Interrogating Diasporic Conditions: A Critical Study of Select Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Abstract

This paper examines the complexities of diasporic conditions in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's ***Purple Hibiscus*** **(2003)**, ***The Thing Around Your Neck*** **(2009),** *and* ***Americanah*** **(2013),** *with particular attention to how displacement shapes identity, memory, and lived experience. It investigates the interplay between longing for home, nostalgia, and emotional dislocation, highlighting how characters navigate the tension between past and present, and how exile functions as a paradoxical state of both survival and dispossession. Grounded in postcolonial theory, the study draws on Said's theorization of exile and Hall's articulation of cultural identity to interrogate the psychological, social, and political dimensions of migration. Findings reveal that domestic rituals, sensory memories, and language mediate the experience of nostalgia, producing fragmented identities shaped by historical and cultural legacies. Memory operates simultaneously as rupture and resistance, enabling characters to reconstruct selfhood through reflection, silence, and imaginative engagement with the past. Displacement is shown to generate persistent psychological exile, as exemplified by forced and voluntary migrations that result in marginalization, emotional fragmentation, and alienation. Characters confront systemic barriers, gendered oppression, and racial hierarchies, which amplify the paradoxical burdens of migration and the disjunction between homeland and hostland. Through these narratives, Adichie portrays diaspora not as linear movement but as a recursive and multifaceted condition marked by loss, longing, invisibility, and uneven belonging.*

Keywords: Memory, Exile, Nostalgia, Cultural Identity and Postcolonial Theory

INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narratives provide a rich framework for examining the emotional, cultural, and psychological dimensions of diasporic life, particularly the tensions arising from displacement and

alienation. Across her works, characters navigating life abroad are confronted with the challenge of reconciling their memories of home with the demands of unfamiliar environments, a struggle that profoundly shapes their sense of self and belonging. The diasporic experience, as presented in these narratives, is marked by a continual negotiation between past and present, homeland and hostland, revealing the intricate ways in which identity is contingent upon memory and cultural anchoring. Memory, in this context, functions as both a repository and a lens through which diasporic individuals interpret their realities, providing continuity amidst upheaval and offering a framework for negotiating emotional and social dislocation. Payel Pal (2021) observes that "nostalgia is typically perceived as a sentimental reminiscence or desire for a return to some irrecoverable past" (p.47), highlighting the deeply emotional character of such recollections. This nostalgic engagement is not merely a passive longing but an active negotiation with the self, in which memory mediates the tension between what has been lost and what continues to shape personal identity.

Nostalgia, however, extends beyond a mere emotional response, operating as a complex lens that reflects both the comfort and the challenges of remembering home while confronting new realities. Svetlana Boym (2001) asserts that nostalgia embodies "a sense of loss and displacement, as well as a confused sensation of the past and the present, of home and abroad," a duality that is evident in the lived experiences of Adichie's characters. The diasporic individual's yearning for familiar languages, cultural practices, and community connections underscores the intricate interplay between memory and identity, where recollection serves as both a refuge and a site of tension. Within this framework, memory becomes a crucial mechanism for preserving continuity of the self, facilitating the reconstruction of identity in foreign spaces while exposing the fragility of belonging. Zinchenko (1939) similarly emphasizes the centrality of memory in human consciousness, noting that it is essential in constructing and remaking consciousness and reality, with the processes of remembering and forgetting intimately linked to personality formation and awareness (cited in Meshcheryakov, 2008, p.20). Thus, nostalgia in Adichie's narratives is complex and far from merely sentimental; it serves as a crucial aspect of the diasporic experience, highlighting the persistent links between home, identity, and memory despite the challenges of displacement.

Alongside the affective dimensions of memory, Adichie's texts also interrogate the existential complexities of exile, revealing it as a condition marked by profound suffering and paradoxical attachment. Exile, far from being solely a geographical dislocation, encompasses the social, economic, and psychological challenges of inhabiting spaces that are often

unwelcoming or hostile. Those compelled to leave their homelands experience the weight of separation, negotiating new cultural and social landscapes while contending with systemic marginalization and uncertainty. Edward Said (2000) theorizes exile as fundamentally entwined with the duality of love and loss, arguing that "both love for and attachment to" one's homeland are essential, and that "what defines exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both" (p.191). Said's formulation highlights the paradoxical nature of exile, wherein longing and belonging coexist in an uneasy tension that shapes the cultural, emotional, and personal identity of the displaced individual. By framing exile as an experiential state rather than a simple physical separation, Adichie's narratives foreground the ongoing emotional and psychological labour inherent in negotiating distance from the homeland.

Paul Tabori (1972) further elucidates the precarious circumstances surrounding exile, emphasizing that those forced to leave or remain outside their countries of origin often do so due to legitimate fears of persecution related to race, religion, nationality, or political affiliation. While many exiles maintain hope for eventual return, the persistence of the conditions that prompted displacement frequently renders such return impossible, either physically or psychologically (p.27). Within this context, exile is both a tangible reality and an internalized condition, characterized by uncertainty, suffering, and the persistent presence of a homeland that, although inaccessible, continues to shape thought, memory, and identity. Adichie's portrayal of this state underscores the intricate interplay between longing, memory, and identity formation, revealing exile as an enduring feature of the diasporic experience that complicates simplistic notions of home, belonging, and return. By juxtaposing the affective pull of nostalgia with the existential demands of exile, her works offer a comprehensive examination of the emotional, cultural, and psychological dimensions of displacement, illuminating the ways in which diasporic subjects negotiate their identities amidst persistent tension and dislocation.

THEORIZING DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES IN ADICHIE'S WRITINGS

Literature operates not merely as a mirror that reflects sociocultural realities but as a critical site for interrogating the lived experiences, challenges, and negotiations of immigrants within unfamiliar landscapes. This study adopts a postcolonial theoretical framework, enriched by diasporic perspectives, to examine the complex entanglements of identity, belonging, and displacement in the selected works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Postcolonial theory, as Ashcroft et al. (2007) observe, "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies" and examines "the processes and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century up to and

including the neo-colonialism of the present day" (pp.168–169). Importantly, as Ashcroft et al. (1995) clarify, the "post-colonial" does not simply mean "after colonialism," but begins from the "very first moment of colonial contact" as "the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being" (p.117). This makes postcolonialism not only a framework for recovering the histories of colonized peoples but also a critical practice for interrogating how colonial power continues to shape language, representation, and identity. As Ashcroft et al. (1995) further stress, "language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language" (p.283), establishing how the naming and representation of colonized peoples became an enduring mechanism of cultural control.

In alignment with this perspective, Rukundwa and Van Aarde (2007) emphasize that postcolonial theory emerges from the colonial experiences of people who engaged in liberation struggles across Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America, bearing witness to persistent cultural forces of representation (p.1189). Moreover, it provides a mechanism for those emerging from socio-political and economic domination to reclaim negotiating space for equity, not by waging war on the past, but by challenging its exploitative consequences (p.1190). In doing so, postcolonial theory engages the psychology of both the colonized and the colonizer, raising self-consciousness that can revolutionize minds to envision societies founded on liberty and equity. Bhabha (1994) adds that postcolonial criticism exposes unequal forces of cultural representation in contests over political and social authority, intervening in modernity's discourses that attempt to normalize uneven development and differential histories (pp.245–246).

Within this broader postcolonial paradigm, Edward Said's theorization of exile is especially useful for situating the psychic and cultural displacements central to diasporic experiences. For Said (2000), "exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (p.180). While literature often romanticizes exile, he cautions that these "heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes" are no more than "efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement," since "the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (p.180). This paradox underscores the condition of diasporic subjects who, despite professional or personal achievements, remain marked by absence, nostalgia, and longing. Said further emphasizes that "because exile is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being, exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past" (p.183). The discontinuity of exile, therefore,

generates a perpetual negotiation of fractured identities and dislocated histories. At the same time, exiles are compelled to "compensate for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule," often through intellectual or creative pursuits where "the exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction" (p.187). This insight is crucial in analyzing Adichie's diasporic characters, whose lives often oscillate between estrangement and reinvention, loss and reconfiguration.

Yet exile is not only a condition of melancholia; it also produces a distinctive consciousness of difference. As Said notes, "no matter how well they may do, exiles are always eccentrics who feel their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphan-hood," jealously guarding "their right to refuse to belong" (2000, p.187). This refusal resonates with diasporic subjectivities that resist assimilation while simultaneously grappling with alienation. Moreover, Said underscores the social stigma historically attached to displacement: "exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider" (2000, p.186). Such reflections highlight how exile functions both as an existential rupture and as a structural condition of marginalization within host societies.

Complementing Said's perspective, Stuart Hall (1990) provides a critical theorization of cultural identity that problematizes essentialist notions of fixed belonging. Hall identifies two conceptions of cultural identity: the first sees it as a collective "one true self," rooted in "common historical experiences and shared cultural codes" that secure stability and continuity across time (p.223). However, Hall emphasizes the limitations of this static conception, proposing instead a second view that recognizes identity as dynamic, fractured, and historically produced. Here, cultural identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'," belonging "to the future as much as to the past," and always subject to "the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (p.225). For Hall, identities are not essences but "points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (p.226). This perspective is especially vital for analyzing the experiences of Adichie's characters, who inhabit in-between spaces of hybridity where belonging is negotiated, contested, and redefined across cultural terrains.

Hall also underscores how identity is entangled with power and representation, reminding us that the "colonial experience" subjected black people to regimes of representation that constructed them as "different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West" (1990, p.225). These regimes, in Hall's view, worked not only externally but internally, compelling

colonized peoples to see themselves as "Other" through what Foucault terms the couplet of "power/knowledge" (pp.225–226). This illuminates how diasporic subjects remain caught within inherited structures of racialization and cultural stereotyping, while simultaneously finding ways to resist and rearticulate their positions.

By situating Adichie's works within this theoretical framework, the study foregrounds the ways in which literature serves as a site of resistance, memory, and reconfiguration. Said's exilic framework highlights the ruptures and estrangements that define diasporic experience, while Hall's conceptualization of identity emphasizes its dynamic and contested nature. Together, these perspectives illuminate the complex intersections of identity, power, and belonging that shape the experiences of African immigrants in Western societies, allowing Adichie's works to be read not only as narratives of displacement but also as archives of survival, resistance, and cultural transformation.

NOSTALGIC ECHOES: MEMORY AND LONGING IN 'IMITATION' AND 'THE SHIVERING'

In her exploration of diasporic experiences, Adichie demonstrates how the longing for home shapes immigrants' emotional lives and identities, functioning both as a source of comfort and as a reminder of dislocation. In her short stories from the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), memories of the homeland evoke attachment while also exposing fractures in belonging, revealing the intricate tensions inherent in diasporic life. This interplay between memory and identity enables her characters to negotiate the liminal space between their homeland and the foreign environments they inhabit, reshaping themselves in response to both nostalgia and the challenging realities of life abroad.

Through the short story "Imitation," Adichie's portrayal of longing for home and nostalgia intricately reveals the complexities of diasporic conditions, particularly through Nkem's psychological and emotional struggles. Nkem's attempt to visualize her husband, Obiora, while being plagued by uncertainty, "she is not sure if he is at home, in his car, somewhere else" (p.30), signals the emotional disconnection that physical displacement has exacerbated. Her spiraling thoughts about the "girl with the short curly hair" and whether that girl now shares intimate routines in the Nigerian bedroom, "does this girl walk to the bathroom on tiptoe as she herself had done as a single girl when her married boyfriend brought her to his house" (p.31) reflect how memory and suspicion conflate to form a fragmented sense of identity. Stuart Hall (1990) helps us understand this fragmentation by arguing that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but rather a positioning,

one that emerges through "memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (p.226). These recollections deepen her alienation as she contrasts the life she has built abroad with the past she left behind, a past riddled with socioeconomic struggle and gendered compromise. Her reflection on past lovers, "Ikenna… had paid her father's hospital bills… Tunji… bought them the first real sofas… she would have considered being his fourth wife" (p.31), foregrounds how her former identity was shaped by economic necessity and cultural expectations, thus sharpening the emotional stakes of her longing for home. Hall (1990) argues that identity "undergoes constant transformation" and cannot simply be recovered from the past because "history has intervened" (p.225); this notion of identity as a process of "becoming" rather than "being" (p.225) directly resonates with Nkem's shifting self-perception. Nkem's recollection of past lovers, linked to financial dependence and socio-cultural obligations, highlights how her earlier identity was informed more by survival and societal roles than personal agency. In this context, Mushtaq Asiya's assertion that "nostalgia is a sensation, a feeling towards one's past or one's homeland, frequently marked by homesickness, recollection, yearning, and worry" (2020, p.56) becomes central to understanding Nkem's internal conflict. Her current diasporic condition, surrounded by material ease, stands in opposition to the visceral memories of Lagos, memories that are not only tender but also laced with regret and shame: "it shamed her, even more than it frustrated her, that she could not do any of the things expected of the First Daughter, that her parents still struggled on the parched farm, that her siblings still hawked loaves of bread at the motor park" (p.31). Here, Hall's view that "the colonial experience" positions black subjects as "Other" through "regimes of power and representation" (1990, p.225) explains the internalized shame that shapes Nkem's diasporic identity. This duality is made palpable when Nkem is triggered into action after imagining Obiora's infidelity: "She puts the phone down, tells Amaechi she will be right back, and drives to Wal-greens to buy a carton of texturizer. Back in the car, she turns the light on and stares at the carton, at the picture of the women with tightly curled hair." (p.32). Hall (1990) reminds us that the colonial project not only imposed "Otherness" externally but also led to "subjective conformation to the norm" through an "inner compulsion" (p.226). This act reflects an attempt to reclaim a sense of agency through aesthetic transformation, even as it exposes her vulnerability and her internalized desire to remain desirable in a dislocated marital structure. The nostalgic pull of home is also felt through domestic rituals, where food becomes both a cultural anchor and a symbol of loss. Nkem's observation, "real African yams, not the fibrous potatoes the American supermarkets sell as yams. Imitation yams, Nkem thinks, and smiles" (p.32), captures not only the tangible absence of the authentic but also the metaphorical 'imitation' of life abroad. Her reflections

during cooking scenes, "She remembers how her mother plucked plant leaves that nobody else ate and made a soup with them, insisting they were edible. They always tasted, to Nkem, like urine, because she would see the neighborhood boys urinating on the stems of those plants" (p.33), evoke a powerful sensory memory, one that is both unpleasant and dearly missed. According to Hall (1990), such memory is not a simple recall of the past but a means of identity construction "after the break" (p.226), where loss and longing become sites of narrative reconstruction. These memories tie her to a collective cultural history that, while marked by deprivation, carried a sense of familial cohesion and belonging absent in her American domesticity. Moreover, Nkem's interactions with Amaechi reveal the performative nature of her domestic authority. Although she recognizes that "Amaechi is much better in the kitchen than she is" (p.33), she continues to maintain the illusion of control, thereby reflecting the disjunction between appearance and reality in her American life. Nkem also recalls Obiora's patronizing attitude toward Amaechi's family, how he "said Amaechi's parents had embarrassed him, kneeling down on the dirt to thank him" (p.33), a detail that highlights the lingering class and power dynamics embedded in their diasporic experience. This echoes Hall's claim that identity is formed through the "discourses of history and culture," making every assertion of selfhood a "politics of position" (1990, p.226), as Nkem's identity is shaped by her historical memory, class status, and cultural expectations within a transnational space. Ultimately, Nkem's longing for home is expressed not only through memory but also through her senses, routines, and emotional discontent. Her recollection of the "cadence of Igbo and Yoruba and pidgin English" (p.37), and her yearning for the "Lagos sun that glares down even when it rains" (p.37), contrast starkly with the sterile routine of her suburban life in Philadelphia. Though she has assimilated into American routines, "Pilates class twice a week," "bakes cookies for her children's classes", Adichie poignantly notes that "America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin" (p.37), revealing how diaspora complicates the notion of home. Hall's concept of "imaginary plenitude" and the "desire to return to 'lost origins'" (p.236) is particularly relevant here, as Nkem's nostalgia emerges as both a symptom of dislocation and a yearning for coherence. This idealized return, however, remains unreachable, an imagined wholeness that stands in tension with her lived reality. The comfort of her American lifestyle is ultimately inseparable from the discomfort of her cultural and emotional displacement. Through Nkem's fragmented inner world, Adichie masterfully captures how memory and nostalgia shape diasporic identity, revealing the entangled feelings of longing, shame, and resignation that infuse everyday routines with the weight of cultural dislocation and expose the irreconcilable gap between where one lives and where one feels they truly belong.

In a comparable way, in Adichie's short story "The Shivering," the emotional lives of Nigerian immigrants Ukamaka and Chinedu in the U.S. are shaped by their yearning for home and the complex memories of their homeland, which simultaneously offer solace and reinforce their disconnection. Ukamaka's anxiety about her ex-boyfriend Udenna's safety intensifies her sense of isolation and spiritual confusion, prompting theological questions that mirror the confusion of diaspora itself. When she asks Chinedu, "If you say God is responsible for keeping Udenna safe, then it means God is responsible for the people who died… Does it mean God prefers some people to others?" (p.147), she voices the diasporic dissonance between belief and experience, how the abstract comforts of religion collapse under the emotional weight of exile and loss. Chinedu's reply, "God always makes sense but not always a human kind of sense" (p.148), echoes the irrationality that governs not only divine providence but also the arbitrary emotional ruptures of diasporic life. Ukamaka's disbelief in this logic reveals her inner instability, which is further exposed through her recollection of the moment Udenna ended their relationship, a memory intricately tied to place and ritual, where "they had been inside Thomas Sweet, drinking strawberry and banana smoothies, their Sunday ritual" (p.148). This habitual setting becomes a site of emotional anchoring, a symbol of the comforting regularity now disrupted by Udenna's absence. The narrative repetition of "staid", "Staid, and yet she had been arranging her life around his for three years… Staid, and yet she cooked her stews with hot peppers now, the way he liked" (p.148), reveals how deeply embedded her identity had become in these shared routines. Through this repetition, Adichie exposes the contradictions of diasporic longing, where the attempt to find stability in romantic rituals abroad mirrors the diasporic subject's attempt to reclaim a sense of rootedness, however illusory, in a fragmented and ever-shifting reality. This psychological entanglement with memory aligns with Stuart Hall's view that cultural identity is not a stable essence but a constantly shifting position, "constructed through memory, fantasy…" (Hall, 1990, p.226), highlighting how identity is shaped by selective recollection and imagined futures rather than fixed cultural roots. Ukamaka's longing is not merely for Udenna himself but for the life she envisioned with him, a future built on shared dreams and symbolic projections. For Ukamaka, her imagined life with Udenna in Nigeria, complete with future children named "Ulari and Udoka" (p.148), illustrates Hall's claim that identity is shaped by an "imaginary plenitude" (p.236), rooted in a nostalgic desire for a coherent past that remains unfulfilled in the diasporic context. Her inability to remove Udenna's photograph, "sometimes reluctantly, always frightened of the finality of taking it down" (p.149), reveals the unresolved tension between attachment to a symbolic past and the challenge of adapting to a fractured present.

Similarly, Chinedu's story reveals the emotional and cultural complexity of diasporic identity. His painful memory of a same-sex relationship with Abidemi in Nigeria and the deep, quiet pain it still evokes, seen when "something about the way Chinedu said his name, Abidemi, made her think of gently pressing on a sore muscle" (p.159), reflects Hall's insight that diasporic identities are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p.235). This assertion captures how Chinedu's identity is not fixed in his past in Nigeria, but is instead continually reshaped in the diasporic present, marked by loss, concealment, and adaptation. These memories are filtered through specificity, "He drank Guinness stout, he sent his driver to buy roast plantains, he liked the Lebanese kibbe at Double Four" (p.159), signifying a deeply embedded, but now inaccessible cultural world. As Hall observes, diasporic identities must live "with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (p.235), and Chinedu's identity is fractured not only by geographic displacement, but by his exclusion from a homeland that criminalizes his sexuality. His inability to return, due to African culture, particularly the Nigerian one, which condemns homosexuality as an abomination, demonstrates the rupture that Hall describes as the "traumatic character" of colonial and postcolonial identity, marked by profound breaks from the past (p.226). Ukamaka's emotional dependence on a lost relationship and Chinedu's silenced suffering also reflect Hall's concept of "the play of difference within identity" (p.228), which suggests that identity is not singular or stable, but continuously shaped by shifting experiences, contradictions, and unresolved tensions. This dynamic tension is evident in the emotional and cultural dislocations both characters endure. Their fragmented attachments and incomplete confessions show how diasporic individuals are often "without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless—a race of angels" (Fanon, cited in Hall, 1990, p.226), caught between what was left behind and what cannot be claimed. Adichie uses these personal histories not only to illustrate homesickness but also to expose the fractured nature of "home" as both geography and affective state. In line with Voigt-Graf's notion that "home" is a relational and emotional construct, Chinedu's memories of Nigeria are saturated with love, pain, and betrayal, none of which can be separated from his experience of place. For him, as for Ukamaka, longing for home is not a desire to return to a fixed point but to recover an emotional coherence that diaspora has fractured. This aligns with Voigt-Graf's (2008) observation that "many Indo-Fijians regard Australia as their new permanent and secure home, Fiji as their emotional home and India as their ancestral home" (p.24), illustrating how diasporic subjects often relate to multiple geographies simultaneously, each with different levels of emotional and symbolic resonance. Like the Indo-Fijians who "stress their

emotional and day-to-day links into the Pacific" due to their inability to reintegrate into Indian society (p.24), Chinedu remains emotionally bound to a Nigeria that no longer offers belonging, safety, or return. His identity, like that of many diasporic individuals, is suspended between memory and displacement, and his longing for home, much like Ukamaka's, becomes a search not for a physical place, but for emotional grounding in a fractured and dislocated existence. William Safran's insight that diasporas often persist "because returning would be too difficult or traumatic" (Safran, 1991, p.91) is validated by Chinedu's inability to reenter Nigeria without erasing or denying his sexual identity. Thus, "home" becomes a mythic space, idealized, yet inaccessible, while the present is haunted by what was lost. Through the emotionally nuanced interactions of Ukamaka and Chinedu, Adichie portrays the diasporic condition not simply as physical exile, but as a sustained negotiation between memory, identity, and belonging, where longing for home remains a simultaneously redemptive and destabilizing force.

EXILE AND THE DIASPORIC PARADOX: SUFFERING AND UNFULFILLED PROMISES IN ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND *AMERICANAH*

This section investigates how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* illuminate the forces that compel individuals to migrate and inhabit diasporic spaces, as well as the multifaceted experiences that shape their identities as immigrants or exiles. By examining these narratives, the research foregrounds the paradoxical nature of migration, in which the pursuit of opportunity is frequently accompanied by suffering, disillusionment, and unmet expectations, thereby revealing the emotional and existential tensions inherent in diasporic life.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie portrays the disintegration of Nigerian society under a repressive military regime, where political instability and systemic corruption compromise citizens' daily lives, fostering violence, ethnic tensions, and socio-political decay. These conditions make safety, dignity, and opportunity scarce, prompting many, especially educated professionals, to seek refuge abroad. Migration thus emerges both as a response to adversity and a pursuit of stability, with exile offering the possibility of a more secure life (Kaboré, 2016, p.8). Aunty Ifeoma exemplifies this difficult choice; her relocation to the United States illustrates how displacement becomes a means of survival and hope, allowing for opportunities denied at home. Edward Said's concept of exile captures the pain of forced displacement and the struggle to maintain identity, defined as "an unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (Said, 2000, p.180). Ifeoma's intellectual contributions are stifled by institutional

decay and political repression, reflecting Said's broader observation that the modern condition is "spiritually orphaned and alienated" (p.180). Her precarious position at the University of Nsukka, where professionals face unpaid labor and arbitrary dismissal, underscores this alienation, making exile both a necessity and a response to systemic failure: "true exile is a condition of terminal loss … [yet] has been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture" (Said, 2000, p.180). Ifeoma's forced departure silences her contributions in Nigeria while enabling her intellectual engagement elsewhere, aligning with Said's claim that "modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees" (p.180). Adichie's narrative depicts exile as a complex condition shaped by cultural, political, and spiritual displacement, reinforced by Dube W. Musa (2018), who notes that professionals are driven to migrate due to systemic corruption, strikes, inflation, and scarcity. This mirrors Said's view of refugees as "a creation of the twentieth-century state" (p.186). Ifeoma embodies both refugee and exile, displaced by institutional collapse and alienated from a homeland lacking dignity and safety. Her gradual displacement is fueled by neglect, political persecution, strikes, and arbitrary dismissal, reflecting Said's observation that exile often entails "narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community" (p.189). Ifeoma's colleagues, like Phillipa, flee in search of better conditions, "at least teachers are paid there [America]" (p.76), yet Ifeoma resists until she is forced out by unjust dismissal and state surveillance: "They have given me notice of termination […] I have applied for a visa at the American Embassy" (p.261). Her resistance, seen when she confronts security officers, "Who sent you here? […] Do you have any papers to show me?" (pp.230–231), is ultimately futile, echoing Said's claim that exiles must often relinquish their critical voice to survive. The *Standard Newspaper* run by Eugene serves as another front of resistance, exposing political atrocities and demanding democratic reform: "We are going to publish underground now… It is no longer safe for my staff" (p.43). Eugene's own disillusionment, "what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy" (pp.24–25), parallels Said's portrayal of exile as "a tragic fate of homelessness in a necessarily heartless world" (p.188). This assertion captures the harsh emotional and political terrain navigated by those who dare to resist oppressive governance, figures like Eugene and his colleagues, whose struggle for justice renders them estranged within their own country. The assassination of Ade Coker, chief editor of the *Standard*, and the raid on the *Standard*'s offices dramatize Said's warning that exile is not always a choice but a "necessity" (p.190), reinforcing the fatal consequences of dissent. Ifeoma's reluctant decision to leave is met with surprise by her colleague and friend Chiaku, who exclaims, "So you, too,

Ifeoma" (p.244), followed by her poignant lament: "The educated ones leave, the ones with the potential to right the wrongs. They leave the weak behind. The tyrants continue to reign because the weak cannot resist. Do you not see that it is a cycle? Who will break that cycle?" (pp.244–245). These responses highlight exile as both survival and complicity, capturing Said's insight that exile "fosters self-awareness" (p.189) while also demanding painful moral concessions. As Simone Weil, quoted by Said, contends, "To be rooted… is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (Said, 2000, pp.188–189), yet exile often replaces this rootedness with nationalist dogma or spiritual alienation. Despite the psychological toll and profound loss, Adichie presents Ifeoma's exile not as romanticized escape but as an ethically fraught necessity, a condition of rupture, resistance, and reluctant hope. Her narrative affirms Said's conviction that exile, when honestly rendered, can both challenge systems of oppression and deepen our understanding of human resilience amidst institutional collapse.

However, immigration in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, as seen through Chiaku and Aunty Ifeoma, illustrates a paradox where expectations clash with reality. Migrants seek economic stability, professional growth, and personal freedom, yet encounter systemic inequality, racial discrimination, and emotional alienation that often mirror or exceed the struggles they left behind. The diaspora's promise of opportunity contrasts sharply with diminished status and psychological strain, as Chiaku notes in her sarcastic query to Aunty Ifeoma, "And life as a second-class citizen in America?" (p.244), emphasizing the marginalization immigrants face despite qualifications. Chiaku's reflection, "All my years in Cambridge, I was a monkey who had developed the ability to reason" (p.244), highlights persistent racial stereotypes undermining immigrant achievements. Professionally, skilled immigrants endure devaluation: "Every day our doctors go there and end up washing plates for oyinbo… Our lawyers go and drive taxis because oyinbo does not trust how we train them in law" (p.244), illustrating systemic barriers to integration and dignity. This paradox situates immigrants in a liminal space where social alienation and occupational downgrading accompany the pursuit of a better life. Edward Said's concept of exile clarifies these struggles, describing exile as "life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal" (2000, p.192), marked by "crushing isolation and the world's indifference" (p.186) and a sense of perpetual displacement, which Chiaku experiences in racial and professional marginalization. Said's imagery of exile as "a mind of winter," where the "pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable" (p.191) mirrors Chiaku's hollow achievements and ongoing emotional strain, while his observation that "exiles look at non-exiles

with resentment… whereas an exile is always out of place" (p.186) resonates with her alienation. Aunty Ifeoma's migration similarly embodies Said's paradox: though her children, like Obiora, gain intellectually— "He has a scholarship to a private school… he is praised and not punished for challenging his teachers" (p.301)—she faces economic and emotional marginalization, juggling multiple jobs as noted in her letter: "She writes about her two jobs, one at a community college and one at a pharmacy, or drugstore, as they call it" (p.300). Said's insight that exile "moves according to a different calendar" (p.192) and is "a homecoming expressed through defiance and loss" (p.181) is reflected in Aunty Ifeoma's dual struggle and Amaka's confession: "Sure, there has never been a power outage and hot water runs from the tap, but we don't laugh anymore… because we don't see one another" (p.301). Both Chiaku and Ifeoma embody Said's notion that exile produces "the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair" (p.186) and that "loss is inherent in the very existence" of home and belonging (p.191). Adichie thus portrays the diaspora as a site of hope intertwined with disillusionment, where professional and personal aspirations are continually constrained, and the longing for home is inseparable from persistent alienation, confirming Said's framing of exile as a condition of split identity, cultural disjunction, and chronic estrangement.

On the other hand, in *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the political, social, and personal upheavals that drive many Nigerians, especially women like Aunty Uju, to leave the country. Set during Nigeria's 1999 transition to democracy, a period still shadowed by military dictatorship, corruption, and social inequality, the narrative depicts the precarious lives of those tied to political power. Uju's dependence on The General, a high-ranking military officer, underscores this vulnerability. Despite being a qualified doctor, her wealth and security hinge on her role as The General's mistress. Her opulence is illustrated during an extravagant event funded by The General: "The General brought a live band. They set up in the front garden, near the generator house, and stayed until the last guests left, all of them slow and sated, taking food wrapped in foil" (p.85). Uju's reliance exemplifies systemic corruption in post-colonial African societies, where privileges depend on allegiance to powerful figures. Her privileged life collapses when The General dies in a suspicious plane crash: "The General died the next week, in a military plane crash… the bodies were charred, there were already rumors that the Head of State had engineered it to get rid of officers who he feared were planning a coup" (p.86), exposing Nigeria's volatile political environment. After his death, Uju faces threats from The General's family: "Okay, don't go... Stay there while I go and call my boys from the army barracks... We are coming back with our own boys"

(p.87). Her security disintegrates as relatives reduce her to a "common harlot" and a "prostitute" (p.86), demanding she leave her home and surrender her possessions: "Two men and three women, relatives of The General, had bullied Adamu to open the gate, and now stood at the front door, shouting. 'Uju! Pack your things and get out now! Give us the car keys!'" (p.86). This treatment highlights gender inequality and the absence of legal protections for women within patriarchal and politically corrupt systems. Uju's exile reflects Edward Said's notion of forced displacement, where departure occurs "out of necessity" (p.190) rather than choice, as exile severs individuals from "their roots, their land, their past" (Said, 2000, p.183). Her lament, "I have nothing. Everything is in his name. Where will I take my son to now?" (p.87), demonstrates both economic and emotional devastation, aligning with Gregory T. Eells's (2012) observation that suffering stems from separation from loved ones and loss of security (p.42). Said further notes that exile produces social and psychological alienation: "originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider" (p.186), and requires reconstructing selfhood: "a state of exile free from this triumphant ideology… is virtually unbearable" (p.183). Uju's displacement exemplifies the fragility of "home": "in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional… Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (Said, 2000, p.190). Her journey from privilege to precarious existence reveals exile as a response to political instability, persecution, and gendered violence rather than liberation, supporting Feldner's (2019) observation that "political upheavals, civil wars, and the restriction of human rights have produced an environment of insecurity and instability that has caused people to seek better conditions and political freedoms overseas" (p.16). Through Uju, Adichie critiques structural conditions that force migration, exposing the profound psychological, social, and political consequences of displacement.

Conversely, the experience of immigration, especially for diasporic individuals such as Aunty Uju and Ifemelu, represents a paradox that frequently results in heightened suffering despite the expectation of a better life. Adichie exemplifies this paradox in her depiction of Aunty Uju's life after leaving Nigeria in pursuit of a brighter future. Escaping the death of her partner, The General, and oppressive circumstances at home, she anticipates a fresh start in the United States, free from the turmoil and discrimination of Nigeria. Yet, her diasporic reality is characterized by continued hardship, reflecting the disillusionment immigrants face when the promise of opportunity collides with systemic exclusion. Edward Said illuminates this condition, observing that "exile is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past" and feel

compelled to "reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (p.183). In the U.S., Aunty Uju confronts ongoing financial instability and low social status despite her education. Adichie describes her working multiple jobs while attempting to qualify as a medical practitioner, noting, "She was working three jobs, not yet qualified to practice medicine in America…" (p.98). This mirrors Said's assertion that exiles constantly strive to construct "a new world to rule" in response to "disorienting loss," often adopting roles that demand mobility and skill rather than material attachment (p.187). Her exhaustive labor underlines the pressures of diasporic reconstruction in a society resistant to her presence, exemplifying the "unreality" of exile, which "resembles fiction" (p.187). This persistent struggle evokes a personal transformation; as systemic barriers render her efforts repeatedly futile. Marginalization extends to professional interactions, where racialized and linguistic prejudices emerge: patients "would think they were doing her a favor by seeing her" (p.172), and a pharmacist deems her speech "incomprehensible" (p.218), reinforcing Said's observation that exiles are "stigmatized as outsiders" and endure "an anomalous and miserable life" (p.186). Said further notes that "homes are always provisional" for the exile (p.190), highlighting Uju's inability to find permanence in America. Encounters like being told to "go back to where I [Uju] came from" (p.218) illustrate the racialized exclusion that transforms borders into restrictive prisons (Said, 2000, p.190). Her relationship with Bartholomew intensifies this suffering. Seeking support, she enters a partnership marked by patriarchal domination and manipulation. Bartholomew's arrogance, performative identity, and disregard for Dike, Uju's son, align with Said's description of exile as a "jealous state" wherein individuals assert "passionate hostility to outsiders" and draw "lines around you and your compatriots" (p.184). His expectation that Uju "should not send money home… without his permission" and that she should "give him [her] salary" (p.217) demonstrates gendered exploitation. Uju's rhetorical resistance— "Did he pay my fees in medical school?" (p.218)—reflects Said's view that exiles often assert their difference "like a weapon… insist[ing] on the right to refuse to belong" (p.187). Her eventual departure, "Dike and I are leaving this weekend" (p.219), symbolizes an attempt to reclaim autonomy while still experiencing the "pathos of exile," the "loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth" (p.185).

Ifemelu's experiences in America parallel this trajectory of diasporic disillusionment. Initially hopeful, she confronts financial precariousness, "your rent check isn't on the table… we're already really late" (p.152), and shame when Ginika assists her, "She hated that Ginika had bought her

groceries" (p.152), revealing the deep impact of economic vulnerability on dignity. Encounters that compromise morality, such as the tennis coach episode, "She could certainly do that, urinate on a man for a hundred dollars" (p.153), illustrate the diaspora as a site where survival can challenge personal ethics. Her attempt to set boundaries, "If you expect sex, then I can't help you" (p.153), and subsequent compliance, "She was already here, already tainted" (p.154), demonstrate how desperation erodes agency. Said's insight that the exile's world is "unnatural" and marked by "willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement" as tools to compel recognition (pp.187–188) is evident in Ifemelu's extreme mental and emotional states. Her bodily dissociation, "Her fingers still felt sticky… she could not bear the thought of touching her own body" (p.154), and violent fantasies, "She would hit him on the head over and over with an axe" (p.155), expose the psychological strain and "intransigence" Said associates with exile (p.188). Caroline Lyle (2018) further notes, "Ifemelu experiences sexual assault that results in a multi-step process that robs her of her voice, sexual agency, physical control, and ultimately, her sense of self… she is traumatized, unhappy, and completely unclear of her sexual orientation" (p.107). These experiences deepen her isolation, "She was bloodless, detached, floating in a world where darkness descended too soon" (p.155), and validate Said's claim that exiles perceive "the entire world as a foreign land" (p.190). Her deletion of Obinze's messages, "She deleted his voice messages unheard and his e-mails unread" (p.155), illustrates the fragmentation and emotional severance typical of exilic existence. Said's framework thus illuminates Adichie's depiction of migration and exile, emphasizing the duality of creativity and alienation. Exile is "virtually unbearable" without reconstructing a coherent identity (p.183) and can lead to renewed exclusion within supposedly liberating spaces, "perhaps this is the most extraordinary of exile's fates: to have been exiled by exiles" (p.184). Adichie's portrayal of characters navigating interrupted histories, emotional dispossession, and fractured belonging exemplifies Said's "lyrics of loss" and the "indefinitely postponed drama of return" (p.185). Through Aunty Uju and Ifemelu, she demonstrates that diaspora entails not merely geographic displacement but continuous negotiation of marginalization, resistance, and the impossibility of fully reconstructing selfhood in foreign terrains. Migration, while promising renewal, ultimately engenders emotional dislocation and psychic rupture, leaving identity, home, and belonging perpetually elusive.

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the ways in which Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works critically explore the interplay between memory, nostalgia, and diasporic identity, revealing the paradoxical and multidimensional

conditions of exile. Through *The Thing Around Your Neck*, particularly in the stories "Imitation" and "The Shivering," the emotional lives of characters such as Nkem, Ukamaka, and Chinedu illustrate how memories of the homeland evoke attachment while simultaneously highlighting fractures in belonging. Nkem's recollections of past lovers, familial obligations, and domestic rituals in the U.S. reveal the tension between her current material comfort and the socio-cultural realities she left behind, reflecting Hall's notion that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a constantly evolving process shaped by memory, fantasy, and history. Similarly, Ukamaka and Chinedu's experiences demonstrate the psychological and cultural complexities of diaspora, where longing for home manifests not merely as physical desire but as an attempt to recover emotional coherence within fractured identities, revealing the persistent contradictions inherent in transnational life. Nostalgia functions as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force, anchoring characters to their cultural roots while exposing unresolved dislocations, including internalized shame, unrealized desires, and social alienation, demonstrating that diasporic identity is continually negotiated through memory, imagination, and socio-cultural positioning.

Adichie further illuminates the paradoxical conditions of exile in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, showing that migration—often pursued for safety, opportunity, or empowerment—is intrinsically accompanied by suffering, disillusionment, and unfulfilled expectations. Through the experiences of characters such as Aunty Ifeoma, Chiaku, Uju, and Ifemelu, Adichie portrays how political instability, systemic corruption, gendered oppression, and social precarity compel individuals to leave their homelands while simultaneously exposing them to alienation, marginalization, and psychological strain in diasporic spaces. In line with Edward Said's framework of exile, these narratives depict displacement as a condition of duality: a survival strategy fostering resilience and intellectual engagement, yet producing profound estrangement from one's roots, ethical dilemmas, and emotional fractures. Exile emerges as both imposed and chosen, marked by the impossibility of full reintegration, the persistence of social and racial hierarchies abroad, and the enduring tension between hope and loss. Through her complex portrayal of Aunty Ifeoma's reluctant migration, Uju's precarious displacement, and Ifemelu's diasporic disillusionment, Adichie shows that the diaspora functions as both a site of possibility and suffering, where the promise of renewal is inseparable from alienation, professional devaluation, and psychic rupture. By framing these experiences through Said's notion of exile and Hall's concept of cultural identity, this study demonstrates that diasporic life entails perpetual negotiation between survival, moral compromise, and the quest for selfhood, revealing the

enduring complexity, paradox, and ethical weight of migration in contemporary African narratives.

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