical consideration of the portrayal of women in African literature from a feminist’s viewpoint in her work *Quest for the Rights of Women: African Feminist Theory in Fiction* she writes that: African women have latterly joined with women from other parts of the world in the quest for their rights, opportunity, relevance and recognition. Chukwuma supplies surplus relevant samples of female self-assertion in fiction by select African women which serves to locate the various stages of the feministic encounter. The whole object according to her, is to give women a voice and locus in their own affairs within the marriage institution and in other issues that have a direct bearing on them. Analysing female literary development in Africa from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era and the present time, women writers, beginning with Flora Nwapa, the first published Nigerian and African female writer from 1966 who made women her writing interest and was motivated to correct the disparaging image of women in male-authored novels. She situated her female characters within rural settings with its

“masculine supremacy and dominance where gender roles and relationships were strictly circumscribed by norms and traditions”. Nwapa (1966 & 1970) depicts such women bearing same names as their titles. Nwapa (1981), continues to explore women’s options in the face of subjugation and victimisation in marriage by further highlighting the prominent issue of childlessness in marriage through the protagonist Amaka. Emecheta (1994) presents Adaku who walks out of her marriage because of her insecure position as she has no male child like her co-wife Nnu Ego. Nwapa’s female characters in the above novels and in Nwapa (1986) broke societal norms in a bid to assert themselves. Nwapa and Emecheta advocate for personhood by urging women to break away from subsuming norms and situations in the marriage institution, although they stand the enormous risk of being labelled ‘cultural deviationists’ because the marriage institution is held as sacred to culture, tradition, and religion. These women writers liberated their female characters from the gendered yoke by making them burst forth from the system to freedom. Nawal El Sadawi, reknown radical Egyptian writer raised the bar of women’s liberation still higher and graver. Her protagonists, Firdaus and Zakeyas’ feminist victories were gained through the outright killing of their male oppressors in Sadawi (1985 & 1997). According to Chukwuma, it could be argued here that their actions are justified by the enormity and brutality of their male opponents. Adichie (2003) also quietly ushers in a domestic revolution through Beatrice who slowly and methodically poisons her overtly overbearing husband in order to free herself and her children from this yoke. Emecheta (1983) also shows women’s solidarity through the enactment of a gruesome punishment on Ronje for raping Ayoko. However, Chukwuma sees this as a disturbing streak which prompts one to ask the question whether there are no other avenues subsumed which women can adopt except murder? In order to break away and be liberated, must women resort to promiscuity or sex work? Must acquiring their freedom involve taking a life? If all aggrieved women killed their male culprits, there would be very few men left, if at all any. To Chukwuma, this opens up a new phase in African feminist writing for exploring other options of taking off the yoke of oppression, such as empowerment through education and economic independence. Chukwuma asserts that in women’s quest for rights, the importance of education cannot be over emphasised. It imparts knowledge, discernment, exposure, and self-esteem. Examples include Agnes in Nwapa (1981), and Assatou and Ramatoulaye in Ba (1981). Education is shown to be an enormous leap forward in the path of freedom, independence and empowerment for women in various African nations today.

Another option proffered by Chukwuma is that of space, location, and environment –women removing themselves from their subsuming environment or situation. Women writers make their female protagonists burst/break away from the marriage situation when it becomes too subjugating. Examples abound on this : Firdaus in Sadawi (1981), the protagonist in Adichie (2003), Chinaza in Adichie (2009) “*The Arrangers of Marriage*”, Amaka in Nwapa (1981), Adaku in Emecheta (1994) , Adah in Emecheta (1977) etc.- all take leave of their matrimonial homes, physically and psychologically distancing themselves in order to seek their individuality and self-realization in the wider world.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, literature has been used as a tool for women’s empowerment. The Nigerian feminist novel was created as a reaction to the negative images of women in male-authored works. Nigerian literature was long dominated by male authors such as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, or Elechi Amadi. Nigerian literature, beginning with the pre-independence works like (Tutuola 1952 and Achebe 1958), depict literatures of masculinity; Women did not fit much into the heroic cadre of the society of that time and, therefore, were not subject of literary imagination or creativity. From their exclusively male perspective, the Nigerian woman was often portrayed as a “femme fatale” – such as Ihuoma in Amadi (1966), she was voiceless – like Okonkwo’s wives in Achebe (1958), without power. Apart from that, the Nigerian woman was presented as a mere extension of a man and was defined by her husband. The woman was marginalised and placed in traditional and domestic roles of wife and mother (Tlamková 2016:22). The dismal representation of women in early Nigerian literature is directly linked with the patriarchal nature of traditional societies, in addition to the colonially inspired judgment of the time. Women in most traditional societies were hardly visible, they were restricted to domestic chores and subsistence farming while the struggle for independence spearheaded by men, focused attention on the colonial model of civilization. Western education became the yardstick for measuring civilization and schools then were dominated by males. Nigerian feminist literature has helped to balance the long-time male-dominated Nigerian literary canon. The goal of Nigerian female authors is to liberate the Nigerian woman from patriarchal oppression and to create gender consciousness. Nigerian women writers have enabled their female characters to find their voice and present the world from their unique perspective. Nigerian women writers have enabled their female characters to find their voice and present the world from their unique perspective.

Soyinka (1959) makes a caricature of women by presenting them as foolish no matter their age. However, independence ushered in a new vision and in post-independence novels like Achebe (1977) and Aluko (1970) for example, women are seen to be equally engaged with the men in the pursuit of western education. These writers however only equip the female with just enough education to enable them play the roles of girlfriends or good-time girls. Such stereotyped representations were carried out primarily by male writers who formed the early teachers of literature. Although women played significant roles in history and culture, they were conveniently ignored by male writers of that era and it was not until Nigerian women themselves began in earnest to write the woman's own travails from the point of view of women, did we start to have proper representation of females in our literature. Consequently, works and novels by Nigerian female writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Zainab Alkali, Chimamanda Adichie, and many others, have been an attempt to go beyond literature by male authors like Achebe, Soyinka (to mention only a few) whose works have reduced female characters to stereotypes and who to a large extent have acted as a weapon to challenge male authority and re-inscribe women into authorship. These women writers have often tried to deal with women's concerns in their work of art. Their educational career opportunities and their background experiences have enriched the fictional world. They have invested in themes related to traditional culture and current events, often situating women at the centre of their fiction, and challenging the sexist bias of their male counterparts. This is witnessed in Adichie's narratives in that she goes beyond the society's stereotypes to portray able female characters as strong and assertive. Despite the fact that the Western voice has largely criticised Nigerian feminist novels, feminism in Nigeria differs from the Western brands of feminism to a great degree. The African woman rejects the radical aspect of Western feminists who claim they do not need men. Some of the "militant" Western feminists even encouraged learning to get sexual satisfaction without male counterparts (Akung 2013:32). Nigerian feminists, however, desire "that the man and the woman should be in harmony in the home and in the society at large" (Ogini 1996:15). Unlike Western feminism, Nigerian African Feminism, (Womanism) holds the view that the man and the woman have complementary roles of relationship" (Ogini 1996:16). Moreover, Nigerian "Womanism" does not accept men and women being alone, without children. A man or woman's inability to have children is considered a tragedy and a social failure. On the contrary, western feminism accepts childless marriages (Akung 2013: 28).

Oladele Taiwo (1984) examines the contemporary African female novelists by looking at the common concerns and preoccupations of these women writers through their position as women, and is generally favourable to their standpoint. Taiwo's work has been an important guide for this thesis since it also studies a contemporary female author. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* by Boyce-Davies and Graves (1986) is an attempt at redressing the omission of women from the body of literary creativity, and also expand the interpretation of this whole body of African literary creativity. They examine earlier writings produced solely by men and a more functional reading of the recent inscription by both men and women. Their approach contributes greatly to the analysis of this thesis.

Susan Arndt's *The Dynamics of African Feminism* (2002) offers an analysis of theories of African feminism. She highlights African women writers' focus on Womanism, which acknowledges that while women suffer from sexism, women and men in African societies are both victims of oppressive and corrupt systems, necessitating solidarity and efforts to eliminate inequalities not only for women, but for all people. To a large extent the present study takes the above approach of an analysis of female characters in the text under study and also emphasises the necessity of cooperating the complementarity of both genders. The above approach is relevant to and provides additional information for this research study.

Little's *The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature* (1980) examines the modern-day position of African women. Applying his thought to African women's situation in urban areas provides a literary description of urban African women in East and West African novels. In these narratives, he discusses girlfriends, good time girls, mothers, wives, free women, courtesans, prostitutes, and political women and workers. Though his approach to women is gender-biased, his work is important in the analysis of this thesis in the sense that it offers insight into and supports the position on the biased, stereotypical, and nuanced portrayal of women in literature by male authors. Although these urban women are free from the bondage of traditional roles, independence is a mixed blessing. The approach of Ogunyemi (2007) to women's studies is also relevant to my research. She demonstrates how women are viewed and how they function in critical times. She explains how heritage is passed on, in spite of dismal situations stemming from colonialism, post-colonialism and poverty. This resonates with Adichie's concerns in *The Thing around Your Neck*, in that both women are concerned with a portrayal of how women are

perceived in society and, with a demonstration of how women are able to navigate their ways through the myriad of difficult situations and problems which confront them and their ability to cope with and eventually surmount them. Similarly, Literature is a simulacrum of reality and every work of arts is a product of its social and cultural milieu. Consequently, every writer is a product of his/her social, political and historical environment. In Igbo traditional societies, women face patriarchy. Thus, whether in fiction or otherwise, it was the privilege of men to promote their perspective. Moreover, they convey their philosophy instead of highlighting both theirs and that of women. As a reaction to such a situation, women embrace the art of writing leading to the birth of movements such as feminism. This rings very true and significant to this study as Adichie's aim in some of the stories in *The Thing around Your Neck* is to correct and improve women's living conditions in a patriarchal Igbo society where they are deprived of their rights and liberty. Smith (1986:27) outlines diverse images of women which mirror some of the many faces of Africa and facets of inequality in the colonial era. She looks at creative ways of exploring the female images in African literature. The aim of this study to explore the theme of tradition and culture in several of the stories in *The Thing Around your Neck*, such as *The Headstrong Historian*, *Arrangers of Marriage*, *Tomorrow is Too far*, and *Cell One*, fall within the pre-colonial and colonial times.

FEMRITE writer Lena Ampadu in *A Journal of the Oxford Round Table* uses a cross-cultural analysis of the works of female writers such as Mariama Bâ, Alice Walker and Nozipo Maraire to argue that “women writers of African descent contest the status quo in the cultural, social and political scopes of their communities by using their craft to present women who defy traditional roles and resist structures of oppression” (2007:67). In so doing, they lend voice to women who have long been silenced and devalued. Therefore, it is the view of this study that Adichie is linked to African writers pursuing this mission. Most of the main female characters in *The Thing around Your Neck* are driven by ethical values and social commitment, even though most of them live in diaspora. This shows that modernity and the opportunities it provides women should be embraced.

2.6. Critical Works on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Texts

It is important to note that scholars have examined Adichie's texts from different perspectives. Hence various scholarly and critical works abound on Adichie's portrayal of women in her novels, although in contrast there appears to be a scarcity of critical literature on her short story collection *The Thing Around your Neck*. Critical studies have been conducted on the works of Adichie and understanding these provide grounds for the present study.

In a study titled: *The Female Voice and the Future of Gender Relationships in the Nigerian nation in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun (2007)*, Georgiads adopts the womanist ideas advanced by Ogunyemi (1996/97) and Kolawole (1997) to investigate how Adichie projects the female voice(s) in her writing. Georgiads explores how she, as an African woman writer, suggests a new vision of men and women collaborating in liberation efforts. The study echoes the womanist argument that gender in the African context cannot be treated in isolation as the continent is bedevilled by many other problems. The study recognises the African man as a victim of colonialism and neo-colonialism and strives to end his suffering.

The approach of Ogunyemi (2007) to women's studies is relevant to this research. This is because she demonstrates how women are viewed and how they function in critical times. She explains how heritage is passed on, in spite of dismal situations stemming from colonialism, post-colonialism and poverty.

Katherine Frank, in *Women without Men*, calls for positive representation of female characters, concluding that "we need to turn to the growing number of women novelists in Africa in order to find female characters with a destiny of their own" (1987: 15). This work is also of great value to this study because it provides additional information on the aspects of women's life in general.

Amartey in his Thesis titled: *Articulations of Womanism in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*, carried out a comparative analysis of the two writers. A womanist reading of these texts was undertaken to ascertain their points of convergence and divergence in articulating the womanist theory. The study concludes that while Adichie leans more towards usurping patriarchy as she is more aggressive in the questioning, critiquing, and subversion of patriarchal authority, Emecheta valorises traditional patriarchal society. The study

however, points out that both authors lean towards the ultimate womanist goal of unity and survival of males, females, and children.

Still on the issue of feminism in Nigeria as portrayed through Adichie's works, Fuengyl in her study *A Reformist-Feminist Approach to Adichie's Purple Hibiscus* (2011) adopts the Reformist feminist theoretical framework for her academic quest. The framework reveals that while it remains true that women are oppressed, dehumanized, and face various forms of cruelty at the hands of men, this feminist frame of reference equally recognises certain positive aspects of patriarchal societies that foster peaceful coexistence between men and women. The study also concludes that reformist feminism uses positive male characters to challenge men with oppressive tendencies towards women to change. It regards women as complimentary partners in progress and resolves that the oppression of women by the male folk is to the detriment of the family and society at large. The present study echoes the forgoing, as it also adopts the African Reformist approach to examine character portrayal in Adichie's short story collection to show that while the author portrays female characters, who as Fuangyil points out, are dehumanised and face various forms of cruelty at the hands of men, she equally recognises such men have a tendency to change and come to regard women as complimentary partners in progress.

As earlier mentioned, in comparison to Adichie's novels, there appears to be very scanty critical works on her short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck*. However, a number of previous critics have explored Adichie's portrayal of female characters. In Iorbee (2012), he examines the major themes of the short stories of Chimamanda Adichie, which according to him include Diasporic living, ethno-religious crises, cultism on Nigerian campuses, among others. Findings from the study reveal that Adichie's short stories demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the contemporary Nigerian situation/society. Iorbee acknowledges that she has been able to touch on those issues which scuttle and impede the growth and development of women in Nigeria, including misplaced priorities, religious extremism/sentimentality, military irresponsibility, corruption, and the slavish mentality culminating in the desire to live abroad by every means possible and so on. The study however, concludes that Adichie does not attempt to proffer solutions to the economic, social, and political problems, but merely exposes them for society to correct itself by their representation.

Echoing Iorbee's theme of diasporic living or diaspora, are studies done by Jackson titled: *Transcending the Limitations of Diaspora as a Category of Cultural Identity* in Adichie's *The Thing around Your Neck*; and Sachin titled *Family and Exile in Adichie's The Thing around Your Neck*. Jackson (2012) examines the ways in which these short stories explore the limits of diaspora as a category of cultural identity and move toward a more flexible conceptualization of the impact of globalization on people's sense of themselves and their place in the world. He notes that many of the Nigerian characters abroad in these stories do not really fit into the category of a Nigerian diaspora because of their shifting and sometimes multiple geographical locations. On the other hand, Londhe adopts a psychological approach to analyse the diasporic characters in the short stories and reveals that the *Thing Around Your Neck* is an analysis and study of the psychology of the Nigerian characters in diaspora in which Adichie explores their struggles and hardships. She appreciates their struggles and lauds their determination and courage. The study further states that this short story collection reveals the human desires and unavoidable depressions which binds together the people of the two countries-Nigeria and the United States of America. The findings from Jackson's study concludes that the stories in this collection seem to suggest that although differences of nationality and ethnicity are socially constructed, differences of social class (or more precisely, differences of material wealth) are very real because they are about people's actual material circumstances. While the forgoing studies examined Adichie's thematic articulations in *the thing around Your Neck*, this study aims to examine the portrayal of women in the said author's short stories and how she empowers and liberates them. This study would also build on Jackson's views by further exploring the theme of diaspora or diasporic living. It likewise would examine all of the 12 short stories as the two previous studies - the Nigerian characters in diaspora in which Adichie explores their struggles and hardships, appreciates their struggles, and lauds their determination and courage.

Ordas in a study titled *Submission and Resistance: Archetypes of contemporary Nigerian Women in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and The Thing around Your Neck*, offers an insight into a variety of Adichie's female characters in the novel and short story collection, with focus on "Imitation", "*Jumping Monkey Hill*", and "*the Arrangers of Marriage*". The characters are situated within the context of a postcolonial environment and analysed in terms of gender subjugation, exploring the amount of freedom enjoyed, the liberation opportunities they can access, and finding elements of both submission and resistance in most of them. The study

findings show that many powerful female voices abound in Adichie's stories and these women are taken from the Nigerian reality and as such live in a strongly sexist and patriarchal society. The characters are fluid in their attitudes towards their situations and although they endure abusive situations for a certain amount of time, they usually find an escape route eventually. (Ordas, 2015) This study will also build on Ordas' study by further exploring and analysing a variety of Adichie's female characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck* to ascertain how the author equips and empowers her females to fight and overcome situations of subjugating and attain their liberation and freedom. But while Ordas examined *Purple Hibiscus* and only three of the twelve stories in *The Thing around Your Neck*, this study will examine only *The Thing around Your Neck*, focusing on the entire 12 stories in the short story.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on the general portrayal of women in African Literature from the historical to the present. It looked at the critiques advanced by feminists, which laid the foundations for African feminist women's literature in response to the negative treatment of female characters in literature. Literature reviewed established a pattern of the biased, nuanced, and stereotypical treatment and portrayal of women in literature by male writers. This set the stage for the detailed analyses that followed Adichie's portrayal of female characters in the anthology of *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The analyses clearly presented why the study focuses on examining women's writing and how it aims at correcting these negative portrayals of women in literature. This as noted in the chapter, gave women a voice, thus portraying them in a more positive light. Finally, the review narrowed down to an analysis of the available literature specifically on Adichie's works. In this instance, attention was placed on what critics have written on particular works of Adichie which provided grounds for the present study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

The study is located within two theoretical understandings, the African Feminist Theory and Feminist Discourse Analysis Theory. These theories serve as the frameworks to respond to the problematic in the study. Firstly, the choice of the broad theoretical framework of the feminism theory is informed by the research design, research questions, as well as the research methods and methodology for the study. Secondly, the study deals with gender issues in the fictive work of an internationally acclaimed writer and self-professed feminist; an anthology of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the main thrust of which is to critically examine and analyse the representation, depiction, and portrayal of women characters in the above mentioned text.

3.2. Theoretical Framework Explained

Bezuidenhout (2014: 55) defined theoretical framework as ‘a specific collection of thoughts and theories that relate to the phenomenon that we choose to investigate. It is the conceptual starting point and the frame of a research study’. It is, in essence, using theories or models to explain a study. A theoretical framework is used to shape the scope of a study, provide guidelines through which a study is examined, and identify key variables and points to critical research questions that need responses (Bezuidenhout, 2014).

Research theories are constructed in order to explain, predict, and master phenomena such as relationships, events or behaviour. A theory makes models of generalizations about observations and consists of an interrelated, coherent set of ideas and models referred to as theoretical framework. A theoretical framework of a study is a structure that can support or hold the theory of a research work. It presents the theory which explains why the problem under study exists. Thus the theoretical framework is but a theory that serves as a basis for conducting research purpose. It provides the researcher with a general framework for data analysis.

3.3. Principal Theories upon which the Study is based

This research is guided by the African Feminist theory and the reformist feminist approach.

Feminism, according to Hooks (2006) is said to be the movement to end all women's oppression, social, economic, and cultural disparities of power and rights. Feminism is both an ideology and a social movement. Its most basic definition is that of the belief that women are socially disadvantaged and are not equal to their male counterparts. It also refers to organized movements or actions that promote women's move towards attaining equality with men. Tong (1992) posits that feminist theory is not one but many theories or perspectives that attempt to describe women's oppression, explain its causes and consequences, and prescribe strategies for women's liberation. Kolawole (1992) asserts that feminism could be segmented into four categories based on the understanding of different groups of people.

The first group of feminist are of the view that there should be equality between male and female in the society. The second group contains the followers of Karl Marx, whose point of view is based on the premise that woman could not be independent without societal re-structuring. The third group includes the feminist activists who are against sex discrimination. This group is of the view that "whatever is good for the gander is equally good for the goose"; both male and female must necessarily have equal rights and privileges so that their responsibilities will be the same. They are also known as the lesbianists and are against woman subjugation or submissiveness to man. The fourth group is the African women activists who premise their theory on customs and traditions. They are mostly concerned with the woman rights. Kolawole (1997) opines that womanhood is central and this is neither controversial nor conflicting to the African woman, therefore, they are not seeking to be like men, look like men, or necessarily act like men. As it is known, 'the women's liberation movement emerged in the United States of America (USA) and Europe in 1800, purposely in response to the undue treatment inflicted on women in the society. The American Government intended to silence women and deny them the freedom of speech, while American constitution forbed women's rights. They could not vote or be voted for and could only be engaged in selective jobs. Women were abysmally relegated. The birth of the group Women's Liberation Movement then was consequential to the cause and effect of registering dismay and protest. Similarly, there is no place in other countries of the world, where women do not face challenge(s) in the society. Arthur, (1969) discusses a bit on these

challenges. She asserts that our status as 'woman' has to do with things that are happening to us and women face certain peculiar challenges in the society which men do not face. For instance, rape, polygamy without due information, re-marrying widows, women inheritance, women trafficking, early marriage, ignominious appreciation of women during their menstrual period, domestic officers/parentage, as the core of women's duties and roles for which women are not credited. The issue of change of name from one's surname to spouse's name after marriage and leaving one's parents' house to join the spouse's family is tarnishing women's image. It incapacitates women and renders them toothless without being able to take sole decision or any step or action as they wish against challenges that they face in the society.

Feminism theory has both its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, considering the customs and beliefs of the black race, particularly, the African race, it takes cognisance of the African culture. African feminism does not disregard family affairs and marriage institutions because it runs contrary to the norms and customs of our race. Family affairs and marriage institutions are rather held in high esteem in Africa. Scholars have argued on the marital affairs that motherhood, wife, and childhood status is very much important in the discussion of black race, custom and tradition. This is why Walker (1983) suggests 'Woman Rights' theory in place of Womanism or Feminism, because of the dichotomy between the European and African view(s) or thought(s). The main thrust of feminism lies in its strife to fight for women's rights against oppression, most especially in the area of marriage. The major proponent of this theory sees marriage institution as methodologically oriented, which should be procedurally pursued. Both the male and the female hold the marriage institution in high esteem. Hence, the regard that a wife has for her husband's family and friends is very high.

3.3.1. African feminism/ Reformist Feminist Approach

Steady (1981) defines African feminism as emphasising female autonomy and co-operation; nature over culture; and the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship. She posits that African feminist literature, concerns itself with the liberty of all African people. African feminism came into being partly as a reaction to the perceived exclusion of the experiences of the Black woman and continental African woman by White Western feminisms. This is because the western feminism does not take into account the particular issues black women face at the

intersection of both their blackness and their womanhood. In *White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*, Hazel Carby, notes why white feminism is considered the normative experience of all women. She writes, “History has constructed our sexuality and our femininity as deviating from those qualities with which white women, as the prize of the Western world, have been endowed”.

African feminism was not wholly a reaction to exclusion of Black women from white feminist's vision of feminism, but also, their own ingenuity and desire to create a feminism that embraced their backgrounds and experiences. African feminism voices the realities of women in varying African countries. Arndt (2002.p:32) points out that just as there are diverse terminological approaches to African challenges of gender it is impossible to assume homogeneity of feminism in Africa. The diversity of social realities in the African continent has had a lasting effect on the conceptions of feminism, making it necessary to use the plural with respect to feminism in Africa as well. Nonetheless, there is like a common denominator of African feminism. Corroborating this point, Nkealah says African feminisms “strive to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman within the heterogeneous cultures of Africa”. Arndt further stresses that gender debates influenced by post-structuralism have given rise to an understanding of the dynamics, complexity and diversity of feminism, which make it necessary to speak of feminisms rather than feminism. This plurality emerges from a wide range of coordinates, with regional differences playing an important role Arndt 2002.p:31). Feminisms in Africa, ultimately aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies. At the same time, Africa is not a monolith and so some have critiqued any idea of “African feminism”. There exist differences regionally, ethnically, politically, and in religion, which all work to impact how women conceptualise what feminism and freedom looks like for them. While African women from Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Senegal, for example, will have some commonalities, there will be variations in the way they understand gender and gender struggles. Therefore, these varying cultures alter the way these African women experience the world. Thus, one cannot simply merge all women under an unrealistic expectation of sisterhood, but instead to recognise and respect the differences that exist as a result of these diversities. There is a commonality to the struggles women face across the world since the common factor is male privilege. African feminisms address cultural issues that they feel pertain to the complex experiences faced by all women of all cultures on the African continent. Generally speaking, African feminism gets to the

bottom of African gender relations and the problems of African women - illuminating their causes and consequences - and criticises them. In so doing, African feminism aims at upsetting the existing matrix of domination and overcoming it, thus transforming gender relationships and conceptions in African societies and improving the situation of African women (Arndt 2002 p;33)

Acholonu notes that feminism is useful. “Feminism has as its ultimate goal the triumphal emancipation of the woman as a unique distinct individual with a mind uncluttered by patriarchal beliefs and abusive submission to tradition”. Though the general notion of feminism aims to provide women with political, social, and economical freedoms, it has been criticised as excluding the narratives and experiences of women of colour, especially black women. Because of this perceived exclusion in feminism, Womanism has emerged as the African-American and African variant. Womanism addresses feminism from (1) an African perspective; (2) an African geopolitical location; and (3) an African ideological viewpoint. Womanism is important because it places the feminist vision within black women’s experiences with culture, colonialism and many other forms of domination and subjugation that impact African women’s lives. Womanism “aims at identifying the problems relating to male dominance in society while seeking solutions to women’s marginalisation by looking inward and outward” (1995).

Susan Arndt’s *The Dynamics of African Feminism* (2002) offers an analysis of theories of African feminism. She highlights African women writers’ focus on Womanism, which acknowledges that while women suffer from sexism, women and men in African societies are both victims of oppressive and corrupt systems, necessitating solidarity and efforts to eliminate inequalities not only for women, but for all people. To a large extent the present study takes the above approach of an analysis of female characters in the text under study, and also emphasises the need of cooperation and the complementarity of both genders in the anthology of short stories under study. Arndt (2002 P:32) critiques the existing concepts of gender which she says is realised on the basis of certain paradigms only describe tendencies, and do not necessarily represent obligatory criteria for African feminism. These criteria are clearly mapped out by Arndt to include:

Firstly, the idea of a cooperation or complementarity with men, the affirmation of motherhood and the family.

Secondly, the concern of African feminism with the critique of patriarchal manifestations in African societies in differentiated ways. This means above all that African feminism weighs precisely which traditional institutions are agreeable and positive for women, or at least can or could be, and which disadvantage women so severely that their abolition seems imperative. This careful consideration has much to do with the position of many African feminists that the criticism of African societies inherent in the criticism of African gender relationships weakens Africa's position with respect to the West, as well as African resistance to western cultural imperialism.

Thirdly, African feminism aims at discussing gender roles in the context of other oppressive mechanisms such as racism, neo-colonialism, (cultural) imperialism, socio-economic exclusion and exploitation, gerontocracy, religious fundamentalism, as well as dictatorial and/or corrupt systems. With this approach, African theories of feminism by far exceed even the race-class-gender approach of Black Feminism.

Fourthly, it includes the criterion whereby many African feminists do not leave it at a criticism of patriarchal structures, but also attempt to identify both traditionally-established and entirely new scopes and alternatives for women that would be tantamount to overcoming their oppression. It is impossible to assume homogeneity/uniformity of feminism in Africa (Arndt 2002, P: 33).

Supporting Arndt's fourth criterion, Nkealah in an article titled; *West African Feminisms and Their challenges*, discusses the various forms of African feminisms. First, she argues against Womanism pointing out that it is not part of African feminism, as it pertains to African women of the diaspora and not continental African women. Next she examines *Stiwanism* founded by Omolara Ogundipe- Leslie, which, on the contrary, places African women at the center of the discourse because Stiwanism is deeply rooted in the experiences and realities African women face. Third, she looks at the fact that the criticism of existing concepts of gender is realised on the basis of certain paradigms that only describe tendencies and do not necessarily represent

obligatory criteria for African feminism. This means above all that African feminism weighs precisely which traditional institutions are agreeable and positive for women, or at least can or could be, and which disadvantage women so severely that their abolition seems imperative. This careful consideration has much to do with the position of many African feminists that the criticism of African societies inherent in the criticism of African gender relationships weakens Africa's position with respect to the West, as well as African resistance to western cultural imperialism.

Mina Salami, owner of the blog site MS AFROPOLITAN, in an article titled 7 key issues in African feminist thought, thinks it more accurate to speak of 'African feminisms' than of an almighty 'African feminism'. Pointing out that not all African feminists agree with each other, but respect differences while recognising a common ground is of priority.

Mina goes on to clarify that "African feminists" refers to feminists of African heritage both in Africa and in the diaspora. And that 'African women' refer particularly to 'women of African descent or heritage, whether rural, urban, and of all social classes who live in Africa and across the globe'. Goredema corroborates the above point by asserting that "African feminism concerns itself not only with the rights of women from Africa, but is also inclusive of those living in the diaspora as many of the contributors to feminist literature have often lived "abroad". Therefore, the inquiring minds need not be limited by a geographical location as the name would imply. However, the debates, practices, and implementations are most credibly pursued on the African continent.

This research employs the African reformist feminist approach, to articulate the concerns of Chimamanda Adichie in *The Thing around Your Neck*. An African reformist feminist analysis of the short story collection of this author is justified because African feminism emphasises the basic idea of the survival of both males and females and cooperation and complementarity as necessary to Black/African reformist feminism and this is the stance Adichie takes in *The Thing Around your Neck*.

In an article by Susan Arndt, titled *Perspectives on African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African-Feminist Literatures: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No. 54 (2002), pp. 31-44, the author differentiates three main currents of African-feminist literature, ensuing mainly from

the concrete orientation of the criticism as well as the four paradigms mentioned above within which the critique of gender relations can be. They are:

- i. Reformist,
- ii. Transformative, and
- iii. Radical African-feminist literature.

These currents are nonetheless very heterogeneous; and their boundaries are blurred. Quantitatively, the transformative American-feminist texts are dominant and also much more heterogeneous than the other two currents. In the texts of reformist African feminism, individual, patriarchally-molded attitudes, norms and conventions, both century-old and modern, which discriminate against women and hinder their self-realization, are condemned. As a result, the criticism is only partial, and is usually brought forward in a distinguished way. Reformist African-feminist writers want to negotiate with the patriarchal society to gain new scope for women, but accept the fundamental patriarchal orientation of their society as a given fact. In such texts, alternatives to what is criticised are always discussed and taken into consideration. It is assumed that the society is capable of reform; and in line with this logic, the texts usually have a conciliatory 'happy end'. Moreover, a liberal treatment of men is very typical of this branch of African-feminist literature: Men are criticised as individuals, not as representatives of men as such. This criticism is always done in a very relativising manner, and they themselves always have agreeable sides. In addition, they tend to be capable of rethinking and overcoming their reprehensible behaviour - though only partially and within the boundaries offered by patriarchal society. At least they are contrasted with positive pendants, who embody only partial reforms. In these texts, we often find women characters who share the responsibility for the criticised. But this complicity of women tends to play a subordinate role. Only seldom is the criticism of patriarchal discrimination combined with criticism of other mechanisms of oppression. In most cases, it is usually indicated that men and women are typical representatives of this group of African-feminist literature.

In contrast to reformist literature, texts which can be classified under transformative and radical African feminism put forth an essential and fundamental critique of patriarchal social structures. Discriminatory behaviour by men is described as typical for men as a social group and criticised

most sharply. In contrast, radical African-feminist texts argue that men (as a social group) inevitably discriminate against and mistreat women. The men characters are 'by nature' of their socialisation, hopelessly sexist and usually deeply immoral. Men characters from this pattern are rarely found and those who do are powerless. This powerlessness symbolised either by their premature death or by their inability to realise their positive. A further fundamental characteristic of these texts is their use of tragedy and women characters suffer physical and psychological violence at the hands of men. Improvement in the situation of women is unthinkable. The radical texts are distinguished disturbing lack of perspectives. Thus, for example, death and murder carry the end these texts. This approach is often tied to the fact that their women characters are also portrayed on the basis of their likely socio-economic status and/or racial identity. Thus, the men characters are hopelessly sexist and usually deeply immoral. This question is often combined with an examination of other mechanisms of oppression. Men, however, are not even depicted as allies in the struggle against these forms of oppression. These display a devastating pessimism, fundamentally denying any hope of a transformation of prevailing gender relations. Not even the reproduction of patriarchal structures through women's behaviour is described as surmountable. At the most, sisterhood or solidarity among women is shown a possible source of solace or a vague anchor of hope. It is characteristic of radical African- feminist texts that they do not differentiate when criticising traditional and modern forms gender oppression. However this refusal to differentiate must not be misread as implying that radical African-feminist writers reject their African cultures. Rather, it is a result of the uncompromising rejection of all forms of oppression of African women. The short stories of Kenyan women authors published in Karega's and Nzioki's anthology (1992) as well as El Saadawi's (1975), are typically representative of this group. The textual examples named in the classification show that all the currents of African-feminist literature are quite heterogeneous as far as the regional, social and religious origins of the authors are concerned. Only the generation to which the authors belong can, if only very broadly, be brought to bear on their feminist orientation. Authors of all generations contribute to transformative literature. In contrast, there is a general tendency for the reformist branch to recruit mainly among the pioneers of African-feminist literature, while radical literature seems to be primarily the domicile of the youngest authors who were born after most African countries gained independence (that is after 1960) and who started to write in the late '80s. El Saadawi's novels, which can be described as radical, are an exception.

3.3.2. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and in particular the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) alongside African reformist feminist theory to critically analyse Adichie's employment and use of language in the short stories of *The Thing Around Your Neck*. And to show the usefulness of studying language in discourse for the investigation of feminist issues as raised by Adichie in these short stories. Feminist Critical Discourse "analyses the relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak 1995:204).

More specifically, CDA studies real, and often extended instances of social interaction which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of:

- a. The relationship between language and society, and
- b. The relationship between the analysis and the practices analysed (Wodak 1997:173).

Lazar (2007:P.142) , posits that Feminist Critical Discourse aims to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle ways in which very often-taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities (2007). She goes further to pinpoint that such an interest is not merely for an academic deconstruction of texts and talk for its own sake, but comes an acknowledgment that issues dealt with have important and phenomenological consequences for groups of women and men in specific communities (Lazar; 2007).

FCDA is interdisciplinary in nature. On the one hand, it contributes to (critical) language and discourse studies, and on the other hand, it suggests the usefulness of language and discourse studies for the investigation of feminist issues in gender/women's studies. As a political perspective on gender, FCDA is concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse is applicable to the study of texts and talk equally, which offers a corrective to approaches that favour one linguistic mode over another(Lazar, 2005a).

Frameworks for the analysis of discourse in CDA, also and importantly, acknowledge a multimodal dimension (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Scollon, 2001) that is generally missing in other approaches in linguistics. Increasingly, in CDA research, language is critically analysed

along with other semiotic modalities as visual images, layouts, gestures and sounds, which makes for an enriching and insightful analysis. Clearly, a multimodal view of discourse has great value for a holistic feminist critique of discursive constructions of gender (Lazar, 1999, 2002). The levels and foci of analysis in feminist CDA are also wide-ranging including choices in lexis, clauses/sentences, conversational turns, structures of argument and interactions among discourses also known as interdiscursive analysis” (Fairclough, 1992).

This theory is suitable for this study because it would be used to show how Adichie uses language to resist sexism in “*The Thing around Your Neck*”. Therefore, this study adopts this framework to use and analyse how Adichie’s choices in lexis/clauses/ sentences, conversational turns , structures of argument etc. all are aimed at resisting sexism in language in the of the short story collection , her employment of metaphors as well as other rhetorical devices in “*The Thing around Your Neck*”.

3.4. Conclusion

The African Reformist and The Feminist Discourse Analysis theories have been explained in general as well as their shortcomings/critique, relevance and suitability for the present study and in relation to Adichie’s portrayal of female characters in her anthology of short stories: *The Thing around Your Neck* . These theories will further be utilised in assessing and analysing the portrayal and depiction of female characters by the author in relation to the research questions raised in this study. The African reformist theory provided an overview of definitions of and emergence of the theory by Black/African feminists in response to the perceived exclusion of and the need to address gender issues affecting women of African descent. The critique/weaknesses of the theory, however, did not deter its adoption for this study. These theories will be applied to a reading of the 12 short stories in *The Thing around Your Neck* in the Chapter Five of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methods and methodology adopted by the study. It expounds on the research design, data collection and analysis methods for this study. The chapter also presents the scope/limitations of the study.

4.2. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach founded on primary and secondary sources of data. The qualitative approach encompasses ‘attributes, characteristics, or categories that describe an individual and cannot be quantified’ (Marczyk *et al.*, 2005: 97). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2), qualitative approach involves studying ‘things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’.

Qualitative research affords a researcher an understanding of people within their social, cultural contexts (Myers, 1997). Qualitative research is connected to in-depth exploratory studies where the prospect for quality responses is available (Biggam, 2008: 86).

Secondary sources are useful in understanding intellectual analysis of the phenomenon under study. Whilst primary sources form the foundation for which answers are provided to important questions the research seeks to answer (Rugg and Petre, 2007: 32).

Due to the nature of the research objective, a qualitative method of research is more appropriate than quantitative research, which relies on field/survey study. Thus, this study employs a qualitative research based on textual analysis method. Qualitative methods are admissible when the phenomena under study are humans, social in nature, and not subjected to quantification and statistical presentation (Liebscher, 1998:669). The qualitative encompasses ‘attributes,

characteristics, or categories that describe an individual and cannot be quantified' (Marczyk *et al.*, 2005: 97).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2), qualitative approach involves studying 'things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'. Qualitative research affords a researcher an understanding of people within their social and cultural contexts (Myers, 1997). Qualitative research is connected to in-depth exploratory studies where the prospect for quality responses is available (Biggam, 2008: 86.) The research design that is being applied to this study has created a platform for how the research questions will be answered in the upcoming chapter. In collecting data and producing analysed findings of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the study employs the qualitative method based on desk-top research and textual analysis method. According to Given (2008), textual analysis is a method of data collection and analysis that closely examines either the content and meaning of texts or their structured discourses. Texts which can range from newspapers, television programs, and blogs to architecture, fashion and furniture, are deconstructed and meanings extracted. Scholars have said that the meaning of a text cannot be aptly captured by simply counting the number of occurrence of the portrayal of say "violence", or the categories of jobs mentioned in a story, and pointing out that it is rather those subtle, implied or connotative meanings of a text that one aims to understand.

Scholars hold divergent views on the fact that much of the meaning of a text/study is one based on the knowledge which the reader brings to the text. In textual analysis, the researcher carries out the analysis by applying a wide range of theoretical perspectives such as semiotics, psychoanalysis, film genre theory, theory of ideology, feminist theory and others. Because of the researcher's unique perspective or viewpoint and expertise, the analysis of the text as well as conclusions drawn or arrived at, will also be unique. In other words, different researchers on the same text will arrive at different sets of conclusions. Given (2008) emphasises that the aim of textual analysis is not to provide a single correct analysis of a text, but rather a thoughtful and insightful reading that would provide a fresh and valuable perspectives to one's audience. Thus, qualitative textual analysis is an output of a description of texts based in one or more theoretical traditions that informed the analysis, as opposed to a set of tables, graphs, representing the frequency of occurrence of some characteristic or category is identified (Given 2008). The

overall goal of the qualitative based textual analysis is to derive a better understanding of the meaning of the text, or how certain features or factors impact upon the meaning of such a text.

In spite of the above mentioned advantages of the qualitative analysis approach for analysis of texts, one of its shortcomings as observed by scholars, is that while it allows for the insightful evaluation of texts, it also leaves open the possibility of idiosyncratic interpellations. This is in the sense that interpretations may be “biased” even among scholars dedicated to “objectivity”. The choice therefore, for employing the above approach of qualitative in collecting, analysing , and interpreting the data for this study is premised on the fact that it is the method best suited for the research design, research questions as well as research methods and methodology applied towards producing valid and trustworthy results.

The study adopts a qualitative desk-top research approach of the data generated from primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data for this study is the anthology of twelve (12) stories in the *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). And the population for the study is the entire twelve (12) short stories in the collection; some of which had been published earlier in magazines and journals. Namely:

1. *Cell One*
2. *Imitation*
3. *A Private Experience*
4. *Ghosts*
5. *On Monday of Last Week*
6. *Jumping Monkey Hill*
7. *The Thing Around Your Neck*
8. *The American Embassy*
9. *The Shivering*
10. *The Arrangers of Marriage*
11. *Tomorrow is Too Far*
12. *The Headstrong Historian*

The researcher however, also draws upon other secondary sources, including textbooks, journals, conference papers and unpublished materials in both print and via e-sources, as well as interviews granted by the author. Therefore, desktop data gathering, and analysis was employed.

Data was obtained through a close critical reading of these 12 short stories which make-up the chosen text *The thing Around your Neck*. The major female characters will therefore be looked at in the light of who may be referred to as an African feminist. All of these stories revolve around women, either as protagonists or as narrators; Thus, revealing that in every walk of life, including family, schooling, economy, politics, literature and religion, women are either neglected or exploited.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

The study was carried out in strict adherence to and in compliance with the University of Kwa Zulu- Natal's Ethics policy. In addition, permission was sought in the form of Ethical Clearance from the University and was granted to the researcher to go forward with the study.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented that a qualitative research method was employed for this study, with the primary source of data being the 12 short stories in the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The Chapter highlighted that the data for this study was obtained through a close critical reading and textual analysis of the 12 stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* with the aim to investigate the Adichie's approach to the depiction and portrayal of women in the Nigerian society. Through this research approach, it was noted that the study paid particular attention to major female characters whose attitudes, behaviours and actions either further perpetrated or resisted patriarchal oppression. The chapter further pinpointed that the University's ethical policy was adhered while conducting this study. Having discussed the research method adopted for this study, the next chapter discusses the portrayal of female characters in short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SHORT STORY COLLECTION: *THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK*

5.1. Introduction

Female characters in the short story collection of *The Thing Around Your Neck* have a very powerful presence. They adopt diverse roles and enjoy varying degrees of empowerment. To provide a feminist critical reading of these women, it is imperative to construct this analysis in the terms of a continuum of characters taken from the stories, which can be broken down into three. There are the female characters at the two extremes of the continuum - the extremely submissive, subservient and voiceless female characters like *Nkem* from *Imitation*, *Mgbeke* from *Headstrong Historian*. Then the overtly liberal, emancipated, strong and outspoken female characters such as *Nwamgba* and her granddaughter *Afamefuna* in *Headstrong Historian*. And, those female characters who are in the middle of these two extremes, female characters who are under male domination, like *Akunnna* from *The Thing Around Your Neck*; female characters who are objectified and sexually oppressed like *Ujunwa* and *Chioma* from *Jumping Monkey Hill*, and *Chinaza* from *Arrangers of Marriage*. Adichie also portrays female characters in the short story anthology as Migrants or in Diaspora. In so doing she focuses not only on the life of women in Nigeria but also in the United States and pays attention especially to the difficulties connected with living between two different worlds. The women presented in *The Thing around Your Neck* are sometimes trapped between Nigerian traditional customs and the new modern lifestyle they are forced to adopt in their new home, America. Women and their struggle to attain independence in a patriarchal society is the central focus of the stories in *The Thing around Your Neck*. Other roles in which Adichie's female characters are portrayed include: women in traditional sexist roles as sex objects, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, financially dependent on men, and women as subservient to men.

Adichie's anthology of short stories is an example of contemporary Nigerian narratives which have become globally famous. Adichie, a self-acclaimed feminist, depicts in her writing a spectrum of women, which serves to provide for an African reformist feminist critical reading of the prototypes, situations, and representations that account for the thrust/basis of the present study. Set in the post-colonial context of political conflict and Civil war, the anthology offers an opportunity to attend to an uncommonly heard voice - that of the black African female. Through the female characters, it is possible to glimpse Nigeria's recent history and the cultural hybridity of different ethnicities, religions, and ultimately the persistence of western influence (Ordas; 2015).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as a proud Nigerian-born literary descendant of Chinua Achebe, already pays tribute to his *Things Fall Apart* in the opening sentence of one of her novels, *Purple Hibiscus*: "Things started to fall apart when my brother Jaja did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (Adichie 2006,p :3), and also dedicated the last story in the anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck* to one of *Okonkwo's* wives from *Things Fall Apart*. However, the fact that Adichie used only one clause of the sentence to refer to Achebe's internationally acclaimed novel indicates that her writing goes far beyond Achebe's legacy and crosses the boarder of his storytelling tradition. Despite numerous thematic and narrative analogies between *Things Fall Apart* and her novel *Purple Hibiscus* – both novels feature dominant and stubborn patriarchs, depict family tensions across three generations, and deal with the struggle between tradition and modernity. Adichie contests Achebe's portrayal of female characters and this is akin to all her works. In contrast to *Things Fall Apart*, where *Okonkwo's* wives have not yet found the courage to tell their own stories, the female characters of *The Thing Around Your Neck* have finally discovered their hidden voices by confronting patriarchal dominance. Adichie expresses dissatisfaction with the silencing of the female voices in Achebe's work and enables the main female characters of her works and short story anthology: *Kambili* (in case of *Purple Hibiscus*), *Olanna* (*Half of a Yellow Sun*) and the main female protagonists from *The Thing around Your Neck* to speak up and narrate the story from their own, female perspectives.

Adichie presents and portrays in her short story collection, women who perform various significant roles as mothers, daughters and/or wives. While they have considerable responsibility

for the well-being of the whole family, their roles and duties are quite often underestimated and devalued. The women must overcome a great deal of difficulties caused by men or the society they are living in. Even though they use various strategies to attain their desired goals, they all want the same thing – to be liberated from male domination, oppression and injustice based on their gender. From the traditional point of view, women are treated as wives and mothers who are supposed to stay at home and look after their children and household. Daughters are raised to become good wives for their future husbands. With respect to modern influences, women gain freedom of choice, the possibility of education and building a career, so that they have chance to become independent of their male counterparts. This study examines the select narratives of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, to show how as a writer, she strives to rescue black women from the ‘interlocking factors’ viz gender and race by undoing the norms attached to them and performing different roles that would liberate them from their dual oppression and raise the status of a woman in the African society. Her work is a protest of the victimization of Igbo women in Nigeria and by extension all societies. She satirizes the demeaning images of women and the societal forces that shape their lives. Her bold and subversive texts celebrate a woman’s independence and economic success. She redefines a new female identity that does not perform the gender and racial norms constructed by the patriarchal society. Adichie joins with writers such as Emecheta, Nwapa, Nfah-Abbenyi to emphasise that if women need liberation from outdated conventions, men also have to change and adapt to the concept of the ‘New woman’. Adichie, therefore carves a new world for women in which they experience freedom from the marginalisation imposed on them by patriarchy and colonialism. Many African female writers seek to expunge women’s marginal position(s) and thus their texts are ‘spaces of strength’ within and between which they fluctuate as opined by Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 68). In line with this, D’Almeida (1994: 102) considers ‘writing by women as a weapon’ to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality.

Through her writings, Adichie has filled the yawning gender gap between male and female characterisation and shown the other side of the coin. The rural back-house, timid, subservient, lack-luster woman has been replaced by her modern counterpart, “a rounded human being, rotational, individualistic and assertive, fighting for and claiming and keeping her own” (Obiageli and Otokunefor (1989: 120).

5.2. Portrayal of women in Traditional, Sexist and Gendered Roles

In order to understand this analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's characters, it is important to take into account the existing patriarchal system and submission of women in African societies, particularly the Nigerian society. The roots of this phenomenon are unclear, and there is an ongoing debate about whether it started with the influence of Western culture during colonial rule or it already existed in African societies. Katherine Frank establishes that there is a "historically established and culturally sanctioned sexism of African society" (Frank, 1987: 15). On the origins of the subjugation of women in Africa, Mineke Schipper states that the replacement of traditional ideas by Western ones has not proved to be a guarantee for the amelioration of women's position. On the contrary, they may have only served to strengthen ideas which many African creation and origin myths already contained. (Schipper, 1987: 37) 5

Sexism has been and still is very present in contemporary African societies and references to it are very powerful in Adichie's realistic fiction. Particularly, many of her female characters present details that can be traced back to this problematic. In her narratives, the author gives a critical insight of the reality in Nigeria and exposes the problematic of gender in her country through these characters. Many of her female characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck* exhibit behaviours and thoughts that validate this idea of imposed marriage and submission as the only choices for them. In "*Imitation*" for example, *Nkem* the protagonist, after dealing with a hard-inner turmoil of negative feelings towards her situation and her husband's cuckoldry, decides to move to Nigeria with him and fight for her marriage:

"We are moving back at the end of the school year. We are moving back to live in Lagos. We are moving back." She speaks slowly, to convince him, to convince herself as well" (P: 41)

The author draws an interesting parallel in this story between the husband's cuckoldry and the hypocrisy shown by British colonizers. The reflection is inserted in the middle of *Nkem's* thoughts about a conversation she had with her husband and it clearly connects the colonial past

with the present situation she is going through. The husband brought home an imitation of a traditional mask and complained about the British stealing the originals during assaults and also about "...how the British had a way of using words like "expedition" and "pacification" for killing and stealing" (P. 25). The way he mentions this does not differ from how he uses "business" as an alibi for leaving her in the US in order to carry on with his extramarital adventure in Nigeria.

Also, in "*The Arrangers of Marriage*", *Chinaza* goes back to her husband after reflecting on the meaning of, as the title predicts, her arranged marriage. She refuses any opportunity to start a new life free from a relationship she is not happy with and continues with her married life:

"I went back across the hall the next evening. I rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood aside and let me pass" (P.186).

Things are never crystal clear in Adichie's stories and so it could also be argued that *Chinaza* is not totally convinced to go back to the life she is living and comes back just to wait until her legal papers arrive, following her friend's counsel: "You can wait until you get your papers and then leave" - *Nia* said (p.186). However, arranged marriages are portrayed by the author as a source of sadness and melancholy in her fiction, but they are a reflection of the reality in contemporary Nigeria. This kind of marriages certainly lessens the woman's sexual freedom and maintains a sexist and patriarchal system, although their mechanics tend to be less aggressive now than they were in the past. As Falola states, while there is evidence of arranged marriages, it is most common for the parties to court and agree to wed. Families are involved in the marriage, as bride wealth is paid to the bride's family for purposes of social approval rather than wealth redistribution (Falola, 1999:6). As has been mentioned, the discourse of gender is a main feature in Adichie's narratives. The gender problematic is embroidered with that of race and religion, among others, creating a fruitful soil to explore not only the reality of female subjugation and patriarchal power in Nigeria, but also the lines of resistance that could enhance future generations of women, as subsequently discussed in this chapter.

5.3. Women as objects of Oppression/Domestic Dictatorship

Dictatorship in its broad sense could refer to 'absolute', 'imperious', or 'overbearing' power or control.

Domestic dictatorship is used here to refer to a form of personal dictatorship in which absolute power or control lies in the hands of a single individual and is exercised by such an individual within the confines of the home, family or marriage.

The word “patriarchy” has been recreated in the past two decades to analyse the origins and conditions of men’s oppression of women (Kamarae, 1992). Originally used to describe the power of the father as head of household, the term ‘patriarchy’ has been used within post 1960s feminism to refer to the systematic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination (Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998; etc.). The term has been defined as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Feminist theorists have argued that in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes, whether it is feudal, capitalist or socialist, a sex gender system and a system of economic discrimination operate simultaneously. They characterise patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. As feminist and political theorist Carole Pateman writes, “The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection.” (Carole 1988). In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterises patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analysing its manifestations (Ann, 2001).

Okpe, (2005) submits that patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organisation that cuts across political, economic, social, religion, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men. Thus, any system that operationalises an order that accords men undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal. Thus, it is observed in the literature that the establishment and practice of male dominance over women and children is a historic process formed by men and women, with the patriarchal family serving as a basic unit of organisation. A patriarch is considered the head of the household and within the family he controls productive resources, labour force, and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority and legitimized by differences in gender and generation.

In *the Thing Around Your Neck*, the female characters are forced to confront domestic dictatorship as a variant form of patriarchal dominance perpetuated either by their husbands, trusted close relations or people they trusted. In *The Arrangers of Marriage*, Adichie introduces a distinctive agency behind Nigerians' relocation to America. Beyond simply political violence and instability of civil life caused by the military, there lies the extent of what can be referred to as domestic dictatorship. As it can be guessed from the title, *Chinaza Okafor*, the narrator and the principal character of the story has been subjected to a marriage arranged by foster parents. Trusting that they have acted from the best of intentions, as the husband is introduced as a doctor in America, she cannot but accept the arrangement. She *ipso facto* has no say in a decision that not only will touch, but ultimately recast her life forever. As *Chinaza's* trustees, they have introduced this marriage as a final achievement carried out by dutiful and loving spirits, and with which they are to culminate their guardianship. Here, this is showcased as crude and unthinking, which massively diffuses the idea of America as a worry-free country. The narrative points out that *Uncle Ike* was "beaming" as he stresses *Ofodile's* job for the first time to *Chinaza*. *Aunty Ada* spices her intense excitements over the groom with:

"What have we not done for you? We raise you as our own and then we find you an *ezigbi di!* It is like we won a lottery for you!" A doctor in America!" (p:170).

At repeated readings, the narrative makes no allusions that the people in charge of *Chinaza* were not genuinely overjoyed over the prospects of having *Chinaza* marrying in America. Readers have the feeling that even the elderly *Uncle Ike* and *Aunty Ada* wished they had struck similar luck themselves. According to them, they feel no twinges of conscience or second thoughts about what might await their orphan as all possible scenarios are processed as better than if their trustee had stayed at home in Nigeria. They eliminate all possible adversity and hardship. America is approached as the last place in the world where *Chinaza* could be harmed or that could ever be a source of worry. Such a wide circulating assumption annuls spontaneity and introduces America as a worry-free location. Obviously, this sorry state of affairs can be traced to the unreasoning influence of the media which keep perpetuating effective and enslaving myths. Indeed, it is the media that makes it possible for *Chinaza's* foster parents to believe, despite the astounding lack of evidence, that any fate, any prospects awaiting any Nigerian in America are as a matter of course better than when having to stay home. Adichie's drama supplies plenty of evidence to the

contrary. Her works indicate on several occasions that she is horrified at people who look sometimes incapable of considering the striking evidence that contradicts or limits their media-induced and over generalized assumptions. And here lies the central argument introduced in the first part of this article. In the absence of a stable democracy and equal access to wealth, the media continues to inflame ordinary Nigerians' imagination and induce them to try their luck somewhere else, preferably in America. Near the end of "*The Arrangers of Marriage*" when *Chinaza* shows her anger about why she has not been informed very early about *Ofodile's* paper marriage with the American woman, the latter answers in a flat and self-righteous voice:

"It wouldn't have made a difference. Your uncle and aunt had decided. Were you going to say no to people who have taken care of you since your parents died?" *Ofodile* soon adds: "Besides, with the way things are messed up back home, what would you have done? Aren't people with master's degrees roaming the streets, jobless?" (p.183).

Very possibly, readers cannot fail to notice that political dictatorship is but one side of a multifaceted cultural phenomenon that can be referred to as domestic dictatorship. The net result of such a murky situation, together with the misleading influence of the media, leaves everyday Nigerians engaged in self-flattery scheming to relocate to the United States so that once there, their lives start to be served better. 'How better?' remains unanswered because it is not thought to be important. With the help of her African American friend, *Chinaza* leaves *Ofodile's* apartment. As she does not expect her foster parents to take her back, she decides to stay in America, find a place of her own and free herself from the fetish that she was meant to be. The open-ended termination of the story suggests that Adichie is aware that breaking free and circumventing cultural reification cannot be an easy task. But the writer portrays it as an act of will that is vital for one's self-definition and peace of mind.

In *Imitation*, Nkem, the protagonist is dominated by her husband in every aspect: financially, on matters of where to live, the children's school and so on: He takes the decision for her to move to America without any formally discussing it with her. "She was pregnant when she first came to America with *Obiora*. The house *Obiora* rented, and would later buy, smelled fresh, like green tea, and the short driveway was thick with gravel..." (p.24) "They never decided that she would stay with the children-*Okey* was born three years after *Adanna*. It just happened. She stayed back

at first, after *Adanna*, to take a few computer courses because *Obiora* said it was a good idea. Then *Obiora* registered *Adanna* in Pre-school, when Nkem was pregnant with *Okey*. Then he found a good private elementary school and told her they were lucky it was so close. Only a fifteen-minute drive to take *Adanna* there. 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”. Nkem is portrayed as being very pliant and submissive to her husband. She allows him to take all the decisions concerning the family; from the minor to the major and never speaks up or presents her own opinion on anything: “*Obiora* continues to stare at her and she knows that he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand. She wonders vaguely if that is what attracted him to her in the first place, that she deferred to him, that she let him speak for them both” (p.41). Because she had come from a very poor family background, she considered herself very lucky to have married *Obiora*. She had been very excited at the thought of living in America and reminisces on this:

“At first, when she had come to America to have the baby, she had been proudly excited because she had married into the coveted league, the Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Their Babies league”. *Nkem* continues: “Then the house they rented was put up for sale. A good price, *Obiora* said, before telling her they would buy it. She liked it when he said “we”, as though she really had a say in it. And she liked that she had become part of yet another league, the Rich Nigerian men Who Owned House in America league.”

This can be compared to *Half of a Yellow Sun* where *Chief Ozobia* takes advantages of his patriarchal power and wealth to control and silence of his wife, while keeping a mistress. Nonetheless, in contrast to *Mrs. Ozobia*, who does not stand up for her rights as a wife, *Nkem* (to her husband’s surprise) eventually speaks up and decides to end his affair as well as move back home to Nigeria with the children to live permanently:

“Can we cram a year’s worth of marriage into two months in the summer and three weeks in December?” she asks. In the shower, as she soaps his back, she says, “we have to find a school for *Adanna* and *Okey* in Lagos.” She had not planned to say it, but it seems right, it is what she has always wanted to say. *Obiora* turns and stares at her.

“What?” “We are moving back at the end of the school year. We are moving back to live in Lagos. We are moving back.” She speaks slowly, to convince him, to convince herself as well... “We can spend holidays here, together,” she says. She stresses the “we.” “I want to know when a new houseboy (a male domestic help) is hired in my house,” *Nkem* says. “And the children need you” (pp: 41-42).

Having a mistress seems to originate in the traditional Igbo polygyny. The fact that some female characters like *Olanna*’s mother in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and partly *Nkem* in *Imitation* quietly accepts the infidelity is connected to the continuation of the tradition when men frequently had more than one wife. However, younger characters like *Olanna* furiously refuses their partner’s lovers, which could be viewed as the influence of modernity. *Nnamabia*’s mother from “*Cell One*” represents a mother who is also silently submissive to her husband and emotionally detached throughout the story.

5.4. Portrayal of Women as Financially Dependent on Men

A few women who appear in *The Thing around Your Neck* are financially dependent on men. They keep their relationships or marriages merely for the sake of the financial security it offers them. Women who are not educated do not have many options to stand on their own feet and free themselves from their dependence on men. They are forced by society to be dependent on their husbands. Nonetheless, Adichie also portrays women who are self-supporting and contrasts them with those who are not able to acquire the things they need for living without men’s help. This section concentrates exclusively on women who are financially supported by men. This serious problem is the cause and effect of traditionalism as it was believed that the women should stay at home, not pursue a career and be dependent on their husbands. In the *Thing Around Your Neck*, *Nkem* from “*Imitation*” is a perfect example of a female character who is completely dependent on her husband for finances. She does not work and is contented with just staying at home, having babies, and later caring for the children and keeping house. *Nkem* lives her life to please her husband because he supports her and the family financially. She had come from a very poor family background and had been very fortunate to have met and married her husband, *Obiora*. He had transformed her life by giving her the coveted dream of many Nigerian women; life in America, as discussed above. However, *Obiora* uses his work in Nigeria as an excuse to stay

away from his family for long periods of time while carrying on affairs with younger “fair-skinned” girls back in Nigeria and visiting his family only once every while. *Nkem* understands this too well because she was younger, she used to date men because of money. So, she knows how it feels like to be a poor village girl who is obliged to pay for her family and is not able to. Her only possibility is to find a wealthy man. Moreover, she also draws comparisons between her husband’s young mistress and her own wayward life as a young girl when she too was an arm candy to several older married men like *Ikenna* and *Tunji* who met all her household expenses yet never proposed marriage to her (P:31). She is thus forced to identify herself with the very woman she hates and there begins a longing in her to reach out to her home in Nigeria. Claudio Bragga and Glaucia R. Gonclaves thus echo *Nkem*’s self- introspection in these words:

Deprivation and social responsibility seem to force *Nkem* into objectification. She was the *Ada* or the first daughter, the one who is supposed to provide a better life for her parents. Now aware of her husband’s mistress, *Nkem* faces the ironic fact that she too was once in such position. Momentarily, she even identifies with her husband’s young lover, considering how both of them were used by rich, older, married men (P: 3). The story also relates that “*Obiora* visited almost every month the first two years, and she and the children went home at Christmas. Then, when he finally got the huge government contract, he decided he would visit only in the summer. For two months. He could not travel that often anymore; he did not want to risk losing those contracts...”

Nkem’s friend precisely summarizes the behaviour of some men, for whom the situation of a long-distance marriage is convenient thus:

“Our men like to keep us here”, she had told her. “They visit for business and vacations, they leave us and the children with big houses and cars, they get us house-girls from Nigeria who we don’t have to pay any outrageous American wages, and they say business is better in Nigeria and all that. But you know why they won’t move here, even if business were better here? Because America does not recognise Big Men” (p. 28-29).

Looking at the element of women’s financial dependency on men, it has been portrayed that this remains and occurrence owing to several reasons, one of which is the responsibility to respect

and honour her relatives. *Chinaza* from *The Arrangers of Marriage* is like *Nkem*, she is a lower-class girl who gets married because of money. But, unlike *Nkem* or the other aforementioned women, *Chinaza* does not even know who her husband is before their marriage. *Chinaza* would probably never marry such a man if she had the opportunity to do so, without influence from relatives. Family and good relationships are very important among the Igbo and it is not acceptable to break the bond by disrespecting them. Besides, her uncle and aunt have taken care of her since her parents died. The terrifying reality of marriage arrangements is shown in the following extract when *Chinaza*'s husband gets angry because *Chinaza* puts up resistance towards him:

“I wanted a Nigerian wife and my mother said you were a good girl and quiet person. She said you might even be a virgin? I should probably tell her how wrong she was. You were light-skinned. I had to think about my children’s looks. Light-skinned black fare better in America” (p: 184).

Chinaza's husband talks about choosing his future wife like she was a mere object. Nigerian patriarchal society enables him to behave this way, especially if he is a doctor in America. Nigerian people think that his money can help them with their financial difficulties, so they sell their daughters and make a contract with the husband. The girl becomes a victim of her relatives and her unknown future husband. Still she does not have any other choice than to obey her relatives and marry him. Even when *Chinaza* later realizes that she can earn her own money in America after getting her immigration documents, she is still trapped in her hopeless situation as she again must rely on her husband for that for she must still wait. Nia said:

“You can wait until you get your papers and then leave...You can apply for benefits while you get your shit together, and then you’ll get a job and find a place and support yourself and start afresh. This is the U.S. of ...A., for God’s sake.” (P: 186). Nia came and stood beside me, by the window. She was right, I could not leave yet. I went back across the hall the next evening. I rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood aside, and let me pass” (P: 186).

5.5. Women as sexual objects and objects of sexual oppression

Sexuality under the direction of women is considered positively and something that the woman needs for her self-development and to satisfy herself. Nevertheless, sexuality is also misused by men and the woman's body is sometimes viewed only as the object of men's pleasure.

The woman is viewed as a sexual object in several of the short stories in the anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck*. However, there are also many women who take pleasure from sex and a woman can represent an active sexual agent as well. The fact that Adichie narrates so amenably and bluntly about sexuality signifies that she wants to highlight the humanity of her characters, especially female protagonists. Sexuality is not often attributed to women in the writings of most Africans. *Akunna* from *The Thing around Your Neck* is subjected to sexual harassment by her family friend and supposed uncle. She is misused by this man because he automatically assumes that a young girl in a foreign country without her family must be completely lost without a man's help. "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 on your feet. He picked you up at the airport and bought you a big hotdog with yellow mustard that nauseated you. Introduction to America he had said with a laugh" (p.115). He showed you how to apply for a cashier job in the gas station on Main Street and he enrolled you in a community college ..." (p116). He takes advantage of her situation and offers her his help only if she sexually satisfies him: You laughed with your uncle and you felt at home in his house; his wife called you Aunty. They spoke Igbo and ate garri for lunch and it was like home. Until your uncle came into the cramped basement where you slept with old boxes and cartons and pulled you forcefully to him, squeezing your buttocks, moaning" (p.116). When *Akunna* shuns his advances, he proceeds to throw her out on the streets knowing full well that she did not know or have anybody in America. "He wasn't really your uncle; he was a brother of your father's sister's husband, not related by blood. After you pushed him away, he sat on your bed-it was his house, after all-and smiled and said you were no longer a child at twenty-two. If you let him, he would do many things for you. 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?" (p:117).

Chinaza from "*Arrangers of Marriage*" is also a sexual object to her new husband; who simply initiates sex to relief himself without even bothering about his new bride's feelings and interest, nor does he even try to get her interested first through foreplay. "My husband woke me up by

settling his heavy body on top of mine...” “He raised himself to pull my nightdress up above my waist. “Wait—” I said, so that I could take the nightdress off, so it would not seem so hasty. But he had crushed his mouth down on mine...” “When he finally stopped thrusting, he rested his entire weight on me, even the weight of his legs” (pp: 168-169).

The piece “*Jumping Monkey Hill*” centers on a young woman, *Ujunwa Ogundu*, a fictional Nigerian author who attends an African Writers’ workshop in the outskirts of Capetown, South Africa. She is faced with the lustful and patronizing attitude of the white, British, Oxford-trained organizer of the event Edward and treated as a sexual object; first in the main story; by *Edward Cambell*- the sixty-something year old organizer of the African Writers Workshop and again as *Chioma* in the embedded written by *Ujunwa*. *Edward* makes sexually suggestive comments and sexual advances towards *Ujunwa* throughout the course of the Writer’s workshop. “*Edward* had moved a little and sat closer to her.” (P: 98) “I don’t mind sitting in the sun,” she said, already getting up. “Would you like me to stand up for you, Edward?” “I’d rather like you to lie down for me, he said” (p: 106). And in response to this, *Ujunwa* had merely laughed. *Ujunwa* seems blissfully oblivious of his advances and leering remarks until things reach a climax between her and Edward and she chides herself.” *Ujunwa* felt a self-loathing burst open in the bottom of her stomach. She should not have laughed when Edward said... It had not been funny at all. She had hated it, hated the grin on his face and the glimpse of greenish teeth and the way he always looked at her chest rather than her face, the way his eyes climbed all over her, and yet she had made herself laughed like a deranged hyena” (p:109). “*Edward* is always looking at my body.” *The Kenyan* said it was clear from the first day that the man (*Edward*) would be climbing on top of that flat stick of a wife and wishing it were *Ujunwa*: *the Zimbabwean* said *Edward*’s eyes were always leering when he looked at *Ujunwa*: the white South African said Edward would never look at a white woman like that because what he felt for *Ujunwa* was a fancy without respect” (p: 109).

Also, in *Ujunwa*’s story, *Chioma* who has a degree in Economics and had recently completed her National Youth Service, still lives with her mother because she is unable to find a job. She is subjected to several humiliating circumstances wherever she goes in search of a job, and her jobless circumstance remains the same unless she succumbs to the sexual advances of the men in position to give her a job. *Chioma* first suffers sexual humiliation at the hands of a potential

employer at a job interview. “After the first few questions, the man says he will hire her and then walks across and stands behind her and reaches over her shoulders to squeeze her breasts. She hisses, “Stupid man! You cannot respect yourself!” (p:100). Even when *Chioma* finally puts her pride aside and asks her father’s help in securing a job, the story still is the same. With her father’s influence, she is hired by one of the banks to do marketing, which meant going out and bringing in new accounts. She and another girl are driven to a location to solicit new clients for the bank and unknown to *Chioma*, they were supposed to offer sexual favours to their potential clients in exchange for their opening an account with the bank. “The Alhaji (a wealthy Nigerian man from the north) is avuncular and expansive with his smile...He looks at *Chioma* saying “this one is too fine.” “*The Alhaji* speaks to *Yinka* but looks often at *Chioma*. Then he asks *Yinka* to come closer and explain the high-interest savings accounts to him and then he asks her to sit on his lap...” (p:111).

“*Yinka* says *Chioma*! And she looks up. *The Alhaji* is talking to her. He looks almost shy and his eyes do not meet hers. There is a tentativeness that he does not show toward *Yinka*. I am saying you are too fine. Why is it that a Big Man has not married you? I have agreed that I will do business with Merchant Trust, but you will be my personal contact.” *Chioma* is uncertain what to say. “Of course,” *Yinka* says. “She will be your contact. We will take care of you. Ah, thank you sir!” “*The Alhaji* gets up and says, come, come, I have some nice perfumes from my last trip to London. Let me give you something to take home. He starts to walk inside and then turns. Come, come, you too...” (P: 111).

Adichie has stated severally in interviews that this particular short story is “quite autobiographical” and its writing “was spurred on by rage” (Adichie: “in a conversation with James Mustich” Barnes and Noble Review, June 29.) Adichie has made no secret of the fact of her “acerbic” piece being based on her “horrible personal experience (Adichie, 2015) at the inaugural workshop of the Caine Prize for African Writing Workshop, which she attended after the nomination of one of her short stories for the award with same name. Adichie recounts how, she had not only had to put up with the “sexist and lecherous” administrator of the workshop/prize (Adichie, 2015), but how the man had also had the audacity to tell a group of young, impressionable writers from different countries in Africa, what an African story was,

what qualified as African. So, if you were writing about Zimbabwe, you could not write about the horrible Mugabe” (in “a conversation with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” by Ramona Koval, *The Book. Show*, ABC Australia, May 26).

5.6. Portrayal of Women as Strong, Assertive, Resilient

Adichie also depicts women who are very strong, assertive and emancipated. The author pays great attentions to women who are on no account submissive or male dependent. These females are strong-minded and have the courage to stand up for themselves under any circumstances. From a historical point of view, Nigerian women have always struggled for equality and they have used various strategies to achieve their goals. They have revolted against injustice and oppression and risen for their causes whenever necessary. They have never given up and always fight for their rights. They have taken part in politics, economic, and social spheres. They have used literature as a powerful weapon for their empowerment. Independent and courageous women prevail in Adichie’s fiction. Adichie disproves stereotypes and prejudices about Nigerian women held by the Western world and empowers her female characters but at the same time she continues the long literary and societal traditions of Nigeria. *Nwamgba* from *The Headstrong Historian* is the perfect depiction of a strong, assertive, fearless woman and she can be likened to aunty Ifeoma from Adichie (2003). “Her father found her exhausting, this sharp-tongued, headstrong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground” (Adichie, 2009:19,). Through the portrayal of *Nwamgba*’s character, Adichie’s position towards women’s liberation and independence is clear. Monogamy is equal to wealth creation for the family, and social and economic independence for women, while polygamy leads to poverty and female subordination. *Nwamgba* chooses *Obierika* for marriage instead of the other way around and this happened at a time when it was not only unusual for women to have a say in who they married, talk less of choosing a man. Generally, it was the custom for parents to make all the arrangements for both parties. So *Nwamgba* not only marries her choice but remains his only wife at a time when polygamy was the order of the day. Later, after several miscarriages, it is *Nwamgba* who “promptly suggested that *Obierika* takes a second wife, the young girl from the *Okwonkwo* family. The girl had beautiful wide hips and was respectful, nothing like the young girls of today with their heads full of nonsense” (p.201). Adichie’s portrayal of *Nwamgba* counteracts the dominant view in African culture that women are objects of men’s desires and power rather than

fully formed subjects with an equal position in society. In this view, women are not supposed to raise their voices or question anything. *Nwamgba* is placed in conflict with her in-laws (her husband's cousins) as misunderstandings characterise the relationship between the *Nwamgba*, *Okoye* and *Okafor*. She dares to speak out and oppose her brothers-in-law, thereby contesting the prevailing cultural norms. She pours out her feelings in loud open confrontation, shouting and singing with sorrow and anger over their insensitivity towards her situation after her husband's death until she gains the sympathy of the Women's Council, the Elders, and members of *Obierika's* age grade, who issue a stern warning to *Okoye* and *Okafor* to steer clear of *Nwamgba*. Here, *Nwamgba* illustrates the capability of women to defend themselves and refuse to be silenced by the patriarchal system in which the husband's people/family has complete power over them. Adichie, at this point argues for relations based on mutual respect instead of power and fear. It is clear here that women are treasured subjects and not simply units of labour and reproduction.

Adichie also shatters the traditional African myth that women should bear many children in order to safeguard the marriage institution by her portrayal of *Nwamgba* who has only one child. Instead she portrays women as good family planners. *Akoko* herself only has three children. The novel implies that children, hinder women's development, independence, and liberation. While the first part of the novel is set in the pre-colonial period, it is actually addressing the contemporary concerns of Kenyan women with regards to having children and explores ways in which women can escape the dependency syndrome. *Nwamgba* is hardworking, generating wealth of her own. She has a small pottery business in which she also has apprentices whom she trains in the business. She has a small, manageable family and is able to support her son, *Anikwenwa*. This story also shows the ability of women to create wealth in the family through their own initiative and so achieve independence. Through *Nwamgba*, Adichie depicts hardworking women generating wealth for their families. Taiwo foregrounds women's economic contribution to society by noting that:

The contribution of African women to literature and society has been largely connected with their roles as wives, mothers, and partners. Their contribution to the economic well-being of society is enormous, much greater than they have ever been given credit for. The women are largely responsible for the harvesting of all crops. (1984, p. 3).

In line with the above extract, Adichie liberates her women characters financially through her narratives. Another female character who is strong and assertive is Grace, also from *The Headstrong Historian*. Grace is *Nwamgba's* second grandchild, whom she believes is the reincarnation of her dead husband, Obierika. *The Headstrong Historian* charts the formation of several characters starting with *Nwamgba*. This certainly encapsulates Adichie's preoccupation in *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Her female characters are active and define themselves by resisting the harmful cultural practices that limit their potential and capacity for independence. This rings true of several of her female characters in the different periods within which the anthology is set. Like aunty Ifeoma from Adichie (2003), *Nwamgba* must overcome many obstacles connected with her new position of widow. The cousins of *Nwamgba's* dead husband have the right to inherit her along with his property, but *Nwamgba* does not give up and fights to get what she is convinced belongs to her and her son. *Nwamgba's* granddaughter Grace seems to be very close to her grandmother. Like *Nwamgba*, she is very ambitious and determined to attain her desired goals. She does not identify with the Catholic religion and decides to follow her grandmother's traditionalist beliefs. As a result, she starts fighting for the recognition of African Igbo heritage, even though it is suppressed by her Catholic teachers at schools. Later she contributes immensely to the development of African Studies as a field of study at Nigerian universities, which is crucial for reviving the African identity, even for Nigerians themselves.

In *the Thing around Your Neck*, there are several female characters who become empowered as well. Chinaza's (*The Arrangers of Marriage*) process of self-actualization and her journey to liberation begins with thinking about finding a job. "Something leaped inside me at the thought, the sudden and new thought, of earning what would be mine" (p.181). This is the first time she considers the idea of not being financially dependent on her husband, thanks to her female friend who inspired her with the idea of being emancipated.

Nkem from *Imitation* is another example of a female character who becomes liberated:

"She had not planned to say it, but it seems right, it is what she has always wanted to say. We are moving back. She speaks slowly, to convince him, to convince herself as well. *Obiora* continues to stare at her and she knows that he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand. She wonders vaguely if that is what attracted him to

her in the first place, that she deferred to him that she let him speak for them both. We can spend holidays here, together, she stresses we” (p. 41).

Nkem's empowerment lies in the refusal to tolerate her husband's mistress. Her voice becomes louder and her husband is so surprised by hearing *Nkem* speaking up to the point that he accepts her decision and follows her.

Finally, *the girl* from *Tomorrow Is Too Far* experiences a completely different kind of self-awareness. “That summer was the summer of your first self-realization. You knew something had to happen to *Nonso*, so that you could survive” (P.195). Killing her brother is the girl's only choice to break free from the shadow of her brother. The preference of *Nonso* in her family has always been depressing and offensive for the girl. She has always had excellent skills she could never be praised for because as a girl and later a woman she is supposed to serve her husband only. “You wanted to mar the perfection of his lithe body, to make him less lovable, less able to do all that he did. Less able to take up your space. You were better at the things that did not need to be taught, the things that *Gran* could not teach him. *Gran*: ‘It's good you're learning this now, you will take care of your husband one day’” (p.195). The traditional concept of viewing the woman in her limited role as a housewife becomes a mental strain for the young girl.

Even though tradition and modernity stand in binary opposition, these terms function as tools for women's empowerment. The female characters of *The Thing Around Your Neck* take advantage of traditional Igbo heritage and combine it with colonial tools such as Western education. The connection of traditional institutions and modern conveniences becomes the instrument for their liberation in the same way that women in *Half of a Yellow Sun* take the initiative to guide the men and dictate directions during the war. They need to overcome their fears and give up their passive attitudes to be liberated and empower themselves. So also, females in *The Thing around Your Neck* must confront patriarchal dominance to free themselves. Because of their strength and determination to fight for justice and gender equality, women in *The Thing around Your Neck* achieve their goals, gain control over their lives, and liberate themselves from patriarchal dominance. However, the fact that women become free does not necessarily mean that they do not need men at all. They consider men as partners in their friendships, relationships and marriages.

It is evident from the foregoing that Nigerian women have experienced various changes throughout history - from pre-colonial traditional Nigeria, through the British colonial rule and back to the independence. Women have participated in politics and always tried to participate in economic as well as social spheres of Nigerian society whenever they had a chance to do so. Pre-colonial traditional societies usually favoured men. But it was believed that women and men complemented each other. Although men dominated in terms of their authority and inheritance, age and not gender was the decisive factor in determining power. Women had the possibility to contribute to the development of society, mainly based on their family and kinship, as well as through various female organisations. The latest research shows that the British colonial rule greatly changed the role of women. Women's power was shifted to the private sphere and the family. Their public involvement was restricted. Women were supposed to stay at home and look after their children. After independence, women still faced the consequences of the colonial rule regarding their roles. However, women's position is gradually changing towards modernity. They actively participate in politics, they campaign for gender equality and increased involvement of women in politics, and have founded various programs which protect women's rights. The most crucial change concerning the reinforcement of Nigerian women's autonomy was the implementation of a formal education system.

Apart from women's engagement in political, economic and social spheres, Nigerian women have also found another tool for fighting for their cause – literature. Nigerian feminist literature has been created to counter the image of a silenced Nigerian woman as portrayed in male-authored works. Literature has empowered female characters whose voices had been silenced for a long time.

Female characters from *The Thing around Your Neck* are affected by pre-colonial traditionalism and modern influences. In fact, women gain power from combining both of the influences. Despite the fact that tradition and modernity stand in binary opposition, Nigerian women need to become aware of their African identity and heritage. They draw strength from their ancestors and are in close relation to them. However, without the most powerful tool of modern civilization, which is education, they would not be able to become independent. Only

educated women who also respect their own origin have the chance to liberate themselves and create an equal partnership with men.

5.7. Women as Mothers, Wives and Daughters

Motherhood is a fundamental stage in African traditional societies. Apparently it is associated with various forms of patriarchal abuse. Ogunjipe-Leslie explores the oppression of women within marriage, noting the following: The oppression of women within marriage takes various forms. First, the woman loses status by being married. With marriage, she becomes a client or possession; she is voiceless and often right less in her husband's family, she also loses much of her personal freedom. (1994, P. 75)

Nkem, from *Imitation*, is a clear illustration of the above. *Adichie* gives voice and power to the women within the family dynamics. In direct contrast to *Nkem*, *Nwamgba* from *The Headstrong Historian* portrays mothers who have positive influence over their children and the people around them. *Adichie* depicts strong mother figures in modern urban settings as well as rural settings in her fictional work. The story puts into perspective that women can be very good mothers, wives, and daughters to their families, even when it is not necessitated by a lack of choice. *Nwamgba* demonstrates courage, strength, and power. *Adichie* depicts fearless women who are able to solve a crisis in the family. She presents *Nwamgba* as a very influential woman character in the anthology. She singlehandedly takes full responsibility for her son *Anikwenwa*'s education. *Adichie* counters the idea of women's subjugation by painting a picture of women who are able to look after their homes and children. Her narrative carries a message of hope to the women in patriarchal homes 'that they too can have a say as far as their family is concerned'. *Nwamgba* embraces the task of raising her son. She raises him correctly from the time he is born into adulthood, taking up the challenge of a single parent upon the event of his father's death. She depicts women as good mothers and advisors to their children. She gets them out of the confines of the kitchen and bestows them with the ability to take charge of their kin. *Adichie* demonstrates the supremacy of women in the society. She designates women as influential subjects, through *Nkem* who takes a firm decision to reclaim her marriage by moving back to Nigeria with her children and putting an end to *Obiora*'s philandering. The above episode depicts the construction and transformation of women. This demonstrates the strong influence women have over their spouses. *Nkem*'s story depicts women's change and transformation. The

complex collage of images in African fiction reflects complex realities, but if an image is worth a thousand words, the tableau of a thousand women in the vast panorama of African literature projects a powerful picture [...] These images communicate a strength of purpose of women more than equal to the tasks they set themselves (1986, p. 42).

The above depiction contrasts with most of African male writers' literary work in their portrayal of women. For instance, in Wole Soyinka's play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, Elesin Oba, the King's horseman, before his passage to the world of ancestors takes advantage of the women around him for his material well-being. Soyinka's women characters are subjects of male victimisation. His women characters do not play independent roles, but rather, they help the play's hero to accomplish his sacred duty. In this regard, Oladele Taiwo notes: men and women novelists must reflect and indulge in introspective thinking. She discusses the following:

Men, as in many other facets of African life, have dominated the field and successfully pushed the women to the background. Furthermore they have created in their fiction an image of the African woman which needs to be closely re-examined against the background of her traditional role and the social and economic realities of the present. (1984, p. 1, 2)

Contrary to the above, Adichie puts her female characters at the forefront and also in control of their destiny. She defines women's liberation and independence through the depiction of her female characters.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's portrayal of female characters in her anthology of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The analysis was constructed in terms of a continuum of female characters taken from the short stories in the collection. The chapter divided this in to three continuum. It discussed female characters who are extremely submissive, subservient, silent and invisible such as Nkem from "*Imitation*", who willingly relinquishes her freedom, voice and autonomy in exchange for a coveted life of ease and comfort until she is jarred back to her senses by her husband's infidelity. It also looked at the overtly liberal, strong, and assertive female characters such as Nwamgba and her granddaughter Afamefuna who refuse

to succumb to the traditional structures of a patriarchal society that limit women's potentials. Furthermore, the chapter examined female characters who are in the middle of the continuum, such as women under male domination, oppression and subjugation like Chinaza from *Arrangers of Marriage* and Akunna from *The Thing Around Neck* , or female characters who are objectified and sexually oppressed like Ujunwa and Chioma both from *Jumping Monkey Hill*.

The chapter also drew attention to the fact that Adichie tries to present a diverse image of Nigerian society, typically considered patriarchal. She contrasts the female characters in her works with complementary characters, wherein emancipated women are shown alongside submissive women, financially dependent women with those who are self-sufficient, and women who are victims of sexual oppression with the women who take pleasure in sexual activity. Adichie also contrasts family systems in which women are part of as daughters, wives, and mothers. As noted in the chapter, she portrays lower-class families alongside upper-class ones, rural versus urban family structures as well as authoritarian and liberal types of family. The writer's aim is not to victimise Nigerian women; her goal is to show the whole image of the Nigerian society today. Adichie's portrayal of a number of emancipated and strong-willed women destroys the usual representation of Nigerian women who are under male domination (P68). Her protagonists are educated, strong, and emancipated women who are self-sufficient and do not need men to fully live their lives. Nigerian women believe that man and women complement each other and should live in harmony. Their goal is to achieve self-awareness and be liberated from men, but they still consider men as partners. Women in Adichie's fiction are invincible and stronger than their male counterparts. Although they must struggle for their rights, they never give up, just like women throughout Nigerian history.

The element of women's struggle to attain their autonomy and freedom as well as redefine and assert themselves, constitute the central focus of Adichie's narrative in *The Thing around Your Neck*. The strategies which these women adopt to overcome the factors that hinder their emancipatory efforts and freedom are discussed in the subsequent sections.

CHAPTER SIX

STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN CHALLENGING, RESISTING, AND SUBVERTING PATRIARCHAL DOMINATION IN THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK

“The female character has emerged from her cocoon,
basking free to a mixed reception of surprise and wonder.”

Helen Chukwuma

6.1. Introduction

This chapter of the research explores the different strategies Adichie adopts to grant the female characters/women a voice in the face of the silencing structures. This chapter critically presents and analyses some of the coping strategies adopted or employed by Adichie’s female characters. The contents of books written by women can be considered and accepted as a way towards breaking patriarchal chains. According to Kolawole’s counter discourse, it is a healthy approach in African women’s search for acceptable feminine aesthetics. This chapter explores ways of liberating the potential of her female characters/ Nigerian women by Adichie. It also demonstrates the strategies the author uses to defy the patriarchal dictates and stereotypes to emancipate her women characters. While the chapter focuses primarily on the female characters, the male characters also constitute part of the analyses. Adichie’s narrative connects the destiny of women and girls to the realisation of their full liberation and independence. O’Barr (1987, p. 57) states her view of African male writing: “fiction written by African men takes a far less sophisticated view of women’s life and sees them as secondary figures in the environment of males”. Adichie’s counters the above notion in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, in that her female characters play a central role in the narrative. Katherine Frank calls for positive representation of female characters by drawing attention to the following:

“Most African novelists have been written by men, and they tend to focus on social, historical, and political rather than personal or domestic themes but the fact remains

that we need to turn the number of the growing women novelists in Africa in order to find female characters with a destiny of their own” (1987:14- 15)

The way Adichie’s female characters struggle to end their oppression is an element, which this chapter really focuses on. Speaking of the resistance to harmful traditions and cultures that are suppressive, strong female characters who regain their voices, identity, and assert themselves, pursue education as a means of liberation and empowerment for women. Also, female solidarity are identified as some of the strategies that women and female writers adopt and utilise to fight patriarchy and its subsequent institutions such as; oppression and exclusion, silencing and voicelessness, sexual oppression, female objectification, to mention a few. Adichie’s work is a protest against the victimisation of Igbo women in Nigeria and by extension all societies. She satirizes the demeaning images of women and the societal forces that shape their lives. Her bold and subversive texts celebrate a woman’s independence and economic success. She redefines a new female identity that does not perform the gender and racial norms constructed by the patriarchal society. Adichie coalesces with writers such as Emecheta, Nwapa, Nfah-Abbenyi to underscore that if women need liberation from outdated conventions, men also have to change and adapt to the concept of the ‘New woman’. Adichie therefore carves a new world for women in which they experience freedom from the marginalisation imposed on them by patriarchy and colonialism. Many African female writers seek to expunge women’s marginal position(s) and thus their texts are “spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate as opined by Nfah-Abbenyi (1997: 68). In line with this, D’Almeida (1994: 102) considers ‘writing by women as a weapon” to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality. Adichie has filled the gaping gender gap between male and female characterisation and shown the other side of the coin. The rural back-house, timid, subservient, lack-lustre woman has been replaced by her modern counterpart, “a rounded human being, rotational, individualistic and assertive fighting for, claiming and keeping her own” (Obiageli and Otokunefor 1989: 120).

6.2. Breaking Away from Masculine Supremacy and Dominance for Personhood and Liberation

Chukwuma (2006) writes: “African women have latterly joined with women from other parts of the world in the quest for their rights, opportunity, relevance and recognition”. Surplus relevant

samples of female self-assertion in fiction by select African women abound and serve to locate the various stages of the feministic encounter. The whole object of this according to Chukwuma (2006) “is to give women a voice and locus in their own affairs within the marriage institution and in other issues that have a direct bearing on them”. Beginning from 1966, Nigerian and African feminists are motivated towards correcting the disparaging image of women in male-authored novels as they situate their female characters within rural settings with its “masculine supremacy and dominance where gender roles and relationships were strictly circumscribed by norms and traditions”. These writers continue to explore women’s options in the face of subjugation and victimisation in marriage. Some of them present female characters that break the gender/societal norms in a bid to assert themselves. For example, Nwapa (1981) and Emecheta (1994) advocate for personhood by urging women to break away from subsuming norms and situations in the marriage institution, irrespective of the fact that they stand the enormous risk of being labelled ‘cultural deviationists’ because the marriage institution is held as sacred to culture, tradition, and religion. Nwapa (1981) further highlights the prominent issue of childlessness in marriage through the protagonist Amaka. Emecheta (1994) and Nwapa (1986) also present Adaku who walks out of her marriage because of her insecure position as she has no male child like her co-wife Nnu Ego. Nwapa’s female characters in the above novels and in Nwapa (1986), broke societal norms in a bid to assert themselves. These women writers liberate their female characters from the gendered yoke by making them burst forth from the system to freedom. They make their female protagonists burst /break away from the marriage situation when it becomes too subjugating. Examples abound on this, like *Firdaus* in Sadawi (1981), the protagonist in Adichie (2003), *Chinaza* in Adichie (2009) “*The Arrangers of Marriage*”, *Amaka* in Nwapa (1981), *Adaku* in Emecheta (1994, *Adah* in Emecheta (1977) *etc.*- who all take leave of their matrimonial homes, physically and psychologically, distancing themselves in order to seek their individuality and self-realisation in the wider world.

In Adichie’s short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the author presents *Chinaza* from “*The Arrangers of Marriage*”, who walks out of her matrimonial home (even though not for long) when she discovers her husband is still legally married to another woman whom he had married previously as a mutual arrangement to enable the speedy acquisition of his immigration documents after arriving in America. *Chinaza* takes leave of her matrimonial home and distance herself both physically and psychologically from the subjugating condition of her husband’s

deceitfulness, his objectification of her as well as his sexual exploitation in order to seek her individuality and self-realisation.

“That evening, while he showered, I put only the clothes he hadn’t bought me, two embroidered boubous and one caftan, all *aunty Ada’s* castoffs in the plastic suitcase I had brought from Nigeria and went to *Nia’s* apartment” (P.184).

Also, *Ujunwa*, from ***Jumping Monkey Hill*** and the character *Chioma*, from the embedded story written by *Ujunwa* at the writer’s workshop, both walk away from subsuming and stifling situations physically and psychologically in a moment of self-discovery. *Ujunwa* first walks out of a session of the Writer’s Workshop after blurting out “which Africa?” in angry response to *Edward’s* rebuttal of the Senegalese’ homosexual story being reflective of Africa. “*Edward* chewed at his pipe thoughtfully before he said that homosexual stories of this sort weren’t reflective of Africa” (P.108). *Ujunwa* had left the session in anger - “she was the first to leave and was close to her cabin when she heard somebody call her and she stopped” (P.108). In the second instance, the fictional character *Chioma*, also walks out of and away from a demeaning and self-deprecating situation in order not to compromise her virtue as a woman by succumbing to the sexual overtures of the lecherous *Alhaji* “come, come, you two” ... *Yinka* follows. *Chioma* gets up. *The Alhaji* turns again toward her, to wait for her to follow. But she does not follow. She turns to the door and opens it and walks out into the bright sunlight and past the jeep in which the driver is sitting with the door hanging open...she does not answer. She walks and walks, past the high gates and out to the street where she gets a taxi...” (P.111). *Chioma* does not only walk out on *the Alhaji*, but away from her newly acquired job at the Merchant Trust Bank, which she had secured only through her estranged father’s connections. This act of walking out signifies the characters’ outright resistance of sexual exploitation in the hands of both “*Alhaji*” and “*Edward*”. And in so doing they assert their independence and personhood. *Another* character who resists sexual exploitation is *Akunna* from ***The Thing Around Your Neck***, wherein she rebuffs the sexual advances of her supposed uncle when she arrives America.

6.3. Female Resistance in a Postcolonial Environment: Rebellion as Empowerment

In Adichie's narratives, there are a number of female symbols of rebellion against disempowerment. To begin with, the theme of empowerment and liberation runs through the course of most of the short stories in the anthology.

In the short story "*Imitation*", *Nkem*, before giving up and deciding to move back to Nigeria, maybe as the only possible way to fight against her husband's cuckoldry, cuts her hair in a clear act of rebellion. Her motivation to do so probably comes from a desire to mimic two other women; "the *Nigerian woman* she once met at a wedding in Delaware, whose husband also lived in Nigeria and who had short hair although hers was natural..." (P: 28) to whom she feels close due to the similarity of their situations. And her husband's new lover who her friend describes as "the girl with the short curly hair" (P: 41). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight her likely intention of self-cleaning, that of cutting the past together with the hair. This act leads to a conversation with her husband about her new hairstyle, when he makes a self-explanatory appreciation about it:

"Anything will look good with your lovely face, darling, but I liked your long hair better. You should grow it back, long hair is more graceful on a Big Man's wife" (P: 40).

Nkem, conscious of the importance of her long hair as a symbol of her husband's wealth and position of power, chops it off as an action of defiance and an attempt of wanting to also sever the link that confines her as a mere "trophy wife" instead of a powerful individual.

Ujunwa from *Jumping Monkey Hill* as well as her fictional character Chinwe are also examples of characters who rebel against male domination by resisting sexual exploitation, female objectification and slavery chattel by the bank that recruits young girls as marketers, pairs them up, and sends them out to solicit new accounts from potentially rich potential like "*Alhaji*" by offering sexual favours.

6.3.1. Subverting Oppressive Cultural Practices and Traditions

To a considerable extent, gender has been a subsidiary issue in Nigerian society. The traditional social structures have been offering limited incentives for amending the existing distribution of power between men and women. As observed by Nmadu (2000), the Nigerian society (pre-

modern and contemporary) has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potentially inimical to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife-inheritance, and widowhood practices. Moreover, to Bhavani *et al* (2003) such unequal social and gender relations need to be transformed in order to take women out of want and poverty.

As daughters self-identify as females with their mothers and sisters, and sons as males with their fathers and brothers, gender stereotyping becomes institutionalized within the family unit (Haraway 1991). Also, the dominant narratives of religion in both colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society indeed privileges men at the detriment of women, even in educational accessibility. As such, the Nigerian society remains entrapped in 'history of analogy' whereby it is either exoticized, or simply represented as part of European history (Mamdani 1996).

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW articles (1979), -the Nigerian government became a state party to this important convention when it ratified it in 1985 without reservations, signed the Optional Protocol in 2000 and ratified it in 2004,- acknowledge that socio-cultural norms that deny women equal rights with men will also render women more vulnerable to physical, sexual, and mental abuse. The subordinate status of women vis-à-vis men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across countries. In some of the countries, particularly in Nigeria, women also face cultural constraints on their mobility. Cultures are mostly created by men and that is why most of them are oppressive to women making them act within male confines. Adichie advocates for eradicating every habit aiming at deepening the social and economic gaps between men and women. These habits include dowry, widow inheritance, accepting arranged marriages, relentless desire for male children, etc. To illustrate what she advocates, this study presents that Adichie uses characters like *Nwamgba*, *Akunna*, *Chinaza*, to subvert the customs and traditions, especially the ones that keep on conveying ideas about women's total submission to men.

6.3.2. Achieving self-awareness through shared experiences, bonding and sisterhood

In the cleverly crafted story, *A Private Experience*, the Muslim (Hausa) and the Christian women (Igbo) poignantly share refuge in a very small market-store and identify their troubles with each other, whilst mob violence rages. Each is reeling from the senseless and sudden loss of

a loved one, and yet Adachi depicts this as not inevitable. The two women sympathise with and console each other. The strangers share intimate secrets: “*Nnedi*, the woman repeats, and her Hausa accent sheaths the Igbo name in a feathery gentleness” (P.47). Whilst *Chika* offers the woman advice for her chafing nipple, the woman gives *Chika* her scarf (a sign of her ethnicity as a Muslim, a Northerner with a strong Hausa accent) to scorch the blood running down her leg. *Chika* keeps the scarf as a symbol of their close intimate encounter, while the flow of blood connects the women in a deeply personal way and reminds them of their common humanity. If there is hope, Adichie would suggest that it resides in an individual’s recognition of shared human bonds often forged through deep suffering (P.50). As she departs, the woman “hands the scarf back to *Chika* and turns to climb out of the window”. The women find some fulfilment in shared conversations and shared experiences. There is no sense of sarcasm in the woman’s voice as she recounts the suffering endured by the stall holders. It seems that whether the victims be Hausa Muslim or Igbo Christian they are all suffering. Adichie recounts in italics the thoughts of this woman: “*Hold me and comfort me because I cannot deal with this alone*”. *Chika* realises that the media focuses on the brutal and dangerous actions and consequences of this religious and ethnic conflict but overlook the sense of shared grief and suffering. *Chika* will read in the Guardian that “the reactionary Hausa-speaking Muslims have a history of violence against non-Muslims” and yet in this deeply personal and poignant relationship both women come to share their universal experience of womanhood. *Chika* examined the “nipples and experienced the gentleness of a woman who is Hausa and Muslim”.

In *The Shivering*, Adiche parallels the stories of *Chinedu* and *Ukamaka* who provide each other with a degree of comfort. Chinedu reveals her secret that she is overwhelmed by an almost supernatural “shivering” when *Ukamaka* prays (P. 164-166). This friendship also seeks to overcome differences as Chinedu encourages *Ukamaka* to come to her Catholic Church. She assures him that she will accompany him to his Pentecostal church on another occasion (165-166).

Comparisons: These assurances reflect the Igbo and the Hausa women’s experiences as they take refuge in the store).⁶

Another illustration of sisterhood and shared experience from the anthology is found in *Imitation* between Nkem and her maid, Amaechi. Living in a foreign land that is far away from home, family, friends and familiar surroundings, loneliness sets in. In *Nkem*'s case, she forms a bond of friendship with her maid, a situation which would have been completely outrageous if they had been back home in Nigeria. But because *Nkem* is lonely, hardly has any friends and her husband only visits once a year, she naturally gravitates towards the only adult present, with whom she could talk to and who would listen." The madam/house-girl line has blurred in the years she has had *Amaechi*. It is what America does to you, she thinks. It forces egalitarianism on you. You have nobody to talk to, really, except for your toddlers, so you turn to your house-girl. And before you know it, she is your friend, your equal." (P: 29). Confiding in Amaechi reinforces the growing sense of equality and friendship between *Nkem* and her maid, *Amaechi*. It enables Nkem to put her husband's infidelity into words for the first time, thus making it real as compared to her living in denial all these years. It helps her express her displeasure aloud for the first time and this has some healing effects on her. However, and despite *Nkem* and *Amaechi*'s similarity in their poor upbringing and tenuous friendship, Amaechi's reaction to *Obiora*'s infidelity is one of acceptance of the inevitable. She counsels Nkem to forgive *Obiora* and insist he moves his girlfriend out of their house in Lagos but points out that *Obiora* loves and takes care of *Nkem*; treating her with respect, thus the suggestion being that *Nkem* should overlook and accept his philandering.

Adichie's vision for women is that she advocates for women to create support networks. Women should reach out to one another and share their problems as seen in most female characters through the spirit of sisterhood. This is because women form solidarity by coming together and creating a close-knit relationship. Sisterhood therefore is used as a tool to create awareness among the female African immigrants with the hope of guarding against expected/foreseeable challenges. The African women are able to reach out to each other and a lot of encouragement, friendship and bonding takes place. In her paper titled "*African Feminism(s) A colonial question*" Mekgwe comments that "the notion of sisterhood is of such importance" and it is also understood as "a marker of friendship"(P:9).

6. 3.3. Empowerment and Economic Independence Through the pursuit of Education

According to Torild Skard (2003, P. 89), “education increases the productivity and income for women”. Education is a tool that Adichie uses in her narrative to sensitise women. James Smith and Spurling Andrea (1999, P. 4) define learning as a process carried out by individuals and groups. What is learnt, that is the output, counts as knowledge or skill. This can take the form of the ability to do something which could not be done before, or a new understanding about the world.

With women’s education, comes exposure, awareness, and the inevitable reaction to their plight in society. African women have contributed a great deal to education and literature. Taiwo underscores the fact that “pre-literate African women contributed a great deal to education and literature. Their art was verbal and their purpose didactic” (1984, p. 1). Indeed, literature has proved to be an important tool in expressing the female condition. The silence of women, caused by patriarchal structures was broken by these African women authors in the mid-sixties. The next decade of feminist writing by African women advanced the recognition of women’s concerns and their relevance. Women’s writing in Africa has shown how a pattern of assertion by women has emerged and impacted on the canon of African literature. This opened up a new phase in African feminist writing for exploring other options of taking off the yoke of oppression, such as empowerment through education and economic independence. Chukwuma (2006) asserts that “in women’s quest for rights, the importance of education cannot be over emphasised. It imparts knowledge, discernment, exposure and self-esteem” and this is depicted by the following female writers through female characters like: *Agnes* in Nwapa (1981), *Assatou* and *Ramatoulaye* in Ba (1981), *Olanna* and *Kainene* in Adichie (2006). Education is shown to be an enormous leap forward in the path of freedom, independence, and empowerment for women in various African nations today. According to Maluwa-Banda (2004), education is generally viewed as an effective way to deal with gender issues in a society. Indeed, education empowers women by enhancing their competencies and preparing them to participate actively in social or economic activities. Education is said to be a vehicle that breaks the shackles of poverty, thus leading to transformation, development, and progress (Ikoni, 2009).

Education gives women the opportunity to be less economically and financially dependent on men and to have more control over their lives. Education is an enormous leap forward in the path

to freedom, independence, and empowerment for women in various African nations. Education policies have often been motivated by views on their political impacts.

In order to free African women from patriarchal burden, Adichie has used some educated women to illustrate this strategy. In several of the short stories in *The Thing around Your Neck*, these educated women are able to escape male oppression unlike the uneducated ones.

The strategy of women pursuing education in Adichie's short stories echoes well with Ba's *So Long a Letter* (P.34) where education has the potential to provide women with the possibility of crafting new identity beyond that of womanhood and acquiring consciousness of empowerment that impacts on their relationship with males at the family and societal levels. The silencing shown by African women is entailed by cultural items such as: tradition, religion, marriage, motherhood, and the privileging of male children and male entitlement. Adichie uses her narrative as a medium for strengthening, emancipating, and liberating her female characters. Her narrative emphasises the importance of education for women's liberation and independence. She places her women characters at the forefront in the field of education. Newell (1997, P. 1) believes that gender images in literature are not static, pointing out that "gender images and ideologies constantly shift to account for their changing status".

In most of the regions of Nigeria, women are still educated at an inferior rate compared to their male counterparts. Gender disparities are more pronounced in marginalised regions of the country such as the Northern and Eastern regions. Some of the factors that affect the aspiration for higher education of girls includes cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, girl-child marriages, betrothal, male-child preference and privileging, pregnancies and high value attached to bride wealth and the community's negative attitude towards female education. These are some of the factors that contribute to a high dropout rate among Nigerian girls. Adichie employs education in her narrative as a platform for women's independence, emancipation, and freedom. This observation is evident in almost all the short stories in which the female characters are portrayed as educated; *Chika* from *Private Experience* is a Medical student on her way to becoming a medical doctor - a highly reputable profession, while her sister *Nnedi* is a Political Science student. *Kamara* from *Tomorrow is too Far*, holds a Master's degree, *Chinaza* from *Arrangers of Marriage* also holds a Master's degree, in *Jumping Monkey*

Hill Ujunwa is also a Master's degree holder, as well as Chioma in the embedded story, who holds a Master's degree in Economics. *Afamefuna* from *Headstrong Historian* is also a highly educated woman "one of the few women at the University College in Ibadan in 1950" (P: 216). Other female characters like *Nkem* and *Akunna* are also educated, *Nkem* is a graduate of a secretarial school and *Akunna* is struggling to put herself through college. Through the characterisation of these educated female characters, the author portrays the importance of education to women as a weapon of self-reliance and financial independence. This narrative corrects the cultural stereotype that 'a woman's place is in the kitchen'

The above portrayal of educated females showcases self-confidence and independence. Adichie's narrative draws attention to education as an eye-opener for the women. She also depicts educated women such as *Afamefuna* who are aware of their human and legal rights and make self-informed choices. *Afamefuna* had switched from Chemistry to History and later became a writer. She also divorces her husband, a Cambridge product when he "told her she was misguided to write about primitive culture instead of a worthwhile topic...." (P: 217).

Adichie's narrative also foregrounds the devastating effects of a lack of formal education on her female characters. *Nkem* is dependent on men as a young girl to meet her needs as well as shoulder the weight of her family's upkeep that was on her. Eventually, she is completely dependent on her husband *Obiora* after marriage to cater to her every need and opting to be a stay at home mother. The above portrayal in the novel is an example of the many women in the contemporary society who get enslaved due to lack of education. The author believes that lack of education makes women like *Nkem* unaware of the dangers and consequences of indulging in prostitution. The author uses education as a tool to emancipate her women characters out of the vicious circle of poverty. Adichie also believes education to be a first step towards self-awareness especially in sexual rights the female characters.

6.4. Women in same-sex relationships

It has been observed that homosexual rights or acceptance of homosexuality is perhaps one of the most socially unwelcomed, touchy, and political topics to broach in contemporary Africa (Lyonga 1998). Consequently, the criminalization of homosexuality in Africa has forced most gays and lesbians in Africa to "live in the closet" (Lyonga 1998). According to the Amnesty

International, homosexuality is still illegal in 38 African countries and there is no criminal law against homosexuality in 16 African countries.

Homophobia, which is fear or dislike of homosexuals, has been the main challenge in the contemporary Africa. Mwakasungula has noted that the one argument that has been continually raised is that homosexuality is a foreign culture, and against the dominant Christian and Islamic religions (P:365). For instance, in 2009 anti-gay activists in Uganda tabled a bill before parliament proposing the death penalty for anyone convicted of homosexuality (Lyonga :297). Nyong'o has satirized it to say that this law could lead to genocide (P: 40). There has been an outcry in Africa on the status of homosexual's rights.

In literature and popular culture, homosexuality has been received with mixed reactions. Some artists tend to ally with homosexuals while others tend to condone homophobia. For instance, the Malawian oral poet Robert Chiwamba has composed two poems titled —Mudzafa Imfa Yowawa (You will die a Painful Death) and —Takana Mathanyula (We Reject Homosexuality) that condemn homosexuality. One of the celebrated Malawian musicians, Lucius Banda, has also spoken against homosexuality. Religious and traditional leaders in Malawi have also condemned homosexuality as the work of the devil and un-cultural.

On the contrary, African writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie of Nigeria, Binyavanga Wainaina of Kenya, Monica Arac de Nyeko of Uganda, and Stanley Kenani of Malawi have criticised homophobia in their fiction. The persistent problem regarding homosexuality on the continent is why within Africa, both in everyday life and in fiction, there are contradicting views and representations about homosexuality. One scholar, Robert McRuer, has challenged how culture continues to accommodate, despite and indeed through the shifting crises surrounding them, heterosexual norms (1979). Some have argued that it is a high time that as part of humanity, homosexuality be given its right place in all spheres of life on the continent. Generally, homosexuality is seen to be against culture, law, and religion in African societies. However, there are also alternative views.

Culture, law and religion have been scapegoats for homophobia in contemporary African societies. Some authors have written to protest by faulting the same three pretexts. Such counter-arguments have been achieved through characterisation in literary works. In the selected short

story anthology by Adichie, the author has made her protagonists act against what is perceived to be normal sexual behavior in African context. Several of the stories in the anthology of short stories stand out due to the peculiarity of their content: Such stories include:

- **“On Monday of Last Week”**
- **“The Shivering”**
- **“Jumping Monkey Hill”**

These stories portray characters who declare or profess themselves to be homosexuals or as having or displaying homosexual tendencies. This is completely unusual in African literature, particularly in the literature of South of the Sahara, except for South Africa. Many African countries are intolerant towards homosexuality and lesbianism, have even criminalized it, and passed laws in place for the prosecution of persons found engaging in such activity. In African literature where it is found, it is often an expression of the perceived effects of Western influence on the African society and its writers. Vignal succinctly puts it thus:

“For the majority of (African writers) homophobia is exclusively a deviation introduced by colonialists or their descendants; by outsiders of all kind: Arabs, French, English, Metis, and so on, it is difficult for them to think homophobia might be the act of a black African” (Dunton, 2007 quoted in Eromosele).

Countering this stance, Sylvia Tamale argues that homosexuality is not un-African (5). She argues that the originality of homosexuality can be traced from Africa itself. These stories show how fiction writers have responded to homophobia in their writing using the same avenues through which homophobic societies justify their actions. These short stories illustrate how, in African societies, social institutions including culture, law, and religion are ultimately responsible for the prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality. In their depictions, Adichie alongside other contemporary authors protests the abhorrence of homosexuals through characterisation of *Kamara* in *Monday of Last Week*, The Senegalese woman in *Jumping Monkey Hill*, and *Chinedu* in *The Shivering*. From the perspective of this study, there are three concerned parties: homosexuals represented in the literature, homophobic African societies that they inhabit, and the writer as the one responsible for the representation. The study looks at the cause of tension between the homosexuals and the societies in which they inhabit. Within the same African

societies, there are contradicting narratives on homosexuality. From time immemorial, there has been a conflicting match between sex and gender. In the African context when one is born a male or female, there are prescribed gender roles for each sex. When a male conducts himself contrary to the prescribed gender roles, he is considered an oddity in society.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler protests the compulsory order of sex, gender or desire (P.5). She contends that —assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of men‘ will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that women‘ will interpret only female bodies (Butler 1990:9). Butler rejects the belief or the view that sex or gender is stable. She regards gender as a multiple interpretation of sex (Butler, 1990: 8). Furthermore, Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity says that gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations (13). In her argument, she suggests that gender is nurtured rather than natured. Consequently, one is not born a woman [or a man], but rather becomes one (Butler 1990:8). For example, in the selected texts some characters’ order of sexuality does not depend on their gender. They protest against being prescribed as to what sex they belong and what gender roles they are to perform. Therefore gender can be chosen and performed.

On Monday of Last week: This story focuses on a young Nigerian woman, *Kamara*, who has recently arrived in the United States of America and taken up the job of nanny to a young boy, whose mother she suddenly finds she is attracted to in a sexual manner. Her initial reaction to this strange attraction is typical of the generally expected reaction of most Africans to homosexuality and lesbianism, summed up by *Kamara* thus:

“A fellow woman who has the same thing that you have?

Her friend *Chinwe* would say if she ever told her.

Tufia! (God forbid) What kind of foolishness is that?” (Adichie 2009, p.81).

In spite of her reservations, *Kamara* still finds herself fantasizing and dreaming of having a relationship with *Tracy*, the object of her attraction. When in her presence, *Kamara* reacted in the same way that she would if in the presence of a handsome and attractive man:

“Tracy’s hand was still on her chin, slightly tilting her head up, and *Kamara* felt at first, like an adored little girl, and then like a bride. She smiled again. She was extremely aware of her body, of *Tracy’s* eyes, of the space between them being so small, so very small” (Adichie 2009 p.87).

At this point, one is left wondering how exactly *Kamara* had come to have such strange homosexual feelings or tendencies. Especially since her character had been presented as a normal, regular African woman who had simply travelled to America to be with her husband (who she discovers has also changed in too many ways). And there had been absolutely no mention of any previous instance or situation which might have suddenly influenced her change in sexual preference or orientation. There is no earlier mention of any change on her part, except for the slight weight gain. It therefore appears rather abruptly that she would imagine herself sexually attracted to another woman overnight or right out of the blues.

Adichie, unlike many African writers, desists from overtly presenting *Kamara’s* change in sexual preferences as stemming or resulting from a foreign influence. Although the reader is still left with the question of why she only suddenly discovered her lesbian side or tendency in America and not while she was still back home in Nigeria? *Jumping Monkey Hill* is also another story which the author uses to convey the theme of sexual preference through the portrayal of a female Senegalese who declared herself a lesbian during the writing retreat, through her homosexual story. In reaction to her story, *Edward* casually points out that “such homosexual stories are not reflective of Africa” (p.108). To this, *Ujunwa* the female protagonist in this story responds rather forcefully, “which Africa?” (p.108).

Adichie, here presents simultaneous perspectives on the place of homosexuality in Africa, and in so doing, makes her stand on the issue obvious or rather clear. She presents the evidently popular perception of homosexuality in Africa - that of its being an alien culture to Africa through the annoying character of *Edward*. Here the author, through her protagonist *Ujunwa*, expresses her contrary opinion. It is quite clear to see that her opinion on homosexuality points to the fact that it cannot be said to be alien to Africa; or that if it was in the past, then it could no longer be said to still be so. This view is further supported in the third story *The Shivering*, where Adichie makes the passing mention of the homosexual club (through the character *Chinedu*) where he

and his boyfriend, *Bidemi* shook hands with a former president. Here, the author brings attention to the fact that homosexuality is not a result of or the effect of the influence of foreign culture, and therefore not alien to Africa, but rather, that there are also many gay people in Africa (Nigeria) including very important, prominent and highly respectable members of the public, although they may never readily admit it publicly. The third homosexual character in the short story collection is presented by the author in "*The Shivering*". Here, Adichie appears to be trying to convey how ordinary and normal homosexual people are. Also, through her depiction of *Chinedu*, although not a female character, she shows how possible it is for homosexuals to be just as religious as heterosexuals, or to even have stronger faith in God than the latter. This is a deliberate attempt on Adichie's part to separate sexuality from religion and to show that *Chinedu's* sexual status does not in any way take-away from his relationship with God. This is conveyed through snatches of the conversation between *Chinedu* and *Ukamaka*:

"They prayed: he prayed in that particularly Nigerian Pentecostal way that made her nervous; he covered things with the blood of Jesus, he bound-up demons and cast them in the sea, he battled evil spirits..." (p.143)

"The coincidence is too much. God is telling us something. Only God can save our country" (p.145)

"God is, God is faithful!" Chinedu raised his voice. "God is faithful. Do you hear me?" (p.146)

And right after this rapturous exclamation, *Ukamaka* had received a call which confirmed that her boyfriend *Udenma*, was fine contrary to her fears that he had perished in the publicized plane crash. "*Nne, Udenma is fine. Chikodi just called me to say they had missed the flight. He is fine. They were supposed to be on that flight but missed it, thank God*". (P: 147).

The stories mentioned above depict people who have rejected the sexual confines set by society, especially the Nigerian society, and in so doing, defy prevailing set perceptions concerning sexuality. These stories as well as several others from Adichie's other works reveal that the author, like several other fresh African literary voices is also concerned about sexual matters;

whether she is writing about obvious contemporary sociopolitical, religious issues or other seemingly obscure and unconnected issues, her attention is drawn to the sex and sexuality of her characters, especially females. It is evident that she is not in support of the restrictions placed on sexual expressions by the society, especially the Nigerian society where homosexuality and lesbianism are criminalized. She therefore portrays homosexuality and lesbianism through her characters as simply human characteristics, and not as an “un-African” code of behaviour.

In summary, Souza (2016) argues that in African communities, social establishments such as culture, law and religion are accountable for the prevalent attitudes of homophobia towards homosexuality. According to Souza (2016: 16), Judith Butler has argued that culture tends to prescribe what gender a male or female must have, i.e. order of sexuality. She contends that gender is a matter of performance. She argues that if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. It can be deduced from this that Culture runs so deep in Africa and this culture is what shapes people’s views on homosexuality. Homosexuality is being described as forbidden because the Igbo/African culture from which the characters come from, forbids it. Engaging in homosexuality therefore means one going against the acceptable cultural norms and values.

In many African countries, the ‘laws validate heterosexuality and criminalize other sexualities. In his scholarly article titled —*Compulsory Able-Bloodedness and Queer/Disabled Existence*, Robert McRuer observes that the ongoing subordination of homosexuality (and bisexuality) to heterosexuality allows heterosexuality to be institutionalized as the normal relations of sexes, ‘while the institutionalization of heterosexuality as the normal relations of the sexes‘ allows homosexuality (and bisexuality) to be subordinated (90). McRuer’s observation suggests that there is a deliberate repression of homosexuality by the institutionalizing powers. Thus, the study also sees that law as one of these powers that subordinate homosexuality and embrace heterosexuality as the normal relations of the sexes. The Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church and Islamic sections have been at forefront rejecting homosexuality in Africa in particular and in the world in general. As it has been pointed out at the beginning, religion has predicted attitudes towards homosexuality. Adichie uses the portrayal of the homosexual character of Chinedu from *The Shivering*, whose prayers are answered even before he has finished praying. She suggests here that homosexuals are even more fervent in their Christian

beliefs than heterosexual Christians. This seems to contradict one of the beliefs of Christian faith that one cannot be a homosexual and be a Christian. She portrays *Chinedu* as a more fervent Christians than even heterosexual Christians.

This justification of homophobia using religion can be best understood in Butler's comparison of theatrical performance and gender performance. In her comparison of the two notions, Butler writes that although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions (Butler, —Performative Acts and Gender Constitution 524).

From the forgoing one can conclude that it the social institutions of culture, religion and law that are perhaps the reasons why homosexuals are viewed in Africa as abnormal and may also account for one of the reasons why Adichie's short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* has not been accorded the same fame or gained the same popularity in Africa as her novels as pointed out earlier in the study. Culture, law and religion are deeply embedded in Africans and these tend to prescribe Africans' views towards homosexuality. A number of African critics have challenged Adichie's stance on homosexuality and her portrayal of homosexual characters, calling it "un African".

6. 5. Space, Location and Environment

Another option/strategy proffered by female writers and which female characters in *The Thing around Your Neck* adopt in resisting patriarchy is that of space, location, and environment – women removing themselves from their subsuming environment or situation. Such writers make their female protagonists burst /break away from the marriage situation when it becomes too subjugating. Examples by other female African writers abound on this including *Firdaus* in Sadawi (1981), *Amaka* in Nwapa (1981), *Adaku* in Emecheta (1994), *Adah* in Emecheta (1977).

Regarding the strategy of space, location and environment in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the short stories are littered with examples of female characters who take the bold step of walking out on their spouses and matrimonial homes/marriages, subsuming relationships and situations putting physical distance between them and the objects of their subjugation in order to seek independence, autonomy and individuality. This act of walking out of such relationships and

situations is for them a liberating experience. In *Imitation*, *Nkem* decides to move back to Nigeria away from America where her husband stashed her and the children in order to have the freedom of carrying on with his extra-marital affairs back home in Nigeria unhindered. *Nkem*'s move back to Nigeria is in a bid to regain her autonomy, independence and voice which she had willingly given up as she came to live in America.

Akunna from *The Thing Around Your Neck*, also walks out of her supposed uncle's house, physically removing herself out of harm's way; out of her uncle's lecherous and wanton desire for sexual favours from her in exchange for and as payment for all he had done for her.

Chinaza from *Arrangers of Marriage* is also another character who takes leave of her matrimonial home, albeit temporarily, to get away from a lying, cheating, and domineering husband. The prevalence of cheating spouses remains high and runs through almost all the stories in the anthology and some series of events reinforce the idea that cheating is expected and should be put up with. But *Chioma's* mother from *Jumping Monkey Hill* refuses to chase after her cheating husband and beg him to come back to her as advised by her aunts, she asserts her independence and prioritizes her own happiness over the outward appearance of her marriage.

6. 6. Migration as strategy for Empowerment and liberation

Adichie tells stories based on her own personal experience and enables readers to see Nigeria from a totally different perspective than they would expect from a Nigerian novel. In her work she often portrays privileged female characters, who are educated, strong, independent and confident, which is a quite unusual representation of an African woman. Adichie's background is significant because it is reflected in her work to a great degree and enables the author to describe Nigeria from a dual perspective. On the one hand, as a Nigerian Igbo from a middle-class intellectual family with strong ties to the rural life of her ancestors, she is able to observe Nigeria from the inside. On the other hand, as a US immigrant, the author can describe her homeland from the outside. One of Adichie's essential themes is immigration. The author experienced the US way of living both as a black Nigerian and a migrant. Adichie's characters often stand between two continents, as the author herself does. The collection, *The Thing around Your Neck* focuses on women and migration as one of the major themes, and raises many more

questions than it can answer: what does it mean to be a woman living across cultures, in the early-21st century? Is it possible to feel at home when a migrant? What is home, in a country (Nigeria) of tensions, violence and religious/cultural divisions? What is the legacy of a traumatic past, personal, political, colonial and postcolonial, on the here and now?

On one hand Adichie criticises Africans/ Nigerians who readily adopt Western lifestyles upon migrating and who reject or deny their own cultural traditions. Suggesting that those who migrate to America often compromise their African roots and diminish themselves in the process. They often lose an important piece of their African identity as they try to assimilate into the white man's (materialistic) society. Also pointing out how, those who seek a new life often suffer because of the burden of family expectations. They feel responsible for the plight of their Nigerian relatives, but often do not have the means to fulfil their high (materialistic) expectations. While on the other hand Adichie seems to suggest migration is a strategy of empowerment and independence; an escape route from oppressive and subsuming situations which several of the female characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck* find themselves. To begin the analysis, we examine "*Imitation*." A story about Nkem living in a Philadelphia suburb with her two children. Her husband, a "Big Man" in Nigeria, spends only two months a year with her and the rest of the time in Lagos. She, herself, equally goes home to Nigeria only during the Christmas holidays.

The story begins in the present when *Nkem* learns from her friend, *Ijemamaka* that her husband, *Obiora*, has a girlfriend in Nigeria who has now moved into her Lagos home. It then wavers between her first getting the news, her initial response, flashbacks on her life and marriage and the final decision to return with the children to Nigeria and only come to the United States of America during holidays. Through this structure, based on the technique of rememory which consists of constant movement between the past and the present, Adichie x-rays the life of a heroine negotiating her identity through a transformative series of cultural and personal encounters.

Nkem's migrant status, her experiences in Nigeria and America all jostle with each other to ultimately define a woman who, for the most part, has been defined by others, and must take her own destiny into her hands when confronted by a threat to the space she calls her own. It is a

space characterised by multiple boundaries that culminate in underscoring her transnational status. An examination of how her identity is constructed before the story begins is important to our understanding of the decisive act she enacts when she assumes agency at the end of the story. Before marriage and eventual movement to the United States, *Nkem* grows up in an environment where her identity is constructed by social norms informed by gender and class. Her parents are poor farmers on a parched farm who can barely afford meals for the family. Her brothers hawk bread at the motor park. As the first daughter, *Nkem* is expected to cater for the needs of everyone often to her own detriment. In the Igbo patriarchal setting in Nigeria, an eldest daughter of the home carries numerous burdens, namely, providing for her parents and ensuring the welfare of her siblings. *Nkem* accepts this world as absolute and seeks only to find her defined place in it. Consequently, she dates married men to have the money to perform the roles that her cultural setting has mapped out for her. She looks forward to the men proposing to her, even if it means being the fourth wife in a marital relationship, but this does not happen. As it were in the postcolonial capitalist context of Nigerian, the parameters of marriage have been redefined. Most men now prefer university educated girls for wives possibly to further enhance their status. Young girls too look for rich men who would meet their needs and those of their families. In such a context, *Nkem* has very little chances of success because her beauty notwithstanding, “she had gone to secretarial school, not a university. Despite her perfect face she still mixed up her English tenses; because she was still, essentially, a Bush Girl” (P: 31). Consequently, before *Obiora* comes, the heroine sees little or no value in herself. Her life is dictated by society’s exigencies, a postcolonial society defined by a patriarchal and materialistic ethos. She does not measure up in her own eyes to “the kind of women who went abroad and bumped into each other while shopping at Harrods” (P: 32). She even wonders why *Obiora* dates her. This comparison is used to good effect to underscore the acquiescent role she later plays in the marriage because everything revolves around the husband whose tastes, position, and desires now define her. She defers to him in everything, for, even when *Obiora* proposes to her, *Nkem* finds this needless. This is because “she thought how unnecessary his asking was, because she would have *been happy simply to be told*. The phrase, “simply to be told”, significantly captures the gendered space of male dominance and female voiceless subservience that *Nkem* has come to accept as a normal way of life. It further accentuates her transformation when she recovers her voice in her self- defining posture at the end of the story. Upon marriage to this wealthy man, *Nkem*’s identity

is constructed on his material achievements. It is told that she first came to America to have her baby, “she had been proudly excited because she had married into the coveted league, The Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives To America to Have Their Babies league” and when their rented house is finally bought, “she liked that she had become part of yet another, the Rich Nigerian Men Who Owned Houses in America league” (P.26). Her life, as we noted earlier, is dictated by the husband’s likes and dislikes. For instance, she wears her hair long, waxes her pubic hair when he is to come for visits and appreciates the art objects he brings even when she understands very little about them

Apart from such transforming cultural encounters above, the green card, which *Nkem* finally succeeds in having, is a significant indicator of her transnational status. It enables her to enter America “without having to put up with the condescending questions at the American embassy back in Nigeria” (P.37). It equally indicates her belongingness in her host country and a symbol of her mobility between the twin worlds of her experience. The visa gives her the freedom to navigate both spaces freely. Her reminiscence on its acquisition is quite moving because it further defines her perception of her host country. “She really belonged to this country now, this country of curiosities and crudities, this country where you could drive at night and not fear armed robbers, where restaurants served one person enough food for three”. Most significant of all is when she speaks up for the first time regarding her life. She insists that she and the children will return to Nigeria and only come to America for holidays. This takes the husband by surprise. It is narrated that “*Obiora* continues to stare at her and she knows that he had never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand” (P.41). In this trans-migrant space, *Nkem* finds a voice and henceforth determines the path her life and that of her family will take. Her experience indicates that “the convergence of multiple places and cultures re-negotiate the terms of [migrant African women’s] experience that in turn negotiates and re-negotiates their identities” (Boyce-Davies 1996:3).

Nkem’s maid, *Amaechi* is another character who becomes liberated and empowered from her poor family background through immigration. Like *Nkem*, she too had been brought up in a very poor family background. Her father was very poor and had come under *Obiora’s* employ as a driver, and *Nkem* had taken *Amaechi* in at the age of 16. The level of their poverty is portrayed through her parents’ profuse show of gratitude to *Obiora* when he buys the father his first

motorcycle. "...*Amaechi's* parents had embarrassed him, kneeling down in the dirt to thank him, clutching his legs" (P: 33). Immigrating to America for Amaechi therefore is a window of great opportunities and possibilities towards liberating herself from the shackles of poverty back home in Nigeria.

Akunna, the heroine of the title story in "*The Thing Around your Neck*," migrates to America by winning a visa lottery. Nigeria is home from which the protagonist sets off to begin a new and better life in America envisaged as one of luxury and good education. Her experiences in the 'host' country, however, challenge not only her vision of things but radically initiates a re-vision of who she is in the global context in which she finds herself. Her efforts at coming to grips with her subject position in a multicultural/transnational context, continuously foregrounds the instability of identity and the violence sometimes underlying its construction. Adichie employs the technique of juxtaposition to present the different cultural spaces that shape *Akunna's* world. The case of *Nkem*, enables us to understand how transnational lives "challenge binary modes of thinking about space and time" (Espiritu 2003: 70).

While in Nigeria, *Akunna's* identity is shaped by the dynamics of class in a country where there is a yawning gap between the haves and the have-nots. Consequently, we are told that "she was used to accepting what life gave, writing down what life dictated" (121). What life has given her is nothing but poverty, misery, and destitution. The one room house with unpainted walls and very little furniture the family of six is crammed into is eloquent in this regard. Her father is a junior driver in a construction company where he drives a Peugeot 504 with rust-eaten holes on the roof. While, her mother is a cleaner in a parastatal "whose salary is barely enough to pay her brothers' fees in a secondary school where teachers gave an A when someone slipped a brown envelope" (118). Her aunts and uncles hawk bread on the streets of Lagos.

The episode in which *Akunna's* father accidentally rams his rickety Peugeot car into a Big Man's car "with golden headlights like the eyes of a leopard" (p:122) enters the narrative to delineate the relationships between the two groups where the have-nots are preyed upon by the rich and powerful captured in the image of the leopard. The father's posture, where he falls flat on the muddied road begging to be forgiven by the Big Man, shows how the poor and destitute are at the mercy of the man of power. At the national level, the country is characterised by corruption

and interminable strike actions which “caused universities to close so often that people added three years to their normal course of studies and lecturers ...were still not paid” (P:121). The realistic description of the heroine’s life, in her home setting emphasises the significance of winning the visa lottery which assumes symbolic proportions in the construction of self.

The American visa for *Akunna* and her family is the passport to the good life, of big houses, cars and the capacity to be able to send gifts of shoes, bags, and perfumes to her uncles, aunties, friends and cousins. Everyone therefore looks forward to her going to America with the kind of “unreasonable hope” found in “*Imitation*”. The reality of life in her ‘host’ country radically challenges these presumptions. Her encounters with her uncle, the college girls, her boyfriend and the American public at her waitress jobsite lead to a revision of her initial positions on life here. Again, the technique of juxtaposition works well in underscoring the dichotomy between previously held beliefs and the reality of things. The communal ethos that reminds her of home in her uncle’s house in Maine is underscored through the Igbo language spoken, the garri (Also known as *gari*, *garry*, *tapioca*, *garri* is a popular West African food made from cassava tubers.) eaten for lunch, the children calling *Akunna* “aunty” and the uncle’s wife addressing her as ‘sister’. This is radically called into question when the uncle tries to take advantage of her sexually. Here, she comes face to face with the ugly side of American capitalism played out in gendered terms as “America was give-and- take. You gave up a lot, but you gained a lot, too” (116). *Akunna*’s rejection of this patriarchal canvass in her definition of self is played out in symbolic terms when she takes the Grey-hound bus to another part of the country where, through effort, she can make life for herself, even though this may mean, in the interim, a lull in her education. Her encounters with the other characters, mentioned earlier, either reinforce stereotypes about the ‘other’ or reveal some fresh perspective about her new world. For instance, she discovers the surprising openness of Americans, their continuing stereotyping of Africa and Africans (something which offends *Akunna*), the freedom and liberty that extends even to naughty children whose parents fear to smack them, the underlying racism that still defines black/white relationships and the abundance of food, among others. She also discovers that contrary to what she and her family members had thought, Americans did not have big houses. *Akunna* engages these twin strands of her transcultural perspective through the relationship she forges with a caring white young man who helps her out of her loneliness and is even ready to accompany the heroine back home on the death of her father. It is a relationship which, as we

noted earlier, reveals the racism still present in the country, but which also indicates *Akunna's* ability to forge relations on her own terms no matter how these may be perceived by the wider public. As a waitress, she sends home half of her salary to cater to the needs of her family, participating in what Caroline Bretell calls “transnational activities” which include economic, social or political exchanges across borders (Bretell 2006:1) and which constitutes part of migrant realities. For Thomas Faist, “conceptually, African women immigrants view remittances as a moral imperative, a duty and a mutual obligation to the family members back home” (Faist 2002:216). This is consonant with *Akunna's* position in this story who knows that as first daughter, tradition demands that she be responsible for the welfare of her family. Adichie’s realist perspective is continuously reinforced in this regard. As, a transnational subject, the heroine contributes to the economy of her home country through the remittances sent home every month. In this wise, she negotiates and assumes the subject position of a breadwinner for her family, something that might not have been feasible in her home country with the general collapse in the level of living.

The heroine in “*The Arrangers of Marriage*,” Chinaza Okafor, is forced into a loveless marriage by her uncle and aunt on the pretext that marrying a doctor from America is akin to winning the American visa lottery itself. All this draws from the foundation that marriage, especially one based on ethnicity, defines the woman (*Chinaza's* Yoruba boyfriend is rejected on this count). While the protagonist would have loved to pursue university education, this desire is thwarted by a set up defined by compulsory domesticity and the enforcement of specific gendered relations (Hooks 1984: 23).

Chinaza is an orphan raised by an uncle and aunt who ironically pride themselves in taking care of her, finding a husband for her, buying her a new pair of shoes every two years. This irony is all the more succinct when we discover that she has been exploited by her relations. We are told that “she had sold more bread in her *aunt's* bakery than all the other bakeries in Enugu sold, the furniture and floors in the house shone because of her” (170). The reward for all of these is to be married off to a total stranger. Upon arrival in America, her perceptions of the man and of life in her host country change. Her wish to maintain her cultural identity is challenged by a husband obsessed with social conformism who tries to constrain her to adhere to what he perceives as typical American mores. The plot of the story revolves around how he tries to force *Chinaza* to

adapt to the American way of life. Through *Chinaza's* responses to his attempts at assimilation, Adichie criticizes certain cultural exigencies that deny the individual the opportunity of redefinition in the framework of globalization. In this context, name, food and relationships work to indicate narrative posture and mood. The journey motif, (where Chinaza's husband takes her round to show her how to do grocery shopping and use the bus) for instance, becomes the weapon to underscore the contrast between Nigerian and American culture. The beef in key food supermarket compares poorly with the fresh cut meat slabs in Ogbete Market where you examined them before buying. American favourite foods like pizza with poorly cooked tomatoes and poor eating customs nauseate her even though her husband assures her that she will learn to love these ways. The focus on food stuffs, eating habits, and culinary aesthetics indicate that "food constitutes a central constituent of cultural identity" (Tunca 2010: 302) in this context. Eunice Ngongkum: Transnationalism in *The Thing Around Your Neck* The ground *egusi*⁷, dried *Onugbu*⁸ leaves and *uziza*⁹ seeds, carried along by the heroine can thus be seen as cultural markers that meet their challenge first at the airport where "the custom officer raked through the suit case to seize the *uziza* seeds for fear that *Chinasa* will grow them on American soil" (168). This "othering" is relentlessly pursued by her husband who insists on her cooking only American foods, eating hamburgers, speaking like an American and seeing things from an American perspective. This process of assimilation begins with renaming. *Chinasa's* Christian name, Agatha, which she has never used, becomes the preferred name for her husband who has also changed his names to David Bell from *Ofodile Udenwa*. His argument is that if "you want to get anywhere...in this country...you have to be as mainstream as possible" (p: 172).

James C. Scott has observed that the usual power of dominant elites is to compel performances from others. But while these performances typically generate insults and slights to human dignity, they, in turn, foster a hidden transcript of indignation and revolt (Scott 1990: 18, 7). Compelled by her husband to perform as an American in all facets of life, *Chinasa's* Nigerian identity is radically challenged. However, as the plot of the story unfolds, she quietly registers a hidden transcript of revolt against the husband's efforts to "Americanize" her through acts like speaking Igbo to herself while cooking, teaching *Nia*, her neighbour and friend some of it,

⁷Egusi seeds are the fat and protein-rich seeds of certain cucurbitaceous plants. They can be ground and used to thicken soups in West Africa.

⁸ Onugbu leaves, commonly known as bitter leaves in West Africa, are species of *Vernonia* eaten as leaf vegetables.

⁹ Uziza seeds are the spice derived from the West African variety of *Piper* known as piper guineense.

throwing away “pieces of half-cooked, clammy chicken, and starting all over again” (179). Her firm decision to quit the marriage, “find a job, find a place, support herself, and start afresh” (186), when she gets her papers, underscores a lack of disposition towards cultural interaction. This is a major element in her characterisation that serves to hold up to ridicule her uni-dimensional husband obsessed with social conformism.

6. 7. Women reclaiming their voices and asserting themselves

“Silence represents the historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, which forms of social organisation in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status” (D’Almeida, 199). In a patriarchal society, many voiceless women abound and many have gone uncelebrated. According to Uwakwe (1995), “silence comprises all imposed restrictions on women’s social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure”.

The feminist movement is geared towards helping women speak out for themselves and say no to subservience and embark on a mission of self-recovery. By voiceless, we mean the historical absence of the woman writer’s text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women’s rights and more direct social and cultural issues. By voicelessness we also mean silence: the inability to express a position in the language of the “master” as well as the textual construction of woman as silent. Voicelessness also denotes articulation that goes unheard (Okuyade, 2009).

In *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the author showcases how silence is used as a weapon of patriarchy. It is believed that a voiceless person is left with no sense of belonging. The use of silence or muting leads to domestic servitude. According to Ogundipe-Leslie, women are shackled by their own negative self-image by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy. Her own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear, dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed (p: 35).

The above exemplifies what is obtainable in *Obiora* and *Nkem*'s marriage in "*Imitation*". *Nkem* does not voice her thoughts or opinions about issues in her marriage and generally. Even with *Obiora*'s suggestive indication that she is a mere 'trophy wife' for him, she is not an active participant in her own marriage, but rather a passive spectator, as she has no say in it. This means that she is voiceless and powerless without a voice. She never voices or expresses any opinions of her own regarding her life in America. She simply does her husband's bidding and there is no indication that she even has any personal opinions or if she is capable of holding any opinions. The story hints that she seems to think she had actually achieved much more than she had ever imagined or considered possible.

Nkem personifies the stereotyped image of African women as subdued, victimised, voiceless and subservient. A human being's voice is one of the person's precious assets so, anyone without a voice is bound to go in search of it. In her journey to "find herself", *Nkem* takes a radical and abrupt decision to free herself from the shackles of patriarchy, having had enough of the many years of subjugation and subservience characterised by her silence and condoning her husband's abnormal behaviour and infidelity without ever voicing her displeasure, challenging him or asserting herself as a partner. However, she finally takes the bold step always finding a way to set her free. *Nkem* can be seen as an embodiment of the traditional African woman, who is unsophisticated and content with the economic security her husband guarantees, decides to liberate herself from her husband's domineering and controlling hold. As Ifechelobi puts it:

"She steps out of her enervating state, fractures the patriarchal social structure and demystifies the idealized traditional images of the African woman. She puts behind the psychological rift between her body and mind and liberates herself from the marginal status she assumes at the beginning of the novel as she begins to take control of her life, her marriage and her home. It is this aspect of the novel that gives it a very radical feminist outlook" (Ifecholobi 2014).

Nkem's action can be likened to that of Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* and *Beatrice* from Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In her journey to "find herself", *Beatrice* takes the law into her hands, goes on a personal vendetta, and slowly poisons Papa to death. She had to free herself and her children from the shackles of patriarchy, having had enough of the many years of

subjugation and subservience characterised by domestic violence, verbal abuse, and torture. “*Papa* nearly beat *Kambili* to death for possessing a painting of *Papa Nnukwu* (*Eugene*’s heathen father). “*Mama* does not talk back or challenge *Papa*’s violence against her, but she takes action that speaks the loudest” (Orie 2:11). On the other hand, all the men in *Nora*’s life betray her. Her husband sees her as a plaything to be trampled upon. Although *Nora* did not murder her husband like *Beatrice*, and unlike *Nkem* who does not walk away from her marriage, she took a walk from the marriage. In the words of Frank (1984), “Ten or fifteen years have passed since ‘happily ever after’, the “angel” in the house is restless and unhappy, her children well on the way to being grown, their father a tyrant or stranger or perhaps just a bore. In a pattern that goes back to Ibsen’s *A Doll House*, our heroine slams the door on her domestic prison, journeys out into the great world, slays the dragon of her parochial society, and triumphantly discovers the grail of feminism by ‘finding herself’.”

Many women in our contemporary society live like *Beatrice*, *Nkem* and *Nora*. Some have exited their domestic prisons while some are suffering in silence. According to Salami-Agunloye (quoted in Cooper, 2001), “in many African societies, being a wife is nearly as bad as being a slave or a bond woman as has been illustrated by many writers.”

Nkem however reclaims her voice, first by confiding in her maid, *Amarachi* is able to voice *Obiora*’s infidelity for the first time, in telling it to *Amarachi* and expressing her disillusionment and disapproval over the situation for the first time ever.

Secondly, *Nkem* finds her voice by saying no to years of being subservient to *Obiora* through the rebellious act of cutting her hair short. A deviation from *Obiora*’s usual approved style of hairdo for her ... “I loved your long hair ...Why did you cut it? Is it the new fashion trend in America? “I thought you would like it,” she says. “Anything will look good with your lovely face, darling, but I liked your long hair better. You should grow it back. Long hair is more graceful on a Big Man’s wife” (P.40). *Nkem* cuts her hair as a sign of rebellion over her husband’s domination and control over even her personal grooming habits. It is a way of asserting herself/autonomy in her marriage with *Obiora*. From his reaction, this is clearly and completely unexpected.

Nkem also finds her voice by speaking up for the first time in their marriage; confronting *Obiora* with the true situation of their marriage. “Can we cram a year’s worth of marriage into two

months in the summer and three weeks in December?” She asks. “Can we compress marriage?” (P.41). She takes a decision and tells *Obiora* “we have to find a school for *Adanna* and *Okey* in Lagos.” “...we are moving back at the end of the school year. We are moving back to live in Lagos. We are moving back” (P.41). She speaks slowly and with finality, leaving no room for negotiation.

Adichie does not isolate her characters altogether from their prevailing traditions and culture, but detaches them from harmful traditional practices that hinder their independence and success. Despite the peripheral treatment of women in the Igbo community, the author places woman characters at the center of her narrative, portraying liberated women who are capable of challenging societal norms, and who do not compromise themselves with the forces of patriarchy.

6.8. Name change /Resisting Name change as a strategy for empowerment

Typically, Adichie uses the name change as a powerful symbol of identity. In many of Adichie’s stories, the main characters often change their names as they seek to assimilate into a new society. Daria Tunca comments that a change of names of immigrants is a repetitive phenomenon in Adichie’s narratives which is done in order to create a sense of familiarity in a foreign land and also to assimilate oneself with a different culture at all costs. Here the critic talks about the author’s initial pen name “Amanda N. Adichie” and “Amanda Ngozi Adichie” later on resuming her original Igbo name Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (300). In Adichie’s short stories, not only are the names being renamed by Nigerian immigrants, but they also try to obliterate their mother tongue Igbo.

Ofofiele not only discards his Igbo name but also dislikes *Chinaza* speaking Igbo in public and otherwise too. Daria Tunca while reflecting on “*Arrangers of Marriage*” says: *Ofofiele*’s name change to *Dave* (P: 172) symbolizes his desire to assimilate as completely as possible into American society. It also reveals the clash of differences as Nigerians are forced to renounce their African identity and their cultural views and values that define them and give them dignity. Likewise, when *Dave* coerces her to change her name to *Agatha Bell*, *Chinaza* feels her identity as a Nigerian slipping. Like the food and drink she renounces, the name change becomes yet another symbol of the social and cultural differences that erode (undermine) her identity as a

Nigerian. Adichie portrays *Afamefuma* as a character who proudly rejects the missionaries' version of history; she also rejects her husband's (*George Chikadibia's*) attempt to downgrade the historical book "she would write" entitled "A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria". Adichie thereby reaffirms and praises *Afamefuma's* attempt to privilege African literature and culture and to return to her own cultural roots, traditions and literature. Adichie suggests that this is necessary if the Nigerians are to retain cultural pride, dignity and confidence. This is the best opportunity they have for a hopeful future. As testimony to her and her grandmother's shared courage, *Afamefuma* holds her grandmother's hand, "the palm thickened from years of making pottery." While on the other hand, Adichie uses resistance to change of name as a strategy of liberation and empowerment. *Ofodile* calls himself *Dave* and even changed his last name to Bell because "Americans have a hard time with *Udenwa*". Therefore, he urges his new wife to adapt as much as she can to her new life in the US and even forces her to change her name to *Agatha Bell* (p.172): Adichie is critical towards the hypocrisy that lies behind renaming. *Dave* keeps insisting on how important it is to be assimilated and he praises the wonders of America even if the price to pay is the complete abolition of his African origin. He would not let *Chinaza* speak Igbo or even cook Nigerian food: "This is not like Nigeria [...], he said, sneering as though he was the one who had invented the superior American system" The dichotomy between the so-called American system and the Igbo tradition is present in most of Adichie's stories, and it is dealt with in different ways. Most of her diasporic characters show little balance in their attitudes towards cultural integration or assimilation. This trait often marks the character's role in the narrative. *Nwamgba* resists name changes several times through the story. First with her only son whom she had named *Anikwenwa* at birth, but who upon receiving Missionary education and conversion to Christianity, discards his native Igbo name (based on the belief that it was a heathen/ pagan name) and Adopts the name *Michael* at baptism. But his mother rebelliously refused to address him as Michael, but adamantly addresses him as *Anikwenwa*. "*Michael* would be very angry if he ever heard of this oracle suggestion and *Nwamgba*...still found it difficult to remember that *Michael* was *Anikwenwa*" (P: 213).

Nwamgba again resists a name change on the matter of her son's fiancée, when she blatantly refuses to accept the woman's English name of *Agnes* but opting instead for her original native Igbo name *Mgbeke*. "...but simply said that somebody at the mission had seen a suitable young woman from Ifite Ukpo and the suitable young woman would be taken to the *Sisters of the Holy*

Rosary at Onicha to learn how to be a good Christian wife. *Nwamgba* was sick with the malaria on that day...and she asked *Anikwenwa* the young woman's name. *Anikwenwa* said it was Agnes. *Nwamgba* asked for the young woman's real name. *Anikwenwa* cleared his throat and said she had been called *Mgbeke* before she became a Christian (P: 212).

Another instance of resistance against name change still in *The Headstrong Historian* has to do with the occasion of the first grandchild, who is christened Peter at baptism, but who *Nwamgba* names *Nnamdi* in a resistance to what she perceived as foreign and alien. Also, her second grandchild who is named Grace at baptism, is given the native Igbo name *Afamefuna* meaning; my name will not be lost. Later in life, Grace would also revert to *Afamefuna*, the name given her by her grandmother, in a bid to reclaim her lost identity and history.

Adichie herself, whether by omission or design, only portrays *Anikwenwa's* wife, *Nwamgba's* daughter-in-law as *Mgbeke* throughout the course of the story. Only referring to her as *Agnes* once in the entire story "and when she asked for the young woman's name, *Anikwenwa* said it was *Agnes*" (P: 212) and this is the only instance where Agnes is mentioned.

6.9. Writing by Women as a Strategy for liberation from Patriarchal Domination

Nigerian women have also found another tool for fighting for their cause – literature. Nigerian feminist literature has been created to destroy the image of a silenced Nigerian woman portrayed in male authored works. Literature has empowered female characters whose voices had been muted for a long time and are sometimes forced to challenge patriarchal dominance, while at the same time they are subjected to physical and emotional abuse.

In the introduction to her book, Weiringa asserts that women's acts of resistance are not only subversive, but "sub-versive," highlighting how internationally women are deeply involved "in circumventing, uncoding, and denying the various, distinct, and multi-layered verses in which their subjugation is described and replacing them with their own verses (1-2). Weiringa is discussing Third World women in general. These authors, as well as other political activists are rebelling against patriarchy. What is key is the way in which women writers use the written word as their weapon against patriarchy.

Many female critics believe that male authors write inadequately from the female perspective. Therefore, it is not surprising that they believe that women are more capable of writing from the female perspective. As with male authors, many theorists believe that identity is also very important when discussing female authors. Susan Gubar believes that men see women as “blank pages,” but that women sometimes also see themselves in this way, using writing to re-create themselves. The female author is deeply involved in her work, because it is often considered a re-shaping of herself, Judith Kegan Gardiner also emphasises identity as being an important factor in women’s writing .She believes, “the woman writer uses her text, particularly one centering on a female hero, as part of a continuing process involving her own self-definition and her empathic identification with her character” (187). It is very clear that Gardiner believes that women writers are much more attuned to their writing as well as their female audience, because it is representative of them. This rings very true in Adichie’s *The Thing around Your Neck*. *Ujunwa* from *Jumping Monkey Hill* illustrates the above assertion, she is representational of women who resort to writing as a form of rebellion and resistance as well as a weapon of overcoming patriarchal domination or oppression.

“She laughed and laughed, and they watched her and then she picked up her papers” a real story of real people?” she said, with her eyes on *Edward’s* face. “The only thing I didn’t add in the story is that after I left co-worker and walked out of the Alhaji’s house, I got into the jeep and insisted that the driver take me home because I knew it was the last time I would be riding in it” (P: 114).

At the same time, such women find writing as a means of escape from the oppressive situations. *Ujunwa’s* fictional story about *Chioma* is actually representative of herself. The ending of the fictive writing climaxes also with Susan Gubar believes that men see women as “blank pages,” but that women sometimes also see themselves in this way, using writing to re-create themselves. The female author is deeply involved in her work because it is often considered a re-shaping of herself. This aptly describes *Ujunwa* in the sense that she is deeply involved in her fictive story about *Chioma*, because she in fact is *Chioma*. In writing about *Chioma*, *Ujunwa* sees herself as “a blank page” and uses this story to recreate and reshape herself.

The writing experience helps *Ujunwa* to pen down and unload and her feelings and frustrations over recent past events in her life, firstly, her father's leaving them; "When *Chioma's* father heard of it, he shouted at her mother and said she had acted like one of those wild women from the street, had disgraced him, herself, and an innocent woman for nothing. Then he left the house *Chioma* came back from National Youth Service and noticed that her father's wardrobe was empty" (P: 105). Secondly, her inability to secure a job despite her educational qualification; "*Chioma* lives with her mother in Lagos. She has a degree in economics from Nsukka, has recently finished her National Youth Service, and every Thursday she buys *The Guardian* and scours the employment section and sends out her CV in brown manila envelopes. She hears nothing for weeks" (P: 100), and finally her annoyance with Edward, the facilitator and leader of The Writing Workshop who casually dismissed *Ujunwa's* writing as "implausible...This is agenda writing, it isn't a real story of real people" and it suggesting with an air of superior knowledgeable ability that "it's never quite like that in real life, is it? Women are never victims in that sort of way and certainly not in Nigeria..." (P: 114). In so doing, she eventually unburdens her mind and frees herself from pent up emotions. At the end, she emerges a confident, assertive, and liberated woman contrary to the initial timid, silenced, submissive, and docile woman who had arrived at the Writing Workshop.

Another character in the anthology that becomes liberated through writing is *Akunna* from *The Thing Around Your Neck*. *Akunna* had become disillusioned with the American dream when her Uncle tried to garner sexual favour from her as payment for his continual assistance to her while in America. *Akunna* ventures into life on her own in a foreign country thousands of miles from her home and this sends her into a state of depression and unhappiness. Coupled with the fact that she could not write home to her family for fear of dashing their hopes and dreams about America

"Every month you wrapped the money carefully in a white paper but you didn't write a letter. There was nothing to write about" (P: 118), "it wasn't to your parents you wanted to write, it was also to your friends, and cousins and aunts and uncles. But you could never afford enough perfumes and clothes and handbags and shoes to go around and still pay your rent on what you earned at the waitressing job, so you wrote nobody" (P: 119).

The climax of *Akunna*'s story is when she finally writes home "you wrote home finally. A short letter to your parents, slipped in between the crisp dollar bills, and included your address" (P: 127). This act of writing is a freeing and liberating experience for *Akunna*, as the response she gets from her mother informing her of her father's death enables her to put her life in perspective and take the decision to end her unhappy stay in America and return home.

Adichie also uses her writing to resist sexism in literature. Njoki Mwihi in "A Critical analysis of Athol Fugard's Social Vision in Four Selected Plays" points out that: A writer through his/her creative imagination aims at persuading his/her reader to view not only a kind of reality, but more important from a certain angle and perspective, a certain vision...the writer's creative work reflects reality and also aim at making the readers' take a certain attitude to the reality presented.

On the level of syntax in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Adichie skilfully uses a metafictional format in *The Jumping Monkey* to reflect the women's growing assertiveness and confidence. The narrator recounts her "real experiences" in an embedded third-person narrative format that parallels the emotional experience of the narrator. Accordingly, Adichie presents the notion that art mirrors real life and that the seeds of art lie at the heart of lived experience. The resolution of one story mirrors the other.

Adichie resists sexism in her writing through her portrayal of male characters in her anthology of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck*, where male characters are either excluded completely from the stories portrayed as incomplete, or portrayed in terms of their relationship with the female characters. McCabe et al (2011:200) argue that "not showing a particular group or showing them less frequently than their proportion in the population conveys that the group is not socially valued." Similarly, according to Sarangi and Candlin (2003:118) such categorisation produces "social and moral consequences." Bhatia (2007:281) goes further to say that "conventional metaphorical categories are unchanging...the longer they have been implemented, the more they are taken literally." In *The Thing Around Your Neck*, categorisation is clearly illustrated by Adichie portrayal of the male characters as husbands/men with deceptive, adulterous, promiscuous, and domineering/dictatorial tendencies.

Male characterisation/personification in the anthology is one-sided. Male characters in the short stories are almost invisible, mere appendages, and overshadowed by the female characters. They are never given a proper place or the opportunity to develop as characters; they represent the category of all Nigerian Igbo husbands. They all share the same properties; they are all husbands, domineering/dictatorial, they are almost all promiscuous and adulterous, morally irresponsible, and deceptive. Adichie uses the same expressions; the expressions used to describe members of the male category - male is repeated all over and over again depicted either as liars, cheats, sexually abusive, sexist, physically or emotionally dominating partners or spouses: *Obiora* is deceptive and adulterous; *Akunna's* uncle is physically (sexually) and emotionally abusive; *Ofofiele* is a domineering, lying husband who regards his new wife as a sexual object; *Edward* is a chauvinistic/sexist person who objectifies women; *Obierika's* cousins from *Headstrong Historian* are greedy, conniving patriarchal men, *Ofofiele* is controlling and sexually abusive. The only exception is the portrayal of *Obierika* from *Headstrong Historian* who loved his wife and supported and defended her before his family.

It is however worth pointing out here that Adichie's seemingly one-sided portrayal in the anthology tending to make female characters more visible than the male characters is a conscious act on her part as a strategy of critiquing sexism in literature.

In *The Thing Around Your Neck*, female characters in these stories have a very powerful and overshadowing presence and adopt various roles as well, to enjoy varying degrees of empowerment. The narrators/protagonists of eleven (11) of the twelve (12) short stories in the anthology are females, except for *Ghosts*, which is centered around the only male narrator/protagonist in the collection. The eleven stories centered on female characters are narrated by women. Set within the post-colonial context of political conflict/war and diaspora, the anthology offers an opportunity to attend to an uncommonly heard voice - that of the black African female.

Adichie contests or counters the stereotypical and sexist portrayal of female characters by male African authors such as Achebe, in her portrayal of *Nwamgba* in *The Headstrong Historian*, who was one of *Okonkwo's* wives from *Things Fall Apart*. Through her portrayal of *Nwamgba* as an assertive, strong, and resilient character, Adichie's short story provides a contra-portrayal

to Achebe's famous novel, where *Okonkwo's* wives had not yet found the courage to tell their own stories, by allowing and equipping the female characters in the anthology to discover their hidden and silenced voices by confronting patriarchal dominance (Kurtz34)

As an expression of her dissatisfaction with the silencing of and invisibility of female voices and characters in the writings of most early male authors, Adichie enables her female characters such as *Akunna, Nkem, Chinaza, kamara, Chika, Ukaamaka* (the female protagonists from the anthology) to speak-up and narrate their stories from their own female perspective. In so doing the author is critiquing and questioning the hitherto sexist portrayal of females in literature by African male writers.

6.10. Complementarity: women involving men in their emancipatory endeavours

In spite of the obvious radical feminist perspectives portrayed in several of Adichie's novels and some of her short stories, the author still proffers reformist feminist approach in the text to demonstrate that men with oppressive tendencies and habits can change. This angle of approach stems from the fact that reformist feminists believe in the possibility of a reformation of the criticised society and individuals in particular. Reformist feminists are also of the view that the movement towards the full equality of men and women should be gradual and incremental. The current patriarchal structures are not as terrible as depicted in some of the positive male characters. Indeed, there are non-patriarchal aspects of the past and the current culture that can be retrieved, reinvented and used in the contemporary society. Reformist feminism equally censors "the patriarchal-molded attitudes, norms and conventions that hinder their self realisation" (Arndt 362). The foundations of the patriarchal society are not attacked because they accept the fact that patriarchal orientation is fundamental in society. Reformist feminists seek to negotiate with the patriarchal society to gain a new scope for women and end their oppression. Men are criticised as individuals and the movement believes that men can overcome their reprehensible behaviour if reforms take place and they make a conscious effort towards an attitudinal change. Although it appears that Adichie seems to give the impression that all men are promiscuous or potential adulterers and bigamists as deduced from her portrayals of *Obiora* from *Imitation*, *Chioma's* father from *Jumping Monkey Hill*, *Ofodile* in *Arrangers of Marriage*,

men are however not pilloried as a group but as individuals who are capable of reform. Adichie offers a ray of hope for men's ability to change, or of possible social transformations. The survival of the good men over the bad ones, it is believed, will lead to the transformation of the society. In as much as reformist feminists believe that there are good marriages where husbands love and care for their wives, they emphasise the need for the liberation of women from an oppressive and abusive marriage. Hence the female characters' coming into a realization of their oppressive situations and taking steps towards emancipation and liberation such as *Akunna* who leaves her uncle's house, *Chinaza* who also leaves her husband's house to stay with *Nia*, *Nkem* who also takes a bold step in reasserting herself and reclaiming her home. It is worthy to note that reformist feminist literature does not always end in the murder of men. This is because of the belief that bad men can change in character, values and behaviour, which will in turn, lead to a better and improved society. It is in view of this that Adichie's female characters do not leave their husbands, family or the objects of their oppression permanently, but rather only for a short time, firmly believing in the complementarity between the sexes. Although at the same time, African reformist feminism does not encourage crime and sexual promiscuity. The culprits are however given a second chance in the belief that they would be reformed. Hence *Nkem* does not divorce her husband, or leave him, but rather decides to move back home to Nigeria and live a normal life a family. *Chinaza* also returns to her husband *Ofodile* after spending the night at *Nia's* and pondering over the situation, even though it is not clear that she would not eventually leave him for good once her papers were ready "you can wait until you get your papers and then leave." *Nia* said. "You can apply for benefits while you get your shit together, and then you'll get a job and find a place and support yourself and start afresh." *Nia* came and stood besides, by the window. She was right, I could not leave yet. I went back across the hall the next evening. I rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood aside, and let me pass" (P: 186). It can be deduced from the foregoing that the reformist feminist does not condemn all men or sees them as oppressive towards women but addresses individual men with oppressive tendencies towards women. Reformist feminists are not antagonistic nor are they out to usurp men's positions, but recognise the fact that in African traditions, men and women are complementary partners in the general development of the society. The reformist-feminist postulation also recognises the fact that there are positive aspects of the patriarchal society that encourage women and give them the opportunity to develop themselves intellectually, socially, and politically. Hence, this discourse

identifies those factors militating against women in patriarchal societies in order to alleviate their plight or put a total stop to women's oppression. This is illustrated in *Chinaza's* efforts at getting her legitimate papers, which would enable her to develop herself economically as a step towards liberating herself from *Ofofiele's* domineering clutches.

While there is advocacy for women to be granted social justice and equality with men, the reality is that women are still doubly oppressed. Firstly, they are oppressed by colonialism and neocolonialism like her male counterpart, and secondly, by the patriarchal arrangement whereby the women and the children belong to the minority group in the sense that they are denied some privileges and freedom, which society normally allows for the dominant group (Adebayo 2016: 281). But imbuing positive attitudes towards women will be helpful to women in the society. If men with oppressive tendencies regard women as partners in progress and make a conscious effort towards changing their negative attitudes, the society will be better.

6.11. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the analysis and discussion of Adichie's female characters by exploring ways of liberating the female characters in the short stories of *The Thing around Your Neck*. It presented and demonstrated the strategies used by the author to equip her female characters to defy the patriarchal dictates, institutions, and stereotypes, and liberate the women characters. The analyses revealed that although Adichie places her female characters in oppressive, subjugating, and subsuming conditions and situations, she always offers and equips them with the opportunities and strategies to overcome their situations and liberate themselves. The chapter noted that several female characters from the anthology are faced with challenges, oppressive situations that limit their emancipatory capabilities, disempowers, silences them and renders them invisible, but they eventually rise above their oppressions, liberate and regain their voices and assert themselves whether in their marriages or personal relationships. It also presented that such characters as *Nkem* from *Imitation* illustrates a woman who is depicted at the beginning of the story as docile and submissive to the point of being silent and voiceless in her marriage to *Obiora*, but later becomes liberated, regains her voice, asserts herself and reclaims her marriage and home. The chapter also discussed how *Nkem* evolves from a voiceless, powerless and submissive "bush girl" who "said nothing" to a strong, emancipated, and assertive woman as

seen at the end of the story. *Chinaza, Akunna, Ujunwa, Chioma, Chioma's mother*- all these female characters endure suppression and subjugation for a period of time, but they eventually became liberated and empowered.

The study reveals some of these strategies with which Adichie equips her female characters in the anthology to include resisting name change, migrating to the US as a way of escaping poor family back grounds and seeking better opportunities in life. The chapter also highlighted the strategies of giving strength and support through shared experiences and sisterhood as portrayed in the relationships of *Chika* and The *Hausa Muslim woman* in *Private Experience*, *Nkem* and *Amaechi* in *Imitation*, *Chinaza* and *Nia* from *Arrangers of Marriage*, *Ukaamaka* and *Chinedu* from *The Shivering*. Other strategies include pursuit of formal education, rejection of harmful cultural and traditional practices.

The chapter further noted that Adichie's portrayal of male characters are either excluded completely from the stories, portrayed as incomplete or static, or portrayed in terms of their relationship with the female characters. Though less frequently portrayed in this light, Adichie categorises them as husbands/men with deceptive, adulterous, promiscuous, and domineering/dictatorial tendencies. Male characterisation/personification in the anthology is one-sided. Male characters in the short stories are almost invisible, mere appendages and overshadowed by the female characters. They are never given a proper place or the opportunity to develop as characters. The chapter also pinpointed that Adichie's seemingly one-sided portrayal in the anthology tending to make female characters more visible than the male characters is a conscious act on her part as a strategy of critiquing sexism in Literature.

It further noted that contests or counters the stereotypical and sexist portrayal of female characters by male African authors such as Achebe.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1. Summary and Conclusion

The overall objective of this study was to critically examine female character portrayal in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story anthology, *The Thing Around Your Neck*. After analysing Adichie's short story fiction it is observed that many powerful female voices are found in her stories. These women are taken from Nigerian reality and as such, they live in a strongly sexist and patriarchal society. Also, they enjoy different degrees of empowerment and freedom. Adichie's characters are fluid in their attitudes towards their own subaltern situations; although they cope with abusive situations for a certain amount of time, they usually find a way to escape, like *Ujunwa* in "*Jumping Monkey Hill*" or else act to get a better situation, like *Nkem* in "*Imitation*", *Chinaza* in "*Arrangers of Marriage*" without exerting physical violence.

The importance of these characters resides in the opportunities the author offers them to ameliorate their situations. Moreover, their voices are not silenced, but strong and powerful. Nfah-Abbenyi's reflection about this kind of fiction is very enlightening, in that "female characters in these women's writing therefore are portrayed not in stereotypical subservient, unchanging roles, or in roles that are deliberately limiting. Instead, they come alive as speaking subjects and agents for change" (1985:151).

Adichie's characters are not mere fiction but "agents of change". They are active examples that exhibit hope for many generations of contemporary African women that gain more power each day in their long quest for gender equality. The short story anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck*, has been analysed from an African Reformist feminist perspective with a view to encouraging men with negative attitudes towards women to change. Feminists in Africa are sometimes erroneously regarded as radical and adopting western lifestyle which is alien to African culture. The reformist feminist theory, unlike other types of feminist theories, does not condemn all men or see all of them as oppressive towards women, but addresses individual men with oppressive tendencies towards women. Reformist feminists are not antagonistic nor are they out to usurp men's positions but recognise the fact that in African traditions, men and women are

complementary partners in the general development of the society. The reformist-feminist postulation also recognises the fact that there are positive aspects of the patriarchal society that encourage women and give them the opportunity to develop themselves intellectually, socially, and politically. Hence, this discourse identifies those factors militating against women in patriarchal societies in order to alleviate their plight or putting a total stop to women's oppression. Nonetheless, with the advocacy for women to be granted social justice and equality with men, it is still a factual reality that women are still doubly oppressed. Firstly, by colonialism and neocolonialism like her male counterpart and secondly, by the patriarchal arrangement whereby the women and the children belong to the minority group in the sense that they are denied some privileges and freedom, which society normally allows for the dominant group (Adebayo 281). However, imbibing positive attitudes towards men, as portrayed in the character of *Obierike*, who loved his wife *Nwamgba* and supported and defended her, was faithful to her despite her numerous miscarriages, refusing to give in to pressures from his family and society and even his wife about taking a second wife, but believing in and consoling *Nwamgba* that she would one" it was they who urged him after her third miscarriage, to marry another wife. *Obierika* told them he would give it some thought but when he and *Nwamgba* were alone in her hut at night, he told her that he was sure they would have a house full of children and that he would not marry another wife until they were old, so that they would have somebody to care for them. She thought this was strange, of him, a prosperous man with only one wife ..." (P: 200). If men with oppressive tendencies regard women as partners in progress and make a conscious effort towards changing their negative attitudes, the society will be the better for it.

Adichie's portrayal of a number of emancipated and strong-willed women destroys the usual representation of Nigerian women who are under male domination. Adichie's protagonists are educated, strong and emancipated women who are self-sufficient and even though they do not really need men to fully live their lives, they still negotiate with men and partner with them in their emancipatory goals. Adichie's collection presents the reverse of Daniel Vignal's position as expressed in Chris Dunton's *Wheytin be Dat? The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature*: "for the majority of African writers hemophilia is exclusively a deviation introduced by colonialists or their descendants; by outsiders of all kinds; Arabs, French, English, Metis, and so on. It is difficult for them to conceive that hemophilia might be the act of black Africa." Adichie uses the likes of Kamara; *On Monday of Last Week*, the Senegalese woman; *Jumping*

Monkey Hill, and *Chinedu*; *The Shivering*, to accentuate her position on homosexuality. This homosexual trio's homosexual orientation is not attributed to Western influences.

My primary objective in this study has been to critically examine the portrayal and representations of female characters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The study has engaged with these stories in relation to women's emancipation and liberation. In the successive chapters, I have discussed the different modes and strategies that the author uses in her fictional work to demonstrate women's capability towards their emancipation, liberation, and independence. What are significant in the stories are the women's individual persistent struggles to realise their hidden potential within their cultural milieu. The research was built on the broad framework of the feminist theoretical construct. The analysis embraced the approaches of Susan Arndt, Florence Stratton, Oladele Taiwo, Catherine Acholonu, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie among others, in addressing women's experiences in the Nigerian/Igbo/ diaspora context as presented in the short stories. The study is further informed by other feminist scholars such as, Chikwenyi Ogunyemi,

Chapter one provided a general introduction to the study: an introduction to how African Feminist literature and women's writing in general is in response to the perceived exclusion, invisibility, silencing and the negative images of female characters/women in literature, first by Western writers, and later by male African writers and establishing that Nigerian feminist literature has been created to destroy the image of the silenced African female often earlier portrayed in male-authored works. The chapter also presented a brief relevant biography of the author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The statement of the thesis problem, significance of the study, its scope and limitations as well as the main objectives which guided the study were also outlined in this chapter.

In Chapter Two the researcher presented a review of salient literature on the subject matter under study. The chapter presented an overview of the portrayal of female characters in literature by both male and female African writers from historical to the present. And established a pattern of initial exclusion, invisibility and silencing of female characters, and later, a nuanced, biased and stereotypical representations and treatment of female characters by male writers, thereby setting the stage for an in-depth analysis of how Adichie's portrayal of female characters in her short

story anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck* challenges and aims at correcting these exclusions, invisibility, silencing and negative images of women in literature by giving her female characters in the short stories a voice and portraying them in a more positive and liberating roles.

The review of literature also brought to light the scarcity of critical appraisal on Adichie's short story anthology, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, and in general the lack of interest by researchers /critics on the short story genre, hence, the need to bring the anthology into perspective in order to rekindle the interests of scholars in the critique of the Nigerian short story genre.

Chapter Three presented detailed information on the theories which guided the study as well as provided the rationale and suitability for the study. The broad framework of the African Feminist theory and in particular, the African Reformist Feminist approach theory was employed as the lenses for the present study. The African feminist approach has both its advantages and disadvantages; it holds family affairs and marriage in high regard. Steady's perspective on African feminism lays emphasis on female autonomy and cooperation; nature over culture; concerns itself with the liberty of all African people. The present study to a large extent adopts the approach of Susan Arndt's *The Dynamics of African Feminism* (2002) in which she highlights African women writers' focus on Womanism, which stresses solidarity efforts of men and women towards eliminating inequalities not only for women, but for all people, as well as the necessity of cooperation and complementarity of both genders for emancipatory purposes. This speaks directly to Adichie's approach in the short stories under study in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, where she adopts the reformist feminist writing approach to challenge and at the same time encourage men with negative and oppressive tendencies towards women to change for the better. This approach believes in the transformatory possibility of men with such oppressive tendencies; that is that such men are capable of change.

The analysis revealed that Adichie makes her female characters the subjects rather than the objects of her stories thereby, reinventing and recreating their negative images and representations in literature by male writers and making them more visible than the male characters. The study also revealed that Adichie attributes negative roles and traits to the male

characters in the short stories; portraying them generally as sexually promiscuous, deceptive, domineering, and morally irresponsible, although she also portrays them as being intellectually superior to the female characters and having all the answers. Although female characters are also portrayed in the traditional stereotypical roles of mothers, wives, sisters, daughters.

Chapter four commenced with information on the Qualitative research methodology which the study adopts and goes on to outline the methods of data collection and analysis for the study: drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data was the entire 12 short stories in the anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; while secondary data sources included other works by the author, internet sources such as journal articles, published dissertations as well as critical works on the subject.

Chapter five formed the crux of the study as it dealt with the critical examination of Adichie's portrayal of female characters in the short stories of the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The study revealed that Adichie's female characters have a very powerful presence in the anthology and are presented in an assortment of roles ranging from female characters as objects and victims of sexual abuse, as mothers, wives and daughters, as homosexuals, as migrants, as voiceless and powerless under patriarchal domination, invisible females in the shadows of their preferred male counterparts, and also as assertive, strong and resilient females. The chapter further explored the strategies adopted by Adichie in the anthology to liberate her female characters from patriarchal domination, oppression to become independent and gain personal autonomy. The study revealed that Adichie's female characters enjoy varying degrees of empowerment and freedom which range from supporting one another through sisterhood and bonding, by taking physical leave of their abusive/ oppressive environments-marriages, relationships and regaining their lost voices, attaining formal education as a prerequisite for economic and social independence, among others and most importantly through the strategy of complementarity and cooperation with the male folk and involving them in their emancipatory goals for the preservation of family and society.

A close reading and consequent analysis of the texts reveal that the female characters can be classified along a continuum, with female characters at the two extremes of the continuum and those female characters who are in the center of the continuum: that is at one end are female

characters who are extremely submissive, silent and invisible under patriarchal male domination and oppression, and on the other end are female characters who are boldly assertive, resilient and strong and who are not afraid to break societal bounds to achieve emancipation and autonomy. While we have in the middle of the continuum, female characters who are little of each of the above-mentioned categories, female characters who are neither subservient radically assertive but who are in a compromise and negotiate with patriarchal dominance to achieve their emancipation. Those who triumph over the chains of patriarchy and uphold emancipated femininity. The study has shown that despite the ill treatment of women in the Igbo society where the author comes from, she has placed her women characters at the center of her narrative, portraying them as liberated women who are capable of challenging their societal norms, and who sometimes have to compromise with the forces of patriarchy as well as involve men in their emancipatory goals.

The Headstrong Historian advocates women's liberation and gender equality and opposes the oppression of women. The story challenges blind adherence to cultures that are patriarchal in nature and calls for females' independence. It challenges the traditional practices that deny women their dignity and which impede their success. The analysis of the story has established the unique representations of women. The author does not disassociate her heroines altogether from their traditional practices and culture, however; her protagonists have a keen awareness of their Igbo identity. Rather, she depicts the ways in which her female characters separate themselves from harmful cultural practices that limit their potential for liberation, emancipation and independence. Her female characters are active and define themselves by resisting the harmful cultural practices that limit their potential and capacity for independence. This is true of all her characters in the different periods in which the novel is set.

The discussion suggests that the author undermines patriarchy and male chauvinism by advocating for gender balance at the level of the family. The anthology offers a clear picture of men who practice patriarchy: that they do not progress and are responsible for women's de-personalisation and servitude. It is evident from the analyses that Adichie's portrayal of women characters counteracts the dominant view in African culture that women are objects of men's desires and power rather than fully formed subjects with an equal position in society. Her female characters exemplify the capability of women to defend themselves and refuse to be silenced by

the patriarchal system in which the husbands and their kin have complete power over their wives. The analysis also demonstrates the author's use of education in her narrative as a platform for women's independence, emancipation and freedom from through the depictions of her female characters in almost all of the stories from the anthology: *Kamara* from *On Monday of Last Week*, *Chinaza* from *Arrangers of Marriage*, *Akunna* from *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Grace/Afamefuna* from *Headstrong Historian*, *Ukaamaka* from *The Shivering*, *Ujunwa* from *Jumping Monkey Hill* are all very educated women. The study justifies the importance of education to women: as a means of attaining self-reliance and financial independence. The author depicts such women who can influence their future through education, leading to increased earning capacity, and thereby addressing their social and economic challenges.

The study also demonstrated that women in Adichie's short stories acquire new identities through urbanisation. They move from self-unawareness to reassurance and self-confidence. The *Headstrong Historian* provides a first stride towards women's liberation and independence and their total freedom through the depiction of *Nwamgba* who tried to cope with modernism despite their extremely ingrained African culture that regards them as quiet and subservient in their roles as wives, mothers and daughters, and *Nkem* who finds the diaspora as a means of escape from her poverty-stricken upbringing. Such women work to change some patriarchal ideals by embracing modern structures to uncover gaps and women's patriarchal silences. This narrative is suggestive of a new society that builds the capacity of women and girls, to realise their full liberation and independence; her characters are in control of their destiny. The anthology defines these modern women, who differ from those of the pre-colonial time. They have embraced modern structures to their own advantage as well as that of society in general.

From the analysis, it is clear that Adichie depicts modernity as the agent of change for women. The modern women and girls are manifested in distinct ways: as confident women searching for subjectivity and independence. Eldred Durosomi Jones draws attention to the following: "The duty of an African woman writer is first to find an objective treatment of womanhood and the problems of womanhood and to correct the misconceptions about women" (1987, P. 2).

The study however, also demonstrates that some of Adichie's women characters, for instance, *Akunna*, express disillusionment with modernity, are fearful of female subjectivity and the alienation that accompanies the urban, cosmopolitan world (in this case the United States of America). The author's writing therefore narrates the contemporary world. The study concludes that Adichie's message all through her anthology is that women can empower themselves by taking the initiative and devising innovative strategies that enable them to face patriarchal society. The short stories show that women's sound judgment and suppressed voices can be an effectively important factor in bringing liberation and equality to people's lives. One of the main aims of Adichie's narrative is to bestow modern women with economic and social independence. This type of autonomy brings with it other rights: for instance, to choose whether to marry or remain single as in the case of *Akunna* and *Ukaamaka*, whether to work or not such as *Nkem*, and the right of sexual expression such as *Kamara* and the *Senegalese woman*, among other things.

Adichie narrates the positivity of modernism for women characters. She corrects the negative images of urban women in contrast to the tendencies of African male writers to portray them negatively. Modernism is mostly in favour of women and girls because they are emancipated from harsh traditional cultural beliefs. Adichie also casts female characters who achieve their freedom by embracing other races for example *Akunna* befriends a biracial man and through her association with him she begins to come out of her depression and disillusionment. The writer uses her to demystify inter-racial relationships.

Adichie's short stories uphold the theme of ethics and morality with women's liberation and independence. She portrays women characters that get liberated out of traditional confines and those that fall prey due consumerism or selfishness lack of ethics and morality, and the end results are bondage and servitude. The narrative exposes bad characters such as *Akunna's uncle*, in *The Thing around Your Neck*, *Ofodile* from *Arrangers of Marriage*, *Edward*, *Alhaji* and *Chioma's father* from *Jumping Monkey Hill*, who are responsible for women's downfall. The observations in the analyses lead to the conclusion that while men have been given recognition; the author through her narratives strives to liberate the potential of African women, in particular, Nigerian Igbo women. She has bestowed them with abilities to liberate them spiritually, economically and socially.

As an African feminist, Adichie shows through several of her female characters, that some Igbo women are not competing with their husbands/men in the society or trying to usurp the position of their husbands/men in the society. Instead they are content with their natural state and therefore give respect to their husbands. The men and society should see these roles as complementary and not to perceive them as demeaning roles and exploit them to maltreat women, which womanists oppose. Adichie presents a high degree of the positive aspects of the female characters and a high degree of the negative features of the male characters. The portrayal of the female gender mainly negative in literature is unacceptable by African reformist Feminism, which is in favour of peace and unity through dialogue and negotiation between men and women as a way to reconcile issues concerning gender and to enhance cooperation between both genders. However, sustaining peace in the family and society requires a more positive depiction of the female gender. This will help to change the general mind-set of males against women and persuade them to respect and recognise the contributions of women in the society. This is because the way women are portrayed in literature is the way they are treated in real life. Adichie herself reaffirms her African Reformist Feminist approach in an interview with Christie Amanpour on CNN: “I am angry, everyone should be angry at the state of gender. But I also want to persuade, I want to talk, I want to have conversations. I think that there are gender imbalances in the world and a lot of it is infuriating because it is about injustice, it is so unjust that so many people who make up half the world’s population don’t have the access and opportunities that they deserve. But at the same time, I don’t think that it means all men are evil or terrible, I think that privilege means often that one is blinded. I dream of a world where we no longer need feminism because it would be redundant. It is very important that we live in a world that gives women room to be full people rather than having them being defined solely on very narrow domestic terms” (Amanpour interviews Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Published by CNN on April 17, 2017)

7.2. Recommendations

Following the analyses of Adichie’s fiction, the study found that early male writers portrayed more of men’s achievements and contributions, while the images of women were either neglected or presented in stereotypical roles. The Study also established that the early and later post-war female writers alongside the later male writers tend to recreate and bring down the

image of the female gender from the stereotypical realms. . In light of this findings, the study recommends that it is high time the complementarities of roles and cultural ideologies that move for female subjugation are revisited in order for them to suit the contemporary and changing gender roles in the African society.

The study further established that Adichie portrays female characters negatively or casts them in stereotypical and negative roles in the anthology *The Thing Around Your Neck* as illustrated in the portrayals of *Nkem Imitation*, *Akunna* in *The thing Around Your Neck*, *Ujunwa/ Chioma* in *Jumping Monkey Hill*, *Mgbeke* in *Headstrong Historian*, *Chinaza* in *Arrangers of Marriage*. These female characters are portrayed as being under one form of patriarchal domination/oppression or the other within the marriage/family setting and close relationships with men. This negative portrayal of female characters or depiction of them in traditional stereotypical roles is not seen as a means to dehumanize, demean or disempower women, but rather as a portrayal for didactic art. The study also found that Adichie in her writing represents and recreates the real position of the female gender in the traditional Igbo society by reconstructing the reality of the female gender that has been represented in early male-authored texts, thereby breaking the glass ceiling that hinders women's social progress (Okafor, 2017). Further analysis of Adichie's work revealed that though women today are financially and economically independent, they still are undermined, manipulated, and abused mentally, emotionally and physically.

The study further observed that the characterisation/personification of most of Adichie's male characters are one-sided. The male characters in the anthology are almost invisible, overshadowed by the female characters. Male characters are portrayed only in terms of their relationship to the female characters in the short stories. The study also revealed that Adichie's focus is particularly on women from the Igbo ethnic group of Eastern Nigeria where she originates from. Reflecting on this, this study contends that this is rather a very myopic view of the generality of African/Nigerian women because Nigeria is a very large country with diverse cultures and over 350 ethnic groups, and as such, one ethnic group cannot account for the generality of Nigerian women's experiences, let alone all African women. Arndt (2002.p:32) points out that Just as there are diverse terminological approaches to African challenges of gender impossible to assume homogeneity of feminism in Africa. The diversity of social realities

African continent has had a lasting effect on conceptions of feminism, making to use the plural with respect to feminism in Africa as well. Nonetheless, there is like a common denominator of African feminism. Corroborating this point, Nkealah says African feminisms, "strives to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman within the heterogeneous cultures of Africa". Arndt further stresses that gender debates influenced by post-structuralism have given rise to an understanding of the dynamics, complexity and diversity of feminism, which make it necessary to speak of feminisms rather than feminism. This plurality emerges from a wide range of coordinates, with regional differences playing an important role (Arndt 2002.p:31). Feminisms in Africa, ultimately, aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies. At the same time, Africa is not a monolith and so some have critiqued any idea of "African feminism." There exist differences regionally, ethnically, politically, and in religion, which all work to impact how women conceptualise what feminism and freedom looks like for them. While African women from, for example, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Senegal will have some commonalities, there will be variations in the way they understand gender and gender struggles. Therefore, these varying cultures alter the way these African women experience the world. Thus, one cannot simply merge all women under an unrealistic expectation of sisterhood, but instead to recognise and respect the differences that exist as a result of these diversities. There is a commonality to the struggles women face across the world since the common factor is male privilege. African feminisms address cultural issues that they feel pertain to the complex experiences faced by all women of all cultures on the African continent. Just as there are diverse terminological approaches to African challenges of gender impossible to assume homogeneity of feminism in Africa. The diversity of social realities African continent has had a lasting effect on conceptions of feminism, making to use the plural with respect to feminism in Africa as well. In the light of the above, Adichie's representation falls short in accounting for the generality of Nigerian women's experiences as mentioned earlier.

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