

# LARES

Lagos Review of English Studies

A Journal of Language and Literary Studies

Vol. 16, 2007/2008

ISSN: 0189-3637

All rights reserved.

A Journal of the  
Department of English  
University of Lagos, Nigeria

## **EDITORIAL BOARD**

### **EDITOR**

Oko Okoro, Department of English, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria.

### **ASSOCIATE EDITORS**

Hope Eghagha

Adeyemi Daramola

### **ASSISTANT EDITORS**

Mojisola Shodipe

Patrick Oloko

### **BOARD OF CONSULTING EDITORS**

Ayo Banjo	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Ayo Bamgbose	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Akachi Ezeigbo	University of Lagos, Nigeria
Olu Obafemi	University of Ilorin, Nigeria
Ron Carter	Nottingham University UK
Niyi Osundare	University of Ibadan, Nigeria/USA
Victor Maduka	University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Biodun Jeyifo	Harvard University, USA
Sophia Adjaye	California State University, Bakersfield, USA
Kofi Dadzie	University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
Edgar Schneider	University of Regensburg, Germany
Tope Omoniyi	University of Surrey at Roe Hampton, UK

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Call for Papers

**Lagos Review of English Studies**, a Journal of Language and Literary Studies, is a peer-reviewed African journal, devoted to publishing original, well-researched papers, reviews and commentaries on language and literary studies.

**Lagos Review of English Studies** offers a podium for the promotion of stimulating debates and discussions on language and literary studies for the purpose of developing knowledge in the field particularly in Africa.

Contributions to this journal are invited from all countries. Articles must be written in English and sent to:

The Editor

**Lagos Review of English Studies**

Department of English

University of Lagos

Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

E-mail: [lares@yahoo.com](mailto:lares@yahoo.com)

## MANUSCRIPTS

### Manuscripts are not returnable

All contributions for consideration in LARES should be typed double-spaced on A4 size or similar paper with a wide margin. Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate. Hard copies of contributions should be accompanied by soft copies on CD or sent electronically to [lares@yahoo.com](mailto:lares@yahoo.com). Preferred file formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, Rich Text format or as an ASCII file and PC compatible. References, tables

and other illustrations should be presented on separate sheets. Articles are normally peer-reviewed and authors will be informed within three months of receipt of manuscripts if their papers have been accepted for publication.

Submission of an article is taken to imply that it has not been previously published or is not being considered for publication elsewhere. If related material(s) is being published elsewhere, the author is required to state this fact. Editors and advisors reserve the right to edit accepted articles or rephrase parts of it. Authors are therefore advised to check their manuscripts very carefully before submission. Contributors who would like unaccepted articles returned are requested to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with their articles.

- **Reviews** are normally commissioned and must be sent in by a given deadline. They should not exceed 1000 words.
- **Copyright** Contributors of accepted articles will be asked to sign their copyrights, on certain conditions, to University of Lagos to help protect their materials, particularly in Africa.
- **Reprints** Each contributor will receive one free copy of the LARES issue in which his article appears. Additional reprints may be purchased or ordered at the proof stage.

## STYLE SHEET

Contributions must generally conform to the MLA style of referencing as follows:

Adetugbo, A. (1993): *English Phonetics: A Course Text* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Lagos: University of Lagos: Press.

Trudgill, Peter (1986): *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Literature paper may use the form below:

Tyler, Moses Coit. *A History of America, Literature*. 1607-1783

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

English Stops after /s/ in Initial Position: Different Perception Michael Wei & Yalun Zhou.....	1
Old Stories, New Plots: Understanding the Poetics of 'Pro-Colonialism in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's <i>The Last of the Strong Ones</i> Patrick Oloko.....	17
A Contrastive Study of the Conditional Clause in English and Igbo Oko Okoro.....	32
Chimamanda Ngozi Adich'i's <i>The Thing Around Your Neck</i> : Migrancy and the Literary Imagination Christopher Anyokwu.....	52
A Pragmatic Perspective to the Interpretation of Modal Verbs in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Gbenga Ibileye.....	66
"One Day there will be a New Earth...": The Apocalyptic Essence of Ben Okri's Consummatory Myths Abiodun Adeniji.....	88
Poetry as Action and Interaction: Conversation as Strategy in the Poetic Art of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide Austin Uzoma Nwagbara.....	104
Culinary Norms and Social Cohesion: A Study of the Gustatory Images in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Triloggy Felicia Ohwovoriole.....	122
Nigerian English in Print Media Advertisement: Fact or Fiction? Emmanuel A. Adedayo.....	133
Aggression and the Death Instinct in Toni Morrison's <i>Sula</i> Onuora Benedict Nweke.....	147

Defining the Status of Nigerian Pidgin: Implications for Teachers of English Sola Osoba.....	165
Western Tradition and the Evolution of Modern African Drama: Soyinka's experience Bosede F. Afolayan.....	174
Accent Variation and Intelligibility: A Study of Nigerian Segmentals Kofoworola A. Adedeji.....	192
Education and the Literary Imagination: The Example of Ralph Ellison's <i>Invisible Man</i> and Ngugi's <i>The River Between</i> Solomon O Azumurana.....	206
A Sociolinguistic Study of Yoruba Proverbs of Nature Mojisola Shodipe.....	221
Myth and Realism in Ben Okri's Linguistic Aesthetics Abiodun Adeniji.....	238
Utilizing Perceived Pronunciation Deficiency for Positive Second Language Teaching and Learning: The Izon Experience Uriel Okunrinmeta.....	256



# Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*: Migrancy and the Literary Imagination

Christopher Anyokwu,  
Department of English,  
University of Lagos, Nigeria.

## Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a much-decorated, award-winning female Nigerian novelist whose debut novel entitled *Purple Hibiscus* and her superlative sophomore war novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* have earned her a place in the burgeoning Nigerian (African) canon. Sharing her time between Nigeria, her motherland, and the United States of America where she took all her university degrees and works, Adichie has successfully mined her Diaspora experience as material for her imaginative apprehension of as well as critical engagement with the contemporary (post)-modern condition conveyed through the institutional site of literary creativity. In this connection, therefore, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in the story collection entitled *The Thing Around Your Neck* thematises the timeless *problematique* of migrancy as the inevitable repercussion of socio-economic adversity occasioned by bad leadership and, at a much deeper level, as an ontologic condition of man. This paper, therefore, uses Adichie's work as template to reflect on migrancy as a shaping or framing term of existential experience of Third world inhabitants in particular and humankind in general.

**M**igrancy' is a word which is derived from the English verb, 'migrate', and, according to *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of The English Language* (Encyclopedia Edition), *Lagos Review of English Studies* Vol. 16, Nos 1&2 (2007/2008)

'migrate' means 'to move from one country, region, etc., to settle in another' (807). In the literal sense of the word, therefore, a *migrant*, is an individual who was born in one society and has migrated to another, for one reason or another. Aijaz Ahmad furnishes a number of reasons why people generally immigrate:

Immigration, in other words, has had its own contradictions: many have been propelled by need; others motivated by ambition, yet others driven away by persecution; for some there really is no longer a home to return to; in many cases need and ambition have become ambiguously and inextricably linked. No firm generalization can be offered for so large and complex a phenomenon, involving so many individual biographies. (86)

Thus, Adichie's idea of 'migrancy', for instance, which is quite pivotal to her self-representation both in fiction and in life, has come to us in two fundamental ways. In the first version, partially glimpsed in her debut novel entitled *Purple Hibiscus* and in her story collection that came after both her first offering and her blockbuster sophomore war novel, *Half of A Yellow Sun*, 'migrancy' is given to us as a framing term of existential experience, a framing reality which at once dramatizes the migration of Nigerians from their country to the Northern Hemisphere, or, the United States of America particularly; and as, in the final analysis, an ontological condition of the victims of varied forms of injustice and oppression in the postcolonial Nigerian state. In the second version, articulated more fully in her story collection entitled *The Thing Around Your Neck*, this myth of ontologic unbelonging is replaced by another, larger myth of excess of belonging: not that the migrant belongs nowhere, but, as 'half-child' or a hybrid he belongs to *too* many places (127). Ahmad goes on to differentiate between the various categories of the migrant, to wit, (a) the exile (b) the self-exile and (c) the writer-in-exile. He asseverates:

Writers-in-exile often write primarily for readerships which are materially absent from the immediate conditions of their production, present only in the country from which the

writer has been forcibly exiled, hence all the more vividly and excruciatingly present in the writer's imagination because their actuality is deeply intertwined with the existential suffering of exile and with the act of writing as such (131).

Commenting on the nature and the condition of the self-exile, Ahmad argues that:

The self-exile has no such irrevocable bond; he is free to choose the degree of elasticity of that bonding, and the material consequences of his migrancy necessarily bring him into a much more accountable relation with the readership which is materially present within the milieu of his productive work (131).

We would want to look at the whole grid of predispositions which have gone into the making of an imagination shaped in the main by the social conditions of the so-called 'Third World' migrant, the kinds of pleasures Adichie's book supplies to her initial readership, which is primarily western, secondarily among the immigrant intelligentsia, and, in the last analysis, her readership back at home in Africa generally, and Nigeria in particular. In some basic ways, we are speaking of Adichie's *intention* and *conditions* of her production: the very saturation of her thought, so to speak, by the discursive conditions enveloping the site of her productions.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie studied medicine at the University of Nigeria, for two years; she then left for the United States, first on a scholarship to study communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia, then to pursue a degree in communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University, close to her sister's medical practice. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Eastern in 2001, and later went on to complete a master's degree in creative writing at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. She was also a 2005-2006 Hodder Fellow at Princeton, where she taught Introductory Fiction. Adichie later proceeded to Yale where she did graduate work on the African studies



programme.

The question to ask, at this juncture, is, how decisively or fundamentally has Adichie's migrancy, as can be seen from the foregoing, affected or impacted her work as a whole, and the story collection under discussion in particular? What effect(s) does her dual residency-Nigeria and the United States- have on the subject-matter and style of her fictions? Is she sufficiently representative of her fellow Nigerian writers residing abroad? Or, is she different? Part of the continuing crisis of consciousness in the post-(neo-) colonial epoch in Africa is that both the *production* and the *criticism* of African literature are carried out abroad. This is because, arising from the inclement and uncongenial working conditions occasioned by governments' unhelpful and negative policies and programmes as well as a chronic political climate of anti-intellectualism of successive governments, civilian and military alike, the African continent has witnessed a mass exodus of thoroughbred and world-renowned scholars and writers to Western Europe, Asia and North America. Among these scholars and writers are some of Nigeria's brightest and best minds: writers such as Isidore Okpewho, Ben Okri, Harry Garuba, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Funso Aiyejina and Sola Osofisan; and critics such as Abiola Irele, Biodun Jeyifo, Ernest Emenyonu. Over time, other younger writers have also departed the country in droves, writers like Helon Habila, Sefi Atta, Segun Afolabi, Olu Oguibe, Nduka Irabor, Nduka Otiono, Ifowodo Ogaga, Obi Nwakama and, of course, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. These 'singers of a new dawn' *a la* Niyi Osundare, having migrated, have left their country forlorn, a kind of echo-chamber loud with meaningless inanities and ritualistic collective self-clowning. Both creative writing and the critical enterprise have for long been on a downward spiral, save for few human cacti in this sprawling desert who now and again put forth green shoots of dubious hope.

Of all the twelve stories which make up the volume, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, only three stories, namely, 'Cell One', 'A Private Experience' and 'The Headstrong Historian' do not *directly* have anything to do with the question of migrancy. While 'Cell One', for instance, focuses on the complexities of the coming-of-age process, 'A Private Experience', discloses the all-conquering pull of human *esprit de corps* manifested in the face of apparently man-made acts of

bigotry and prejudice, and for 'The Headstrong Historian', the storyteller returns us to the colonial African past before the advent of modernity and its discontents. The remaining stories, however, make up a seamless tapestry of the cause-and-effect interface of the question of migrancy. The question to actually ask is: why do people *really* leave their countries, especially in the so-called 'Third World' region, of the global space for the Northern Hemisphere, more specifically, Western Europe and North America and, further, more often than not, the United States of America? To reiterate Aijaz Ahmad's list of reasons why people emigrate from their fatherland to safer, saner and more secure climes, they are:

- (i) 'propelled by need';
- (ii) 'motivated by ambition';
- (iii) 'driven away by persecution'; and
- (iv) 'for some there really is no longer a home to return to'. (86)

Therefore for most of the characters in this story collection, the primary reason why they *relocate* to and *settle* in the United States is *economic*: for instance in 'Imitation', Obiora shuttles between the United States and Nigeria in order to make ends meet. He keeps his family in the United States while he chases after contracts in Nigeria. Part of this desire for economic prosperity, however, is the Nigerian knack for class distinction and social prestige: having your family resident in the white man's land or, even going overseas on vacation, is a thing of immense pride and a great achievement, hence the camel-going-through-needle's-eye-experience most Nigerians have at foreign embassies. However, the story 'Imitation' underscores piquantly the divisive *rootlessness* of the postcolonial and (post-) modern family unit wrenched adrift from its spiritual and cultural moorings due to the grim sway of the *survivalist* ethos; an *unsavoury state* of affairs exacerbated by the centrifugal force of migrancy and geographical dislocation.

In 'Ghosts', a story about the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-70), reference is made to overseas travel; however, this time, for educational pursuit and research



purposes. Ikenna and the narrator schooled, we are told, abroad in the 1950s, before their country's political independence; an experience which informs, to a large extent, their outlook on life vis-à-vis the troubled times in which they find themselves.

Ikenna, for instance, is said to have fled to Sweden with the help of the International Red Cross in the thick of hostilities, thus turning himself into an exile, a situation which made people give him up for dead and, also, regard him as 'ghost' upon his reappearance. Doesn't this kind of migrancy make most *émigrés* scattered all across the world lead *ghostly* lives? Is theirs not a decentred, fragmented and nondescript life? We, thus, further encounter these kinds of characters as driftwood and detritus in the piece entitled 'On Monday of Last Week' in which a Nigerian woman named Kamara, is reduced to the humiliating state of babysitting a rich Jewish-American Lawyer's only child, Josh. The overriding message, however, of the story is Americans' attitudes towards parenting. According to the writer, Kamara, '...had come to understand that American parenting was a juggling of anxieties, and that it came with having too much food: a sated belly gave Americans time to worry that their child might have a rare disease that they had just read about, made them think they had the right or protect their child from disappointment and want and failure' (82). In the next story, 'Jumping Monkey Hill', we are confronted by a group of mostly budding African writers drawn from across the world, who meet in Cape Town, South Africa to hone their craft under the supervision of Edward, an Oxford-trained Africanist. In a sense, these young writers tend to betray an undertow of self-doubt and intellectual insecurity, waiting to be inducted and "canonised" by Edward. This inferiority complex is what is played out on a larger continental canvas whereby blacks emigrate to the West for self-actualisation. This unfortunate and dispiriting scenario emblemizes the Other as locus or matrix of self-validation. This self same theme of the postcolony as hell-hole versus the metropolitan location as paradise is re-enacted in most of the remaining stories in the collection. The title story entitled 'The Thing Around Your Neck' for instance, narrates the tale of Akunna (Igbo for 'Father's Wealth' please note the gender agenda inherent in the name!) who is brought to the United States by an 'uncle', who ostensibly tries to violate (rape?) her, thereby making her take matters into her own hands by forging

her own economic independence in a hostile and unfeeling social milieu.

Akunna in this story strikes us as a piece of sexual object to her 'uncle', a good-time girl for her white boyfriend, and wealth-creator for her desperately poor family back at home. She is a virtual hostage and prisoner to various segments of society: her gender *ab initio* condemns her to a life-sentence of living for others-meeting both their sexual and economic needs, a patriarchal cash cow and social "erotic plague".

Furthermore, 'The American Embassy' is a self-explanatory piece which viscerally dramatizes the conduit through which Nigerians bitten by wanderlust and the lure of the exotic as well as the need for self-preservation are sifted like chaff and wheat in order to separate the rejects from the favoured-those who are granted visas to travel to America, 'this country of curiosities and crudities' (37), a place where you 'live a life cushioned by so much convenience that it is sterile. A life littered with what we call 'opportunities'(67). This is the world of boundless opportunities to which both the rich and the poor immigrate, like Ukamaka and Udenna on the one hand and Chinedu, on the other in 'The Shivering'; the abused wife, Chinaza Agatha Okafor, and her shifty husband Ofodile in 'The Arranger of Marriage'; and the marital as well as the familial crisis at the heart of bicultural relationship in the story captioned "Tomorrow Is Too Far". It is important to stress here that Adichie uses the story entitled 'The American Embassy' to obliquely suggest that people in sub-Saharan, post-colonial African nation-states can only find deliverance from the deleterious octopine grip of poverty, the negative effects of bad governments and misrule by the one-way traffic from Africa (also known as the "Dark Continent") to the United States, which reputedly gives the 'escapees' 'a new life'. In a sense, this situation does not only highlight the essential sense of unbelonging and *rootlessness* of the hapless and disinherited inhabitants of these global spaces but also points up the overarching *problematic* of existential displacement and cosmic migrancy. Indeed, most of the characters whose fundamental search for meaning we have been at pains to explicate seem to be united in a common loss as shown by the vicarious distress and empathy shown by both Ukamaka and Chinedu in Princeton at the news of a plane crash way back in Nigeria as narrated in 'The Shivering'. Part of the consequence of geographical



dispersion occasioned by migrancy is that it creates a global, pan-human communion of suffering migrants bound together by the shared commonality of nationhood. The phenomenon of the internet helps in ameliorating the loss of contact and also helps in bolstering the pleasures of exile for these rootless wretched of the earth, for whom America, on the one hand, provides 'the abundance of unreasonable hope' (26), 'the flowering of extravagant hope' (80), and, on the other hand, to quote Che Guevara, it is 'the belly of the beast' (Ahmad 86). Giving pith and point to what we may term migrancy blues, Aijaz Ahmad avers, 'The structure of exploitation into which this colonial immigration is then slotted is the dark underbelly of the myth of America as the land of freedom and opportunity' (82). Commenting further on the issue of migrancy amongst artists and scholars generally, Ahmad states:

Self-exile and 'vagrancy'.... have become more common amongst artists in every successive phase of bourgeois culture since the early days of Romanticism, and as the experience itself has been chosen with greater frequency, the sense of celebration and of 'the migrant intellectual root[ing] itself in itself' has grown proportionately (158).

As far as the setting of Adichie's stories goes, the writer is careful enough to stay within two clearly defined locations: for her Nigerian setting; she repeatedly situates her characters in the Enugu-Nsukka axis of Eastern Nigeria; while most of her characters seem to emigrate from around this very locality to mostly Philadelphia, Connecticut and Princeton, three American cities in which Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself had spent part of her life, mostly schooling, as the bio-profile we furnish in the introductory section of this paper shows.

Adichie was once asked what she found fascinating about this sleepy university town of Nsukka and she replied: 'Nsukka is a town I love and more important for fiction, a town I know well. It is easier to write about what you know. I am certainly not done [using it in my work]' (cited in Adebani 59). This predominance of the Nsukka/Enugu universe (which we also encounter in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of A Yellow Sun*) tends to give this part of modern Nigeria a

solidified and picturesque sense of place, a tourist charm and allure, a public relations stunt capable of helping in rebranding Nigeria from her endemic albatross of social anomie into a tropical oasis of Edenic plenitude. To be certain, Adichie is doing for her country, or better yet, for her ethnic region, what Thomas Hardy, for instance, had done for 'Wessex' in England in his classic novels.

According to Whitehead, 'style [is] the essential morality of a writer's mind' (cited in Ahmad 131). In the light of this, it is quite easy to be seduced by the natural ease of expression displayed by Adichie, the unforced efficiency and the surefootedness with which she writes; and an incredibly deft control of language - limpid, terse and direct, and dramatic in places - that tends to give the lie to the Eliotesque 'intolerable wrestle with words', a torturous experience which most writers would tell you they all always grapple with.<sup>2</sup> Adichie, however, does not appear to be able to rise up to the high standards of her own previous achievement in terms of the technical resolution of her prose, the philosophical-cum-psychological interiorisation as well as the poetic pathos of a group of stories mainly investigating and interrogating subliminal eventualities. To be sure, placed side-by-side the great oracular voices from the past, voices such as Chinua Achebe and Sembene Ousmane, Samuel Selvon, Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin and William Faulkner, Adichie's voice hushes into a monotone of waffle.

In terms of her character delineation, it is reasonable to assume that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a paradigmatic representative of the millions of Africans walking the American night (to echo Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and South African Alex La Guma). Adichie is large, like Walt Whitman, she contains multitudes: a peopled persona, Adichie very easily insinuates *herself*, albeit under the profiles and masks of her numerous surrogates - her fictional characters - into a baffling variety of situations and circumstances in her admirably bold and daring attempt to paint a kaleidoscope of the sundry indignities of migrancy. While it might be instructive to argue that there might have been an undercurrent of gender-related "murmurings" in traditional African societies, it is only fair and logical to emphasize the point that the phenomenon of feminism and allied forms of gendered disputation are a modern manifestation of the corrosive erosion of core African autochthonous practices and way of life; a state of affairs which



Adichie, thanks to her "rootedness" in western tradition, has elevated to the status of abiding artistic ideology.<sup>3</sup> Thus Adichie's subtle, if remorseless, feminism is a product of her migrancy, her wholesale absorption of western intellectual paradigms.

Whereas there is no denying the self-righteous stridency as well as the ideological militancy of her feminist campaign, Adichie's constant and repeated recourse to feminism, story after story, ultimately results in:

- (a) reducing the quality of her artistic vision through easy predictability;
- (b) a sexist partisanship based on an oppositional, adversarial textual/sexual politics; and
- (c) this "agenda writing" or feminist propagandizing might, finally, stymie her imaginative powers to transcend the troublesome mantra of the 'rule of the father' and, then, go on to break new ground in world literature.

In the world of orature even animals travel well: in the black community in the United States of America, Br'r Rabbit is a wily shuttle in the slaveholding American crypt. Clearly when African slaves were forcibly herded onto the slave ship for the infamous Middle Passage, the small but intelligent animal did not fail to follow them to the Americas. And so did some of his kith and kin who have survived in the popular African-American imagination to date. As oral traditions generally go, all traditional human societies have their own localized variants of the Br'r Rabbit archetype; coming closer home, for instance, Achebe narrates in *Things Fall Apart* the migrancy of the world's bird species to heaven, an epoch-making trip in which the Tortoise-another version of Br'r Rabbit-accompanies the feathery kind. Even the Igbo as a race, in their fundamental search for ancestral roots cherish the mythical belief that their forebears *migrated* from ancient Israel. What is more, they remain even in contemporary Nigeria the most travelled ethnic stock, scattered as they are across various global spaces.

Interestingly, the Bible recounts the same migratory experience of the Jewish race in the biblical story of Abraham's descendants who first emigrated to

Egypt and, after an interval of about four hundred and thirty years began a forty-year journey from Egypt through the wilderness and the Red Sea to Canaan. The truth of the matter is that this *archetypal* journey of a race from one place to another in their search for a permanent homeland is a common leitmotif of most world religions; Christianity, Islam, Judaism and so forth. However, since religious thought operates through symbolism and allegory, it is usually more profitable to see beyond the denotative façade of the tale told to its more meaningful underlying connotative purport, its timeless allegorization of the human condition. By the same token, therefore, hardly can we find any homogenous group of people, sometimes, at the micro-level of a cluster of villages bound together by a common language, who will not proudly narrate their own archetypal story (myth?) of origination, more often than not, an epic of migration through forest and desert, through flood and firestorm, and of course, with might and main, before their founding patriarch together with a ragtag band of conquerors subdued many kingdoms and put to flight the "armies of the aliens" and finally colonized the land for good.

We encounter such a tale of heroism and derring-do in the famous Mayflower ship making its historic journey across the Atlantic in 1620, conveying a group of starry-eyed, bigoted pilgrims who later landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts in the United States. These pilgrims had gone on to found the United States while enduring hunger, thirst and disease as well as the murderous hostility of the Amerindian aborigines. The English people are said not to be the original inhabitants of present day England but that they emigrated from other parts of Europe to England, and with the edge of the sword, sacked the rightful owners of the land in an epic "civilizational" ethnic cleansing and occupied the land; such also is the story of the Republic of South Africa, the 'rainbow Nation' comprising as it is many races-African, Asian, Europe *et cetera*; they *all* migrated from different places to stake a claim to the land; the West Indies and the Caribbean Islands as well as much of Latin America are a product of migrancy. In Helon Habila's novel entitled *Measuring Time*, we find a fascinating story of migration, told of the founding fathers of Yeti. The Yoruba as a race, for example, is said to have emigrated from Saudi Arabia to the present-day south-west Nigeria. In fact, for the Yoruba, as for most races, life itself is a



journey, a classic proverbialization of concrete socio-historical experience rooted in their collective awareness of their migrant status. Ibitokun explains:

The Yoruba and the Euro-Christian world-views agree on many aspects of the roots and nature of being, that man has both body and soul, that at death, the soul does not die but goes back to her original home, that man is a sojourner on earth, homo viator that the roots of being reach beyond the earthly, the Yoruba talk of Obatala, Ajala and Orunmila, Eleri Ipin in the pre-terrestrial process of man's roots, that the saints/ancestors, now ethereal essences, live a peaceful life in the hereafter, that there is one God, the creator of man...(2).

In D.T. Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* we equally encounter the story of migrancy told of the heroic paterfamilias of Sundiata, the emperor of old Mali empire, and, by extension, the father of much of francophone West Africa. Going farther back in time, the early man as a *homo sapiens* species was said to have led an ambulant and nomadic life, wrestling with hostile and untamed nature and the elements, intellectually challenged as he was and handicapped by a tunnel-vision about seasonal changes; he had to move from place to place, he himself all the time undergoing physiological and anatomical transmogrification, from a "rational" animal walking on all fours to a biped. Indeed, interesting and mysterious is the alchemy and synergy that exist between man and his phenomenal environment, even as each one continues to *transform* the other *ad infinitum*.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the story of man's cosmic migrancy originated from the dim mists of antiquity and prehistory, as may be gleaned from oral traditions, ancient Holy Writs and historical accounts. What indeed, we may ask, is it about man's existential peregrinations? The 'Johnnie Walker' predilection which predisposes him to bone-deep insatiability and, hence, wanderlust? Why this incurable, intractable *rootlessness*? Why has life and living remained a mere stage and every man, a mere player *flitting about* in vain self-ironising, all in the name of seeking after his 'daily bread'? And, finally, why is the 'daily bread'

unsatisfactory and/or unsatisfying? This set of questions captures some of the reasons why man is ostensibly condemned as it were to a life of existential quest; and this "quest" operates both at the mundane and the spiritual level; 'the quest for the roots'. This quest is sometimes rendered in literature in the epic mode as in Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Vergil's *The Aeneid*, the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, J.P. Clark's *The Ozidi Saga* and *The Nwindo Epic of the Congo*; or the 'absurdist or the irrational factor' (Ibitokun 21). According to Ibitokun:

Roots, truths and religions have been built on a geocentric apprehension of the universe, on man as centre. But later on, the Galilean telescope shattered the metaphysics of old and brought in the heliocentric awareness in which man finds his true position at the periphery (21).

This decentredness of man, this portrayal of man as non-entity, according to Wole Soyinka, 'the HOLE in the ZERO' (See *Madmen and Specialists*), this shattering realization of the essential futility of human struggle is what, to varying degrees of success, modernist writers and philosophers try to capture in their writings, writers like Samuel Beckett, Alfred Jarry, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and philosophers like Nietzsche, Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In fact, there is a sense in which the whole corpus of modern African literature can be interpreted as a collective effort on the part of African artists who feel sufficiently outraged by what might be considered a comprehensive and irreversibly apocalyptic *violation* - both in materialist and psychic terms - of the African world by European (and, to some extent, Arab-Islamic) colonialists, to threaten or lament the *uprootedness* of the black race. In terms of these negrologues, we discover that, from Olaudah Equiano, Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi through Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Okigbo, Clark Bekeremo, Sembene Ousmane, to Mongo Beti, Ngugi, Fugard, Ayi Kwei Armah, U'Tamsi, Aime Cesaire and Tayeb Salih, the story is invariably the same. The African is a fragmented self; and what the contemporary (post) modernist literary imagination tries to capture is this ontological primacy of the fragment, and, in this regard, we may, on a final note, talk of the socio-historical and economic conditions of the 'Third World' migrant *qua* migrant as a moth flying

blindly into the heart of the western flame to be terminally incinerated. This is the basic as well as the *essential* condition of Adichie, nay, her characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, characters who usually emigrate from Nigeria to the United States of America in a grandiose *dans macabre* of second slavery.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Thing Around Your Neck*, 2009. All further page references will be indicated in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Commenting on her celebrated mastery of form and language, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says: "I think I have been blessed with a gift and that I made the conscious decision to work very hard to make something of this gift. I am an incredibly hard worker, perhaps a bit of a perfectionist I will revise a single sentence *fifty times* until I am pleased with it". (emphasis, mine. Cited in Adebani 59).

<sup>3</sup> Chimamanda Adichie is helpfully forthright on the question of her gender ideology: "I am happily feminist, but I never start my fiction with ideology". (Cited in Adebani 59).

#### Work Cited

- Adebani, Wale. 'My Book Should Provoke A Conversation', *The News*, vol. 23, no. 01, 15 January, 2007.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009.
- Ahmad, Ijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations. Literatures* London: Verso, 1992.
- Ibitokun, B.M. *Literature and Quest for The Roots*. (Inaugural Lecture Series) 144, Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2000.

*The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of The English Language* (Encyclopedia Edition). Florida: Typhoon International, 2004.