



**Negotiating Identity in a Diasporic Space:
A Study in Selected Stories from Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck***

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Received: XX January 20XX

Accepted: XX January 20XX

Abstract ;

*This article attempts to consider the interplay between migrant identities and the diasporic space in Adichie's collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The analysis will be conducted with particular reference to some characters in the short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *The Arrangers of Marriage*. The purpose is to highlight how the characters grapple with two worlds and to demonstrate the resultant fragmentation of identities. In the light of the insightful contributions of Homi Bhabha's *Third Space* and Vijay Mishra's *the hyphen*, the article traces the trials diasporic characters undergo in order to (re)form their identities in a perplexing cultural space. Adichie's diasporic characters seem to be haunted with unresolved questions about who they are and what they want to become.*

Article info

Received
..../...../20

Accepted

..../...../20

Keyword:

- ✓ Identity
- ✓ Diaspora
- ✓ Third space
- ✓ Hybridity
- ✓ Ambivalence

1.

Introduction

Nowadays, being a diasporic appears to be the ultimate experience. The diasporic subject is celebrated as one vital agent in the structure of globalisation. Their displacement from their homelands and subsequent placement in new homes in the west seemingly testifies to the success in dismantling physical borders and transcending historical animosities. An intriguing aspect of this diasporic mobility is the ability to travel between the host and home countries habitually. Hence, the immigrant can maintain the connection to his local space, which still manages to exert profound influence on their lives and decisions notwithstanding the displacement. The fact that immigrants move abroad and still preserve and assert the native cultural luggage may definitely create tensions within the subject and with the host culture. It is in this context that the interplay between the diasporic experience and the subject's identity takes place.

Identities become the subject of negotiation fostered by what the diasporic space offers. The immigrant is faced with immediate challenges which put his identity into question. They strive to make sense of the foreign locale and its different cultural products. They take comfort in making

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instant references to their native background hoping for an understanding and a sense of stability. Diasporic subjects are engaged in a complex process of translation whereby they attempt to translate both their own culture and the host's to make room for the emergence of the new diasporic identity. Hybrid identities would be the hopeful outcome of the process of translation. The immigrant seems to have evolved into a new individual thanks to a synthesis of both his and the other's cultural identities. They are positioned in the midst of both worlds and they have no other alternative but to commit to an act of dialogue if their purpose is to remain diasporic.

Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie is an acclaimed Nigerian author and diasporic herself. She is perfectly positioned to communicate the challenges and rewards her fellow expatriates encounter. She responds well to the questions of her time and manages to connect her native home with her diasporic experience. She successfully captures her characters' struggles of coping with a different environment and their psychological attachment to their native habitat. Because she understands and relates to the dilemmas that immigrants endure, a massive audience and readership has been attracted to her and her work. Indeed, she is often referred to as the 21st century daughter of the pioneer Chinua Achebe as a testament to her achievement, influence, and popularity (Uwakweh, 2010).

Adichie would not contest to that appellation as she explains that she considers Achebe's oeuvre as her primary influence. However, what sets her apart from him and other writers of that generation is her departure from fictionalizing nationalist themes. Indeed, the early literature of independence was preoccupied with asserting nationalist cultures and contributing to identity construction (Feldner, 2019). Adichie affirms her, and her contemporary compatriots', difference by highlighting how Achebe's characters are relatable but still live in an incredibly alien world (Adichie, 2008). She explains how these characters' life is devoid of the things she believes as vital like technology and probably the ability and urgent desire to join the diaspora.

The Nigerian expatriate author approaches the diasporic experience critically. She is learned in both worlds, the local and the global. Hence, her transnational narratives complicate the diasporic event thanks to possessing this dual perspective. Through complicating it, Adichie's narrative becomes a space of dialogue and resolution. She deconstructs established norms about Africa and Africans and reconstructs relatable stories. These stories emphasize difference, separation, and the absence from the global influence (Murphy, 2017). Her vantage point, the result of adhering to two frames of reference, allows for a recognition of the shortcomings in both and offers ample room for an alternative more inclusive system. Murphy acknowledges Adichie's advantage and the way she exploits this to advocate for more change. The researcher demonstrates how the author positions herself at a crossroad of identities which intermix in complex ways, and she therefore can challenge the global from a authoritative standpoint.

In her short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), Adichie creates characters who represent the spirit of the time. It tells of protagonists in Nigeria and the US, ones who strive to leave and others who struggle to adapt. The latter choose to leave and experience the life of diaspora. It is quite a challenging life for they witness first-hand how their identities long formed and solidified back home are questioned. Their identities succumb to the pressure of the fragmented diasporic space, plunging them into the struggle for self-definition. The diasporic characters yearn for escape only to end up aching for a stable and uniform identity in a space that breathes difference and hybridity (Pereira, 2016).

Most of the stories represent the theme of diaspora. The main characters are women who leave Nigeria for the United States to join a family member or a husband. They are confronted with a difficult environment and damaging relationships. They attempt to maintain the connection or break it and begin a new life alone. Adaptation, racism, and sexism are the main hurdles they must overcome (Feldner, 2019). *The Thing Around Your Neck* equally chronicles the stereotypes that Americans hold about Africa and Africans, usually stemming out of either ignorance or arrogance as revealed by one the voices in the collection. As a migrant, Adichie is aware of the transformations that entities like home, identity, and family undergo in the diasporic space. She recognises how the migrant experience complicates and problematizes such categories and eventually leads to the development of a new perception about them (Ngongkum, 2014).

The world of *The Thing Around Your Neck* is one Adichie has experienced. She manages to explore the questions that plague the diasporic subject. Her earlier works mainly tackle local Nigerian issues while in this collection she probes ideas of contemporary transnationality, transculturality, and diaspora. Duce (2019) describes how the female protagonists drift between the two worlds and cultures eclipsing all frontiers, challenging their identities and confronting the dilemmas of globalization. The outcome of this journey is a diasporic individual, one whose local ethos blends with that of the host country. Their identity assumes a plurality, which can be anxious or peaceful.

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the interaction of the African migrant with the diasporic context and the resultant formation of diasporic identities. This examination will be conducted with particular references to some dislocated characters in two short stories, namely *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *The Arrangers of Marriage*, from the collection bearing the same title of one story *The Thing Around Your Neck*. These characters' endeavour to link between their past and present only results in emphasizing differences between the two cultures (Misra & Shrivastava, 2017). Identity is negotiated in this diasporic space culminating in the evolution of hybrid subjects. Their identities are split between two worlds and Adichie chronicles this predicament.

2. *Theoretical Underpinning*

Diasporic communities usually fail to act collectively. They represent minority groups that mostly struggle for survival or recognition. However, the endeavour is executed at the individual level, and the whole ethnic community is rarely included. This hinders their full integration into the system and hence they lose the initiative to claim full rights (Hall, 2000). It appears as though the fragmentation that the diasporic subject experiences influences the communal minority consciousness. It is a consciousness split in half. Maintaining both experiences, native and diasporic, the immigrant now lives in doubleness (Král, 2009).

This complex experience the migrants undergo is equally split into two halves. It can be either emancipatory or paralyzing. Strehle (2011) argues that the result of this dual diasporic standpoint is the individual being involved in processes of “loss and gain, painful displacement and liberatory relocation” (651). Therefore, migrants can, on the one hand, embrace the global lifestyle and affirm their hybridity, which can transcend all types of limitations and defy borders. They can, on the other hand, be plunged into nostalgic obsessions and acute awareness of loss. For Strehle, this halts their potential evolution and only solidifies their feeling of alienation.

Diasporic subjects cannot escape manifesting or challenging difference. Indeed, all migrant communities form minority diasporic entities. These entities immediately recognise how this space is overwhelmed with contradiction, ambivalence, and racism. Using these as scaffolding, migrants begin to explore the potentials of the hybridity, multiculturalism, and interdiasporic connections (Mishra, 2007). Hall adequately describes the behaviour of diasporic communities, concluding that:

Migrant communities bear the imprint of diaspora, “hybridization,” and *différance* in their very constitution. Their vertical integration into their traditions of origin exist side by side with their lateral linkages to other “communities” of interest, practice and aspiration, real and symbolic. Individual members, especially the younger generations, experience the contradictory pulls which these different forces exert. Many are making their own negotiated “settlements” within and outside their communities (p.120)

The binary existence that migrants experience results in anxiety. They seem eager to belong to a recognizable space after leaving their familiar one. They simultaneously appear to be anxious and even self-conscious about the new space they voluntarily chose. However, this worry about a lost place only intensifies their yearning to assert themselves in the present location. Mishra illustrates this complex relationship of the diasporic individual to place by insisting that “the simplistic binaries of here and there, of dislocation and yearning, of an imagined homeland and its faked re-creation in another land, give way to the realities of the here and now” (2007, p.187). In fact, the characters in Adichie’s short story collection testify to this state of mind.

For Mishra, unhappiness is inextricably inherent to any diaspora. To be a diasporic is to be uncomfortable with the place one occupies. Mishra describes this position as the hyphenation whereby the diasporic subject is caught in a space between two worlds. Migrants are consciously unsettled about losing a stable uniform identity and place and facing an exotic often demanding location. In Mishra’s words, they are “comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport” (p.1). Two different worlds with distinct ethos are eventually doomed to collide, the outcome of which is unhappiness.

The hyphen is the borders against which the migrant manoeuvres their identity. They try to gradually push forwards hoping they can connect more to the diasporic space. The hyphen also implies now the impossibility of returning to a “purist condition” as the migrants are contaminated with hybridity and multiculturalism (Mishra, 2008, p. 432). Interestingly, this predicament is well represented in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, with characters grappling forces from their past and others from their present. For the researcher, the diaspora is tasked with the challenge of integrating the hyphenated subject into a space governed by the ethos of a nation-state. The preference of the latter is to preserve the diasporic minorities as different and separate entities, non-hyphenated communities.

Hybridity has long been linked to discussions of diasporas. As Hall notes above hybridity is intrinsic to diasporic communities. Homi Bhabha has pioneered the study of hybridization and its impact on diasporic individuals, postcolonial discourses, and the dominant culture. Hybridity, in this context, is understood to assert difference and discontinuities that, to use Mishra’s concept, hyphenated subjects experience. However, they do not stop at these disparities and discontinuities. They rather transform the latter to a new continuity, hence creating “a mode of cultural being which discovers a kind of self-possession in the experience of dispossession” (Boxal, 2013, p. 173). This transformative experience is interpreted by Radhakrishnan (1996) as a rebirth whereby the migrant relinquishes some privileges he acquired at home to hybridise their identities.

Diasporic individuals are valued due to their predisposition to developing hybrid identities. They manifest this through acquiring the host’s cultural codes, enabling them to switch from one frame of reference to another efficiently (Weingrod & Levy, 2005). Bhabha (2003) describes the hybrids’ hybridization as an assertive act that pronounces a cultural authority against a dominant narrative and community. These subjects are challenged by a context infested with political animosity, racism, and inequality. Bhabha further delineates how hybrids adopt to negotiate a position in a struggle seemingly mediated by power balance. He explains that:

The hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. (p.58)

Bhabha stresses the diasporic subject’s position. He redefines the concept of the interstice and argues that the migrant acts as a disruptive agent adapting to and fragmenting dominant discourses in the previously colonizing powers. Then, they establish themselves as an alternative to both their culture and the dominant one. The individual is placed at the threshold of both worlds, waiting to transition or create a third space occupied only by those who are diasporic. Grossberg uses the “subaltern” to characterise people coming from marginalized location bearing minority identities. The subaltern represents “neither colonizer nor precolonial subject, the postcolonial subject exists as a unique hybrid which may, by definition, constitute the other two as well” (2003, p. 91).

For Bhabha, negotiation between divergent cultures takes place at the borderline. The dialogic nature of hybridization helps create a social subject with a unique identity, which celebrates difference and explores likeness (Bhabha, 2003). But he equally draws the attention to the significance of highlighting how diasporic groups manage to negotiate the disjunct positions they

“occupy ambivalently within the nation's space” (p.57). Therefore, any discourses that emphasise disparities and the “them vs us” maybe fruitless, that is if the intention is inclusivity and not separateness.

Hyphenation, interstitiality, and in-betweenness are all categories that interact within the area called “The Third Space”. This space represents a new location where the domains of difference overlap and regenerate (Bhabha, 1994). The study of the ongoing negotiation of powers within this space determines how hybrid “subjects formed in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference” (p.2). Clearly, difference plays a decisive role in determining the identity of the hybrid subject. It is through difference that a reconstruction of one's fragmented identities and a reconciliation with one's feelings of loss materialize. The hybrid subject thrives within this seemingly ambivalent ground although it may prove an arduous experience. But coming from marginalized spaces themselves, they are no strangers to rebirth challenges. Therefore, as Bhabha reiterates, the migrant who “inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality” may overcome these ordeals and triumph in the name of hybridity.

2.1. Diasporic Identities in the Making

“To be part of a diaspora, is, presumably, to be “on the cutting edge” of new cultural and other formations” (Weingrod & levy, 2005)

The diaspora has been gathering momentum ever since the postcolonial debate was introduced. Then, it gained prominence with the overwhelming diffusion of globalization. The latter has rallied for transcending borders and encouraging the free movement of peoples throughout the world. The afrosporic, to use Brancato's (2009) term, may be the one most affected by this trend of mobility. This can be attributed to the history that ties the afrosporic individual to the traumas of colonization.

There exists a myriad of definitions and criteria for diaspora. Feldner attempts to provide a succinct explanation suggesting that diasporas are “a collective living outside its homeland, a displaced population” (2019, p.41). Diasporic experience tends to be always associated with the sense of dislocation, loss, and uprootedness. They seem to lose a sense of belonging to a place; they become deterritorialized. Yet, this is believed to be as empowering as it is traumatic. Chiang (2010) argues that new identities are born out the experiences of displacement, dislocation, and cultural exchange. The diasporic condition, in the sense of predicament, serves as unifying element for the ethnic community. Subjects exploit the diasporic identity to identify and bond with others who share and experience the same ordeal (Falola, 2013).

One of the themes inherent to contemporary Nigerian fiction is related to diaspora. Experiencing diaspora themselves, writers of the new generation consistently tackle the issue. They seem to be anxious about the changes and demands the new space imposes on their identity. Hron (2008) underscores this idea suggesting that contemporary Nigerian narratives intentionally problematize the transnational space of the diaspora. Adichie's narratives are distinguished with their treatment of this subject matter, particularly in her TAN and Americanah. In fact, this only comes as a response to a set of requirements themselves inherent in the global literary market. Král (2009) contends that these requirements might sound inhibiting. In reality, they disguise a blessing as they offer a vantage point through which the writers can “observe the mechanisms at play in identity formation, self-

representation and contextual redefinitions, as well as the need to discuss the paradigmatic value of diasporic identities today” (p.31).

Identity and diaspora both evolve in the dynamic spaces of hybridity and multiculturalism. To discuss diasporas is to analyse the ways in which identities mutate due to dislocation. Diasporic identities, hence, are characterized by constant formation and re-formation relying mainly on the criteria of difference as a driving force for this transformation (Hall, 1990). This represents an affirmative testimony in favour of the diasporic experience, as opposed to the traditional conception which associates it with melancholy and oppression (Weingrod & levy, 2005). Presently, diasporas are believed to be spaces “for the creative melding of cultures and the formation of new “hybridic,” mixed identities” (p.5).

3. *Bewildered Diasporic Identities in The Thing Around Your Neck*

Afrosporics are tied by the same aspirations and motives for departure. In this one story, Adichie portrays a character, Akunna, as she attempts to adjust to an exotic cultural space. *The Thing Around Your Neck* captures the most challenging and intense encounters any diasporic subject can have. Out of all the stories in the collection, this one is probably the most daring, likely justifying why the author uses the same title for the whole collection (Mami, 2014). The initial impressions of the story are hopeful and optimistic as Akunna is looking forwards to joining her supposed uncle in the US. She is fortunate because, out of all her extended family members, Akunna is the only woman who won the American visa lottery.

The associations one establishes at the beginning are, however, mere expectations. They are far from being realistic; rather just naïve judgments about the west that most subalterns nourish. Akunna is indoctrinated that upon arrival in the US, she will be able to own a car and a house à l'américaine. This typical American lifestyle is being globally advertised to “Others” who then innocently fantasize about acquiring the dream house and car. For someone issued from a poverty-stricken family, Akunna is all but happy and hopeful she will better her and her family's life.

The disillusionment she feels once she realises the naivety of the diasporic fantasies alienates her. The disappointment is instantly introduced when she lands in the US and gets welcomed by the uncle. She tells how “the big hot dog with yellow mustard” bothered her stomach (p.115). This first distasteful encounter with the target culture is the first in a long series of a snow-ball-like process whereby Akunna's identity is put to the test. Another scene that truthfully informs her about the US and further confirms the disparity between her native stories and the diasporic reality is when the uncle relates to her how “the company he worked for had offered him a few thousand more than the average salary plus stock options because they were desperately trying to look diverse” (pp.115-116). Akunna gradually realizes how the US maybe similar to Nigeria in terms of the codes of human interaction. The realization might even go as far as to consider her Nigerian background more tolerable than the American.

The afrosporic interaction intensifies and the discordance escalates upon meeting new people. Akunna is amazed at the questions Americans ask her because they seem so basic. The misconceptions and expectations appear to be reciprocal. Americans manifest equal naivety when addressing the afrosporics. Or, as Akunna's uncle informs her, this represents ignorance with shades of arrogance (p.116). The narrator captures how Akunna's university peers interrogate her about her how she was able to learn English, whether her people had houses, and if has ever seen a

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car! More intriguingly, they scan her attire, but with keen interest in her the hair, and they ask, "Does it stand up or fall down when you take out the braids?"(p.116).

The story is rich in other events that portray how Akunna perceives of her diasporic space. Throughout this interaction, the reader can identify an interplay between different stereotypes. Americans project theirs onto the diasporic subjects while the latter attempt to make sense of the expectations of both their former life and the demands of the new space. Akunna is caught in between these two worlds where she is tormented by the sheer ambivalence of the situation. This frustration is in fact a consistent trope in Nigerian fiction (Griswold, 2000). They are partly narratives of alienation and distress because they relate stories of the diaspora. The latter as Mishra (2007) contends is inherently melancholic. The diasporic experience suffocates Akunna as her identity is fragmented between her conflicting worlds and she reiterates the story's iconic statement, "At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep"(p.119).

Akunna comforts herself and alleviates the pain of confusion by resorting to the soothing memories of home. Nostalgia to a familiar location and culture help her connect better with the unfamiliar diasporic space. Remembering the simple things like aunt's dried fish, the town market's smells and sounds, and the tiny crowded rooms that gathered the family all contribute to easing the agony. Nigeria is being reconstructed from distance and then used to establish a hybrid identity within a diasporic space. Another place where Akunna finds some peace is the uncle's. He manages to maintain an Igbo atmosphere in the house and she relates to it as it connects her to her home. Akunna is reminded how, "you laughed with your uncle and you felt at home in his house" and how "they spoke Igbo and ate garri for lunch and it was like home" (p.116).

Adichie's representation of stereotypes is intended to challenge them. The narrator tells of the usual American stereotypes about Africa. Also, she communicates the protagonist's perceptions about the US. This aligns with the aim of diasporic literature to address and overturn stereotypical patterns and images (Feldner, 2019). Adichie consistently portrays and complicates stereotypes. The danger, in Adichie's words, is that stereotypes always promote a single story and hence deprive people from thinking in complex ways (Adichie, 2008). Following Bhabha's arguments, what the writer resists in a community dominated by a single authority. As diasporas, the ultimate goal ought to be a hybrid society where meanings and codes are negotiated rather than imposed. Adichie urges all diasporic individuals throughout the world to "to combat and challenge and complicate stereotypes" (p.46).

Akunna's relationship with her white boyfriend helps bridge the gap caused by the diasporic space. Her anxiety is reduced as she starts to share with him stories from home. The narrator informs the readers about this bond:

And you knew you had become close when you told him that your father was really not a schoolteacher in Lagos, that he was a junior driver for a construction company. And you told him about that day in Lagos traffic in the rickety Peugeot 504 your father drove; it was raining and your seat was wet because of the rust-eaten hole in the roof. The traffic was heavy, the traffic was always heavy in Lagos, and when it rained it was chaos. The roads became muddy ponds and cars got stuck and some of your cousins went out and made some money pushing the cars out. The rain, the swampiness, you thought, made your father step

on the brakes too late that day. You heard the bump before you felt it. The car your father rammmed into was wide, foreign, and dark green, with golden headlights like the eyes of a leopard. Your father started to cry and beg even before he got out of the car and laid himself flat on the road, causing much blowing of horns. (p.122)

She cooks Nigerian dishes and introduces him to garri and onugbu soup. Akunna's identity crisis, felt in the beginning of her US journey, now seems to dissipate. She is able to switch between the two worlds without feeling loss or guilt. The protagonist, in the light of Mishra's (2007) concept of hyphenated identities, is close to becoming a hyphenated subject. There is less friction and more acceptance as she reconstructs a hybrid identity. The story of the car, her father's accident and the pathos she harbours from that incident is quite significant in Akunna's attempt to reconcile with her identities. Her act of sharing a particularly intimate and shameful memory exhibits her conscious awareness of her difference as African and showcases her move towards probably embracing hybrid consciousness.

Akunna's new challenge now is confronting the judgements from the host community. She can perceive both white and black individuals' prying eyes and ironic comments. However, this may signal she has manoeuvred through her identity crisis and anxiety of belonging. Her next ordeals to confront may be racism and sexism. The narrator's words of "you knew by people's reactions that you two were abnormal" (p.125) suggest the protagonist's awareness and tolerance for her difference. One learns by the end of the story how euphoric she is participating in activities with her boyfriend and delaying any correspondence to her home. This diasporic happiness, however, is interrupted by a sudden announcement of her father's death. Home with its associated melancholy and tragedy suddenly reappears. In fact, that is the only reason Akunna decides to return, to reconnect. The pull of the home seems more potent than any diasporic appeal.

4. *Exploring Diasporic Anxiety in The Arrangers of Marriage*

The aspirations and images migrants construct about the diasporic space prove their fragility upon first contact. The Arrangers of Marriage presents another instance of a main character, Chinaza, whose diasporic identity is trapped between two competing identities. Her diasporic, or as Grossberg (2003) suggests, her subaltern identity is placed at a third space where neither her culture nor the target is her frame of reference. Thus, Chinaza, in the words of Bhabha, is "a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (1994, p. 13).

The narrative offers a background on how the protagonist wins the ticket to the US, the land that seems to vibrate opportunities and dreams. Thanks to her foster parents, uncle Ike and aunt Ada, Chinaza apparently wins the heart of Ofodile, a supposed doctor residing in New York. They all arrange for a quick marriage and the couple leaves for the US to begin a new life. The foster parents cannot but be ecstatic at their daughter's fate and aunt Ada ascertains that Chinaza recognize and demonstrate gratitude saying, "we raise you as our own and then we find you an ezigbo di! A doctor in America! It is like we won a lottery for you!" (p. 171).

Chinaza's husband, Ofodile, is the window through which she understands the new environment. He initiates her to what he believes are the ideal keys of assimilation and success in

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the US. He teaches her how to walk and travel through the city. But the one startling lesson she is taught is about name changing. Ofodile gives himself a new identity by renaming himself. He tells his wife, "I'm not called Ofodile here, by the way. I go by Dave," (p172). He even changes his family name and offers the reasons behind the full name transformation, "The last name I use here is different, too. Americans have a hard time with Udenwa, so I changed it. "It's Bell." (p.173). Dave even provides a rationale for the many radical changes he has made and the ones he now wants his wife to adopt:

You don't understand how it works in this country. If you want to get anywhere you have to be as mainstream as possible. If not, you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here. (p. 173)

Murphy (2017) explains how this scene represents one feature in Adichie's attempt to complicate the diasporic experience and reveal its less appealing aspects. The diaspora, in this context, is a place where Nigerian individuals experience a pressure to efface their native identity as a way to conform to the American society. In the light of Bhabha's ideas of third space, in-betweenness, and interstices, Dave may well not represent a truly hybrid diasporic subject. He clearly relinquishes all codes that belong to his native identity and decides to fully adopt the ethos of the opposite culture. At this point, Chinaza attempts to fathom all this confusion that accompanies her diasporic experience. She is challenged by both the unspoken ethos of the space and by the unchallenged demands of her Americanah husband. Dave then decides to change his wife's name too. He is the one designating the names and not Chinaza, who obviously wants to maintain her real name. Chinaza Okafor is now Agatha Bell on paper.

Although *The Arrangers of Marriage* is overwhelmed by tropes of marriage and family relations, it does represent a prototypical instance of a diasporic narrative. Chinaza is a representative character whose life cycle resembles that of all afrosporic subjects. Boelhower (1981) clearly describes the life of the African diasporic character as someone who represents "an ethnic world view, comes to America with great expectations, and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status" (p.5). The protagonist, like most African immigrants, is programmed with a set of unchallenged ideas about the US, which then prove unrealistic.

Much like Akunna, Chinaza reveals her disillusionment with a space of which she thought otherwise. She confesses how she "had imagined a smooth driveway snaking between cucumber-colored lawns, a door leading into a hallway, walls with sedate paintings. A house like those of the white newlyweds in the American films that NTA showed on Saturday nights" (p. 169). Her new world stands in flagrant contradiction to what her old world has taught her. Again, Boelhower (1981) analyses these mental categories the diasporic character experiences. He lists three decisive moments, "EXPECTATION [*sic*] (project, dream, possible world), CONTACT [*sic*] (experience, trials, contrasts), and RESOLUTION [*sic*] (assimilation, hyphenation, alienation)" (p.5). Reminiscing about home and adjusting to the new environment exhibit the different ways characters like Ofodile reconstruct their identities.

Ofodile invokes her home and identity whenever an exotic event confronts her. It is intriguing how one fleeting moment or object sends one's mind into often melancholically nostalgic memories of home. Upon noticing a beef pack in the supermarket while shopping with her husband, the protagonist steeped herself into a spree of intimate memories of a local market. Ofodile shares her thoughts about "the open market in Enugu, the traders who sweet-talked you into stopping at their zinc-covered sheds, who were prepared to bargain all day to add one single kobo to the price." (p.175). Radhakrishnan (1996) purports that due to discontent with the hybrid space, the diasporic individual is compelled to turn their "diasporan gaze back to the home country." and that "often, the gaze is uncritical and nostalgic" (p.211).

Another aspect of how immigrant identities are reborn in the diasporic space is how Ofodile uses language. The protagonist maintains connection to her linguistic identity through using Igbo diction with her husband at home at outside. Examples of such words include "Biko", "Ezi okwu", and "Ike agwum". However, her use of their native tongue irritates Dave who persists in educating her on the American ways and slang. In an early scene, Ofodile intentionally speaks in Igbo only to be answered by him in English, offering an initial glimpse at Dave's new character. "Ike agwum," I said, placing my handbag down on the bedroom floor. "Yes, I'm exhausted, too," he said. "We should get to bed." (p.170). the tension between the local and the global is portrayed and a process of identity negotiation can be observed. Using Nigerian linguistic and cultural codes by Ofodile evidences this (Murphy, 2017).

The protagonist at this point in her life depicts the journey of identity rebuilding. She is the only one who can exemplify the ordeals of diasporic hybrids. Their identities are swinging between two worlds and the ground in-between is unsteady and confusing. Movement characterises diaspora identity making. Ofodile demonstrates desire to preserve at least some of the facets of her native culture coupled with a willingness to adapt to the foreign. Her interaction with Nia, the American neighbour, about the meaning of their names, and her knowledge of Nia's Swahili name origin suddenly reveals probably a life-changing epiphany. She ironically reacts to Nia, "'Oh,' I said and shook my head; she, a black American, had chosen an African name, while my husband made me change mine to an English one." Ofodile might have realized her position as a diasporic subject with dual frames of references can in fact prevail over Dave's single-story identity.

5.

Conclusion

The thing Around Your Neck and *The Arrangers of Marriage* portray bewildered characters whose identities are disintegrated as a response to the diasporic space. Both Akunna and Ofodile yearn for a steady perception of who and what they are. They are unhappy with their relationships and are alienated by a location they hoped would be emancipating. Hence, they are stories about expectation, frustration, and alienation. Adichie abstains from providing a resolution and clear direction for her characters as both stories end with unresolved concerns. Akunna returns home and is uncertain of her future expatriation while Ofodile's ordeal is complicated by her marriage and Dave's questionable history. In fact, this uncertainty communicates the equal ambivalence of the diasporic experience. The characters' double consciousness results in a ruptured sense of belonging.

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Identity is, hence, subjected to the cultural authority of both the native home and the diasporic space. Adichie consistently discloses a hope for the birth of an African individual whose identity is nourished by hybridity and multiculturalism.

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