Exile and the Making of New Homes in Segun Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere* and Chimamanda Adichie's *The Thing around Your Neck*

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Abstract
This paper explores migration, exile and exilic awareness in Segun Afolabi's collection of short stories *A Life Elsewhere* and Chimamanda's *The Thing Around Your Neck* against the backdrop where the common conception of exile relates to absence from one's homeland, that is, an erasure of one's physical presence from his or her native landscape. Consequently, his essay delves deep to unravel the literary vision of Afolabi and Chimamanda, by submitting that Afolabi's short stories offer deep interpretative insights into the phenomenon of exile from a male's perspective while Adichie's unravel the immigrant experience and cultural alienation following migration from a female's perspective. These stories reveal that exile transcends the physical state to psychological displacement (loss, loneliness and disorientation) which does not necessarily imply physical absence from home. Taken together, the essay also problematises the concept of home. It affirms that while home could be the physical territory where a character finds solace, it could also entail a state of mind which affords one the opportunity to create that which has been lost and which is impossible to experience in tangible terms. Through a comparative approach, the essay analysis the differences and similarities in the themes, subject matter, style and narrative technique employed by Afolabi and Adichie in their novels.

Introduction
The trope of exile has been explored by many writers in various climes. Exile is a common literary trope in African writings. African writers such as Benedict Wallet Vilakazi, Dennis Brutus, Tanure Ojaide, and others, have extensively explored this phenomenon in their writings (Charles Bodunde, 2002; Adrian Koopman 2005; Senayon Olaoluwa, 2007; James Tar Tsaaior 2011; and Sayed Sadek, 2013). Moreover, apart from fictional creative works, authors who have either directly or indirectly experienced certain incidents that prompt exilic consciousness have also explored this trope in their works.

Prompted by critical issues as war, violence, famine, human rights abuses, political instability, economic and social deprivation, lack of opportunity, and the desire for greener pastures, exile is an age-long phenomenon. In religious and metaphysical conceptions, some people believe that man is an exile on earth, living temporarily until he is called home through the agency of death. The phenomenon of exile can be traced to biblical times when the Jews travelled from their homeland to Egypt and when they were later taken into captivity to Babylon. Apart from the Jews, many other tribes and nations have experienced similar dislocations from their homelands.

Literature Review
Writers and critics have discussed exile and exilic consciousness from different perspectives. Senayon Olaoluwa defines exile as "the result of the dislocation from

one's native land... a human condition which is defined by dispersal or drift usually against the wish of an individual or community" (223). By this definition, Olaoluwa seems to restrict exile to only the physical plane, although he later speaks about the notions of internal and external exile. However, other scholars have taken this idea further by considering exile as more than a physical dislocation from one's homeland. James Tar Tsaaior's perceptive interpretation of exile takes the concept above a physical dislocation from home:

> While exile could signify absence from one's homeland and hence register an erasure of physical presence from a particular landscape, other interpretive grids that negotiate exile refract it as a spiritual and psychological state that does not necessarily translate to physical absence from home. The essay contends that both modes of epistemology and hermeneutic insights are tenable. (98)

Corroborating this view, Sayed Sadek opines that "exile is not only a political condition signifying one being forced away from one's homeland, but it also implies psychological displacement" (89). In addition, Charles Bodunde considers exile as "the sense of disorientation, displacement and misplacement, loss, loneliness and nostalgia for the homeland" (229). Both scholars, therefore, elevate exile above the displacement from a physical landscape, to the spiritual and psychological. Therefore, the textual analysis substantiates these modes of interpretation of exile.

Writing on the exilic consciousness of Africans, Olaoluwa affirms the existence of what he calls internal and external exile (7). Whereas, those who are displaced outside their homeland (external exiles) are commonly acknowledged, those displaced within their own homeland (internal exiles), without physical displacement, are prone to receive less attention. Olaoluwa views the latter as "spiritual exile which registers itself in terms of absence through presence" (100). In order words, such characters may be within the confines of their geographical setting, but due to some form of social, economic or political imbalance or privation, they are not "visible" to the powers that be in such society.

The exilic consciousness in the select short stories of Afolabi could be traced to his own personal migratory experiences. This asserts the psychoanalytical touch in the story. That is, in line with the positions of Ngugi (1972), Onakaogu and Onyerionwu (2010), Onwuka (2010) and the like, on the inspiration of writers being born out of their life's experience, Afolabi out of his personal experiences import these into his writings. Born in Kaduna, in the Northern part of Nigeria, Afolabi has lived in various places: his formative years were spent in Congo, Japan, Canada, the then East Germany, and England. He had his education in Plateau State, from where he proceeded to Corona School in Lagos. He left Nigeria when he was barely ten, for England for further education. In England, he was educated at University College, Cardiff, where he graduated having completed his study in Management Studies. Afolabi's life is characterised by migratory experiences, as a son of a diplomat. This has stimulated his narrative which is located within the ambit of exilic consciousness and spatial temporariness. That is, Afolabi's "Everywhere", as we find in the short stories, becomes a home. Perhaps, the picture of his life and those of others he witnessed in Diaspora have been aptly demonstrated in this collection. Moreover,

the study identifies tenets of post colonialism such as postcolonial disillusionment, alienation, exile, hybridisation and double consciousness in the stories. From the foregoing, it is safe to assert that Afolabi is an exile. His stories are profound expressions of this assertion.

Likewise, Chimamanda Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* first published in 2009 has been viewed by various scholars and critics as a mirrored documentation of her diasporic knowledge and experiences in the United States where she gained her university degrees and works (Christopher Anyokwa, 2007). Born in Enugu Nigeria and the fifth of six children, Chimamanda Adichie grew up in Nsukka and was in Nigeria up to the age of nineteen when she left for the United States to study after gaining a scholarship to study communications at Drexel University in Philadelphia for two years and ever since then, she has since settled down in the US with regular visits to Nigeria. *The Thing Around Your Neck* is a collection of short stories that provides a critical review of the itinerary and trajectory of Nigerian immigrants in the US. Through her characters, she portrays the repressed fears, silent opinions, and objectives that go on within the minds of Nigerians whilst battling with a perfect settlement in their new environment. It is believed that the dislocation from one's native land does not only happen physically, it is also ingrained into thought processes and patterns. Simran Singh (2022) asserts that the book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* is filled with stories around Nigerian women who struggle with their relationships, religious, political violence, and adjusting to Western culture. The novel is a collection of twelve stories investigating the lives of women in contemporary Nigeria and the United States of America. According to Anyokwa, it 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 (53). In this collection, we dive into the lives of Nigerian women in the United States who are there for different reasons, among which are, a wife joining her husband after six years of separation, a young woman in an arranged marriage to a man she barely knows, another who wins a visa lottery and travels to live with her uncle, and the wife and children of a wealthy business man enjoying an upper-middle class suburban existence while the husband travels back and forth.(Eunice Ngongkum, 2014:82)

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial thinkers who have seen reflecting on literature and life in a postcolonial have shifted concerns to traumatisation occasional by the deformation of the psyche and individual imbalance occasioned by colonial legacies and immigration among other issues. Critics of postcolonial text have also shifted attention and are now focused on the experience of people in a postcolonial and this has open on the literary space for the hybrid theory – postcolonial trauma – this field of enquiry encompassed different contexts – historical, geographical, cultural, discursive, social and psychological. Norman Saadi Nikro opine in this regard:

> With respect to the study of trauma in postcolonial context because it seems more pressing, when we consider how trauma embodies existential experiences and survival of copping in the aftermath of personal and social

> disintegration while disclosing the limits of narrative reference and representation (2).

It is from this perspective that I will engage Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere.* It is of essence and great import to add here that in engaging post-colonial trauma for the proposed study, I will focus my attention on the sociological, political and economic dimensions of trauma as it affects the characters in the novel. The circumstances surrounding the victims will be examined and a line will be drawn on whether the migrants as they are in this case are actually conscious of their exile experiences and alienation from home or whether they are comfortable with it. The study is in tandem with a 21st century postcolonial issue across the globe, migration and exile consciousness. From a combined perspective of psychoanalysis and post colonialism, the study is geared towards an understanding of how personal experience is situated in the purview of global issues.

Synopsis and Analysis of Segun Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere*

The over-riding trope in Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere* is aloneness, displacement and the various faces it can wear. The stories explore the realities of people who have to create a new home in a new world, those who leave and never find home and make home, those who arrive without ever truly leaving and those who are inhabitants of other countries in their own country. Considered holistically, the stories in the collection thematically explore the realities of people who have to create a new home in a new world. In *A Life Elsewhere*, the definition of home becomes fluid as the faces of exile vary. Afolabi keenly captures the impetus of leaving home and making a home elsewhere in "Monday Morning". This is the first story in the collection. The story captures physical displacement and exile. It captures physical displacement as it mirrors the attempt of a family to find themselves in a world where their aloneness is even more compounded by their inability to speak the language of their new environment. "Monday Morning" takes place in an unnamed location. However, by all indications, the family of four appear to have been forcefully thrust out of the safety of the life they have known all their lives, as a result of war in their land. However, it may be inferred from the names of the characters that they are Latinos; and it appears that they have made their way to the West. Here, they are refugees who have to wait for "bureaucratic decision" that will legalise their stay in the country they have run to (6). Before the bureaucratic decision, they cannot truly start living.

However, we soon find that the father of Ernesto and Alfredo's has always been on exile. His alienation transcends his displacement from his homeland through the crisis: "In his own country he had not been an expressive man.... People often thought he was mute or he was from another country or his mind was dull. But all of that did not matter; he had learned to cook and he had discovered the love of a woman who did not need him to be someone he was not" (7). Therefore, he finds himself distraught when the woman in whom he has found home and a sense of belonging is angry at him for risking deportation to provide for them.

In their displacement, the family of Ernesto have to wait in the hostel Excelsior, for "... life to begin" (6). Excelsior, as the mother observes, "...was not a place to become used to" (5). In dealing with the aloneness of the new world where

they find themselves, the different personalities of each member of the family are revealed in the dreams they have at night:

At night, the father dreams that he is in his old kitchen, with the heat and flies and the squawks of chickens outside. The mother flies to the beach on their coast and notices how the moonlight glints off the waves. Ernesto dreams of his school friends before they were forced to scatter, before the fighting began. Only Alfredo remains in the new country in his sleep; he is in the glass hotel, in his own room (8).

Alfredo's soul truly lives in the new land. He has the temperament suited for building a life elsewhere. Alfredo escapes the anger in the hostel room they share to visit the glass hostel. He enters the glass hotel and starts "to try the handles of all the rooms he passed. He was looking for his own room, but he knew he needed a key" (13). Alfredo's personality is one that can cast down all entanglements to the past. He is secure in his aloneness:

> He did not worry about the woman or his mother and father or when he should return to the hostel. He was too tired for any of that. The boy slept. Again, he did not have bad dreams. He did not dream of his own country. He saw the green grass in the park that Sunday afternoon, his mother's five fingers searching for his face, his father and brother, even the angry friend, Emmanuel, sitting on the bed in the hotel room, looking for the face of God" (15).

Furthermore, the short story "People You Don't Know" explores a similar form of alienation. Like the boys' father in "Monday Morning", Leon has been alone. He is displaced in life, "Part of the problem, Stella says, is that I'm not patient enough. I don't give things a chance. She thinks I should find something I love and pour all my energy into it. It's finding that one thing that is the problem, though" (23). Besides, "she's always thinking about the long term, but the long term is another country and I say learn to live in your own before you emigrate" (24). Leon, by an arrangement, has to live with his brother, Bryant, whom he despises so much. They do not belong together: "Two hundred and fifty pounds of him simmering, wishing I weren't here. Thinking he's made a big mistake" (17). Leon is deviant and steals without knowing why he does it. His floundering around clumsily is symbolised by his malapropism. He says "dextrose" (34) when he means "dexterous", "deviant" (37) when he means "devious", He does not even come close to making himself understood when he misuses "effervescent" (31) and "munificent" (29).

His attempt to find himself is symbolically engaged through the journey motif. Unable to find his bearing, he develops a knack for stealing cars. When he is disconsolate at the cleaning job his brother, Bryant, puts him up, he steals a car and ponders: "I want to be moving fast, to feel the wind capture this humidity. There need not be a destination... I drive in a direction I've never been before...." (30-31). The journey, which leads him towards a destination he has never been before, mirrors his physical sense of not belonging. Similarly, he breaks into a mud-red Chrysler and reminisces on the experience: "How I travelled from town to town in the leather-comfort of it, not getting out of the air-conditioning, even at the beach" (32). At the end of the story, he needs at Stella's suggestion. For him, finding himself does not lie in a journey forward but in a journey backward. Here, he differs from

Alfredo, whose answer lies in going forward. As Stella suggests to him, "You could catch the next flight back and start again" (26). This is exactly what he does.

A Life Elsewhere is particularly striking in its disruption of the notion of home. For Afolabi, home does not bear a fixed definition. Home could be a feeling or a place. It is possible for home not to be home, as explored in "Something in the Water". While there are those who pine for the physical and spiritual homes from which they have been displaced in other stories, Femi is back home with his foreign wife, Marcia. However, for him, home has ceased to be home. While Marcia is enthusiastic to visit her husband's home, Femi is reluctant to leave the plane. He has no nostalgia about the home he is visiting. His description of the scene of arrival is devoid of cheerfulness: "There was nothing to see, really, only dry land… Trees. Just trees" (167). He looks on his country like an uninterested outsider: "He could not explain to his wife this need for escape, his inability to breathe…" (170). When Marcia enthuses about home, he wonders: "Home? He didn't know quite what she meant. The place you loved; that you returned to; somewhere that drew you back again?" (172). Home, for Femi, is not a place that catches his interest. Ruminating about his home land, he laments: "God isn't here… and then he wept, hard and bitterly, crouching down to the soil" (180). He is remorseful for bringing his American wife to Nigeria: "He could not remember why he brought her here. It felt reckless now and irresponsible. He did not know what he would do if he lost her" (177). In his home country, he is angry, suspicious and afraid. The only home he knows is in the arms of his American wife, in America.

Home, for Kayode, the old wine guitar in "The Wine Guitar," is not a place. It is his youth and family. Kayode is an old man, "damaged goods" (41), and seeking youth in the arms of a prostitute. In his youth, he was a singer who had performed in the "front of audiences of hundreds" (42). However, at the time of the narrative, he is an old man who has stopped singing because of his thin and cracked voice. Besides trying to capture youth in the body of a prostitute, he looks for home in the food of his youth in Mama Yinka's restaurant, a restaurant whose fault is very glaring:

> But he found himself drawn there despite the shabbiness, despite Mama Yinka's squawking and the irritating tapes. He found he could not help himself; the foods he had learned to taste no longer gave him pleasure. He who had once tasted every single dish on the menu in an Indian restaurant. Or his long affair with Mexican food, with Italian and Thai, his family's obsession with *dim sum.* The hunger now was for the food of his youth, all sophistication and learned habits washed away. He could eat only *akara* and bitter-leaf stew, *eba* and *egusi,* the *okro* soup his mother had made (44)

In their old age, which they spend in their new land, Kayode and Salbatore "were afraid, secretly, of what others thought of them – two old men – the bar staff, the musicians, the young ones who drifted through the door. Sometimes, they heard laughter at their retreating forms" (48). As an old man, he looks back to the land of his childhood and his homelessness. His displacement is engaged through the journey motif:

> ...his wife had returned to the place where they had both been born; he had not followed her even though she had asked him. He felt he had been too long now in another man's country; he had forgotten so much about himself, about the past. He was too stubborn and sometimes it seemed to him he had tried at life and failed, or had been carried along a road whose destination was not his own (51)

Perhaps, most telling is the journey home by Salbatore and Kayode from the bar. On their journey back, he watches "Salbatore struggle to find a place as the bus moved away; the young ones were reluctant to give up their seats... he stamped his feet on the pavement, against the cold" (52). Salbatore's struggle symbolises the story of displacement; the inability of the old to find a place in a world where youth is ultimate. Kayode ponders at this moment: "It was not so easy to be alone and old, to look back at one's life and taste disappointment" (52). He is struck by the desire to make a connection: "He thought he would write or phone or visit one of his children. Probably a letter. He would try to make a connection" (53).

Afolabi further uses the journey motif to interrogate the attempts to come to terms with the life of the protagonist, Mr Ajayi, in "Arithmetic." The story takes place in a carriage. The carriage moves on as Mr Ajayi looks back on his life. He is married to a Spanish woman who has always been lively until the death of their child. Following this, Alicia journeys away from herself: "She is not someone who sighs; she is a woman who likes to laugh" (55). The story is about those who are left behind, even as much as it is about those who leave. Mr Ajayi is caught in a land of guilt. His life is symbolised by the journey, and very often, he has stopped by in other people's houses – as he refers to his affairs. His life is plagued by the guilt of having been to other people's houses: "I have ventured into other people's houses. Boldly, and with curiosity. I have glimpsed their fussy cottages, and their overblown palaces, run my hands blindly into their rooms. … After the first lost baby, I felt it. That it was something to do with me. That it might all have been my fault" (71). Yet, all he seeks is to find a house where he could feel at home. He gets guilt for his troubles.

Guilt is metaphorically interpreted as a country in "The Visitor." Like Mr Ajayi, Lorna and her husband are banished to the land of grief; they have sentenced themselves to a life of childlessness for unwittingly killing a child in an accident. It does not help that Lorna's mother, Irene, reassures the couple: "It was nobody's fault. That's what I'm trying to tell you, the child's running into the road, maybe. But it couldn't be helped. Don't you see?" (91). Lorna, especially, cannot help feeling guilty because they had been drunk when the accident occurred. If living may be likened to driving, in their living, they cut another life short. Following this, they are stuck in the land of guilt, unable to reproduce.

A Life Elsewhere is preoccupied with the different perspectives from which the story of home and homelessness may be told. While Afolabi considers the story of those who leave their home to travel abroad, he also does not fail to consider the stories of those who are left behind and those who are forever banished to be on the fringe: to be citizens of other countries that may never be visited. For these people, home is always a step away and they become the Ooststrooms of their worlds, even without travelling, like the boys' father in "Monday Morning". The figure of Ooststroom derives from "Two Sisters". Ooststroom does not tell his story.

Rather, his story is narrated for him by the child who makes assumptions for him. The child-narrator comes to know the face of Mr Ooststroom to be the face of every lone traveller, who speaks a different language in a new world, who has to make a life elsewhere. Ooststroom is a native Dutchman who has had to make a new life in the United Kingdom. The mother, a Yoruba woman who has successfully made the transition to being the citizen of a new world, possibly recognises herself in the struggle of Oost to belong. Therefore, she reaches out to him but the children, who have never been Ooststrooms in worlds where they are suspected for being different; resent him for receiving their mother's attention.

The protagonist of "Moses" is similar to the protagonist in "The Husband of your Wife's Best Friend". He belongs to those who have been left behind. He has a dead child. He is trapped by guilt and the failure to successfully create a new world. Since he works in a photo lab, he escapes through looking at other people's pictures and getting lost in the lies the photo tells: The afternoon would hurtle by as he gazes at pictures of people enjoying themselves. It is a kind of lie, these moments of bliss, as if entire lives consisted of parties and holidays and grinning "cheese," beaming at one another. He knows this, but still, he would lose himself in the fantasy of another people's happiness (131). In other words, he has failed at creating a life elsewhere:

> He came from a part of the world where you might be fed if you knocked on a stranger's door, but it was not unknown to witness a corpse by the side of the road or a child begging for its blind father. He had moved away from that. He had managed to shape a life elsewhere: a man, a woman and a child. Now the child was dead and the woman had left him. He had lost his job and then his house. It was as if we were starting all over again: the current job, the flat, the woman who lived there. Everything is temporary for him (135).

In "Now That I'm Back", Louis looks for answers in a life after being left. Louis and his mother belong in the country of those who have been left behind. They have been abandoned by their father and he has been in an accident that cost him the loss of the use of his limbs. His mother has attempted to find a new home and she finds it in Jesus: "Papa left, she embraces Jesus: "'Bride of Christ,' she says sometimes. 'Jesus is all you need in this world'" (146). For Louis, his confinement to a wheel chair banishes him to a solitary world. He is the invisible stranger in the world of the able bodies: "Mrs Ambrose swivels around and smiles. I could be thirteen for all she knows, or ninety-three. She sees me, but doesn't see, if you know what I mean. I'm not whole, complete to her" (144).

He runs into a woman at the supermarket who is desperate for attention: "There is a woman in a fake-fur top, combat trousers, running shoes. She's grazing in fruit and vegetables. Her face screams, *somebody look at me! It's Friday night and I'm alone. I* am looking, but she's not interested. I'm a whole other country to her. Too much geography to learn" (149). Disability makes Louis the citizen of another country. He is invisible most times.

The nameless protagonist in "The Husband of Your Wife's Best Friend" has to look back on who he was when he arrived arriving in a new land and what he has become. Knowing how much he has changed in this new land does not fill him with

a sense of guilt most times: "I secure a seat on the Tube. This involves a tussle with a woman who appears from nowhere, but I'm fast and burly, and have misplaced any sense of decorum. I am enthroned in my seat in the carriage, the victor... Sometimes I shudder when I think of my behaviour" (112). For a living, he guides planes. He does not feel secure in his job; his boss has been full of compliments for him, yet he casts suspicious looks over his shoulders. He is married but he is alienated from his wife. He creates an imaginary home for himself in his sexual fantasies. Home, for him, is escape from the turbulence of his realities into the arms of the imaginary fantasias.

Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere* problematises the idea of home and how home may be viewed. He tells the story of home from varying perspectives and views the reality of existence through the lens that insistently examines the world using the journey motif. As has been stated, stories are presented from windows of buses, minds travel backwards to their past as they physically journey forward in trains, buses and planes. Afolabi captures the universality of displacement and aloneness, while averring that home could be a place, a state of mind or a feeling.

Synopsis and Analysis of Adichie's *The Thing Around your Neck*

The Thing Around Your Neck is a collection of twelve short stories. *The Imitation* is a short story that chronicles the marriage between Nkem and Obiora. While Nkem is in America with the children, Obiora shuffles between Nigeria and America. Nkem and Obiora have different imitated Benin artifacts in their home in America, courtesy of Obiora. And he narrates the stories responsible for each of the artifacts that he brings home with so much passion and zeal to Obiora. The story opens up with Ijemamaka, Nkem's friend who was acquainting Nkem with Obiora's escapades back in Nigeria and while Nkem listened, her attention was on the Benin Mask in the living room mantel. Nkem submerges herself in make-believe thoughts and imagination about the Benin Mask and uses these lies to console herself about bitter truths.

The subtle quest to attain the American dream by the immigrants leaves them unfulfilled. Nkem admires the American class society that gives everyone the privilege of attaining whatever heights they desire respective of their background. Nkem is immersed in solitude and access to good schools and driving nice cars doesn't do fundamental justice to her happiness. Instead, she is at war with thoughts and conceptions of what her husband might be doing back in Nigeria.

> She liked them and their lives. Lives, Obiora often called "plastic". Yet she knew he, too wanted the children's neighbors their neighbors', the kind of children who sniʃed at food that had fallen on the dirt, saying it was spoiled." In her life, her childhood, you snatched the food up, whatever it was, and ate it.

Obiora referred to the conduct of the American children as plastic but deep within him, he wants his children to live in the same manner because luxury is rated by such a way of life.

Nkem's friend, Ifeyinwa or Ifeoma explains one of the reasons why their husbands leave them in Nigeria is because of the respect they earn in Nigeria which isn't available in America.

Also, the consciousness of home and the effect migration has on Nigerians is reflected in the short story *On Monday of Last Week* whose protagonist, Kamara who recently joined her husband in the United States is lost between adapting to the Nigerian culture and the American culture. This story portrays the cultural crisis and migration consciousness that Kamara struggles with. Enticed with the American dream of wealth through hard work, her husband, Tobechi is assisted into winning a Visa lottery which would enable him travel alone to the United States and then invite his wife immediately he was settled. However, days turned to months and then years but he had been unable to save enough money to send for his wife. This begins to create a problem for Kamara and her family members back home who are most concerned about their daughter's constrained effort at conceiving.

> Her aunties' whisperings became louder and louder: What is that boy waiting for? If he cannot organize himself and send for his wife, he should let us know, because a woman's time passes quickly!" (8).

The above scenario is a typical description of certain expectations placed on Nigerians when they travel outside their country. They are often believed to be immediately settled and thus expected to consistently and comfortably send money back home. After six years of being apart, Kamara eventually reunites with her husband who she now sees as a completely different person whose language and way of life seemed to have blended so much with that of Americans. She struggles to identify his identity when he says "Amah go" instead of "I will go." And makes statements such as "I wanna fuck you. I'm gonna fuck you." (9)

Kamara's dilemma originates from her years of separation from her husband which ushered her into a state of physical exile. On their reunion, she is unable to properly connect with her husband physically and emotionally. In a bid to once again feel seen, she resorts to seeking attention from people who gave it almost to easily to everyone. Thereby misunderstanding her place in their lives. When Kamara gets a job as a nanny in an American family, she experiences certain levels of cultural shock and is surprised by the way they children are brought up. She wonders why Josh, the child she is caring for cannot be disciplined by smacking: the way a child is disciplined in Nigeria. Instead, she is compelled to Neil, Joshs' father's instruction that the only mode of discipline that should be enacted on him is "Reason-based discipline" instead of abuse. "If you make Josh see why a particular behaviour is wrong, he'll stop it," (4) Neil said. This culture of correction is strange to Kamara who sees abuse in a totally different way. To her, "Abuse was the sort of thing Americans she heard about on the news did, putting out cigarettes on their children's skin.

Motherhood and parenting are an integral aspect of the Nigerian culture. Thus, Kamara can also not understand why Josh's mother, Tracy is not taking up her motherly responsibilities. Instead, she is always in the basement, painting, and rarely seeing or taking care of her husband and son. The responsibility of Josh was totally on Neil which to Kamara is different from the way the Nigerian culture represents marriage.

When Kamara meets Tracy, she mistakes her care and politeness for intimacy and tries at different times to seek her validation in ways that are sexually inclined. However, she once again becomes rudely aware of the American culture that brings her back to the reality. She realises that was not as important to Tracy as she thought and that the compliments, she received which made her somewhat attracted to Tracy was consistently dished out to several other strangers.

Likewise, Chimamanda in *The Arrangers of Marriage* portrays a real and vivid picture of the Nigerian society and its culture of blindly match making couples especially for those that are in the diaspora. It is through this means that several Nigerian women have gotten married to men they barely know. Most often, they are approached by the mothers of their husbands who is looking for a good and respectful wife in Nigeria to give their sons abroad. There is often a misconception that single Nigerian women in the diaspora are not fit for marriage because they have been excessively exposed to the western world and have gained their own level of independence. Nigeria is a country that is severely patriarchal in nature with certain expectations that favour men and disfavour women. Nigeria men are often expected to be the ultimate providers in the home with express level of liberty while the women are often expected to only care for the home and the children. In most African cultures, women are not allowed to have a voice, an opinion or a say in the events that happen in their home. This short story is a replication of this as Ofodile tries all he can to retrain and subject his Nigerian wife to these patriarchal expectations even out of Nigeria. In this short story, Ofodile reveals to Chinaza that the reason why he married her was because "I wanted a Nigerian wife and my mother said you were a good girl, quiet. She said you might even be a virgin." He smiled. He looked even more tired when he smiled. "I probably should tell her how wrong she was." (15).

Written in the first-person point of view, the protagonist, Chinaza narrates her experience in marriage to a complete stranger who she had only known for two weeks. She was arranged for him and encouraged to marry him by her uncle Ike and Aunty Ada who had raised her because "he is a doctor in America" (3) "What have we not done for you? 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!" Aunty Ada said (3). Further expressing their excitement, Uncle Ike states

> What could be better? Ofodile's mother was looking for a wife for him, she was very concerned that he would marry an American. He hadn't been home in eleven years. I gave her a photo of you. I did not hear from her for a while and I thought they had found someone. But …

Chinaza finally gets married to Ofodile and although she had someone else who she loved, he was young and broke and was not considered an option to her Aunty Ada and Uncle Ike who had raised her. On arrival in the US after her wedding, she is faced with the new realities of her marriage and a husband she barely knew. First, her expectation about their house is cut short. Her husband had spoken so confidently about it back in Nigeria like he lived in a mansion. However, it turns out that their home he had most magnified was old and musty. Chinaza describes it as a "furniture-challenged house" (2) She states her first impression thus:

> He turned on the light in the living room, where a beige couch sat alone in the middle, slanted, as though dropped there by accident. The room was hot; old, musty smells hung heavy in the air.
>
> "I'll show you around," he said.
>
> The smaller bedroom had a bare mattress lodged in one corner. The bigger bedroom had a bed and dresser, and a phone on the carpeted floor. Still, both rooms lacked a sense of space, as though the walls had become uncomfortable with each other, with so little between them.
>
> "Now that you're here, we'll get more furniture. I didn't need that much when I was alone," he said. (4)

Again, on their first night together, she does not only realise that her husband snores terribly but was also shocked to the reality that her life henceforth would be with a man who had terrible mouth odour that smelled like the rubbish dumps at Ogbete Market. (2)

Revealing more intricacies of her reality as a new immigrant in the country, she also narrates her discriminating and condescending experience with an officer at the airport on her arrival in the UK.

> The officer had examined my foodstuffs as if they were spiders, her gloved fingers poking at the waterproof bags of ground egusi and dried onugbu leaves and uziza seeds, until she seized my uziza seeds. She feared I would grow them on American soil. It didn't matter that the seeds had been sun-dried for weeks and were as hard as a bicycle helmet.(2)

Coupled with the realities of her migration is the cultural shock and language change she had not prepared herself for. Early enough, her husband begins to correct her on how certain things are said in the country as opposed to how it is said in Nigeria. She soon realises that his way of life, culture, language and even name had been perfectly blended to fit that of the ideal American. Chinaza soon realises that her husband does not drink tea with milk and sugar because Americans don't drink tea with milk and sugar and that he had also changed his first name from "Ofodile" to "Dave" and "Udenwa", his last name to "Bell" because "Americans have a hard time with Udenwa." (5) To justify his actions, he says

> 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. (6)

The next day, Chinaza realised that while he was filing for her social security number, he had also changed her name to Agatha Bell. This name change does not only symbolise a change in culture but a change in their identity as a person. He consistently attempts to stop her from speaking her native language in public and even at home. Once when she asked "Biko, don't they have a lift instead?" his response was "Speak English. There are people behind you," (9).

Common amongst Nigerians in the diaspora is often their rapid realisation of how decapacitated the Nigerian system how and how different the American or

European system is once they leave the country. This narrative is common to most migration stories. In *The Arrangers of Marriage*, Ofodile does not hesitate to do a regional comparison to his country, Nigeria at the slightest opportunity. While taking a stroll through the neighbourhood, Chinaza detail his comment "This is not like Nigeria, where you shout out to the conductor, he said, sneering, as though he was the one who had invented the superior American system." (6) When she also tells him in an eatery that she pizza they ordered tasted like the tomatoes were not cooked well, his response was "We overcook food back home and that is why we lose all the nutrients. Americans cook things right. See how healthy they all look?" His responses portray his condescending judgements of Nigeria and its people.

The straw that broke the camel's back was when Chinaza eventually realises that her husband had been previously married to an American woman before because of his papers yet had not informed her. When she questions him about it, his justification was

> It was just on paper. A lot of our people do that here. It's business, you pay the woman and both of you do paperwork together but sometimes it goes wrong and either she refuses to divorce you or she decides to blackmail you. (15)

Subsequently, Chinaza realises that her husband was not yet a doctor so he was barely trying to survive with the little salary he was paid. He looked for the cheapest items at the stores and constantly sought for discounts and anticipated store sales. This is in contrast to what her aunty and uncle had told her that doctors in America are paid a lot of money.

These experiences and her present reality make Chinaza nostalgic about her home, Nigeria.

> I thought 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. They wrapped what you bought in plastic bags when they had them, and when they did not have them, they laughed and offered you worn newspapers. (8)

The exilic consciousness manifests itself in certain ironical situations. It is ironical that certain Nigerian cultures that Nigerians try so much to hide and change in America in order to seek validations from Americans are the things that Americans like and admire about us. In the story, when Chinaza cooked coconut rice and when Shirly their white neighbour knocked on the door, she comments about the aroma, asked what was being cooked and if is a recipe in Nigeria then she said "It smells really good. The problem with us here is we have no culture, no culture at all." (11). While leaving, she says again: "Smells really good," (11) Although Ofodile enjoyed the meal and as Chinaza described it "even smacked his lips like Uncle Ike sometimes did to show Aunty Ada how pleased he was with her cooking" (11), the next day, he came back with a Good Housekeeping All-American Cookbook, thick as a Bible. His reason was "I don't want us to be known as the people who fill the building with smells of foreign

food,". Looking at the manual, Chinaza describes it as a book full of different kinds of flower.

Similarly, the short *The Thing Around Your Neck* dives deeper into the realities of Nigerian immigrants in the US. The protagonist, a female named Akunna aged twenty-two tells her story of her experience as a Nigerian immigrant in the US and how her expectations were cut short with the harsh realities of living alone. On getting her visa through a lottery, Akunna is elated and immediately begins to ask her family members what they wanted her to send to them once she arrives in US. Her married uncle who helped her get the lottery offers to accommodate her in the US until she is able to be on her own. He enrols her in schools filled with white people who constantly asked condescending questions such as where she learned to speak English, if there are real houses back in Africa, and if she had seen a car before she came to America. They also gawped at your hair. Asking if it stands up or falls down when she takes out the braids? They also wanted to know if she used a comb on her hair. Though highly condescending questions, her uncle had told her to expect it; "a mixture of ignorance and arrogance" (2) Her uncle also tells her about his own experience with his neighbours. How they had told him that a few months after he moved into his house, that the squirrels had started to disappear. This they said with the knowledge they had about Africans eating all kinds of wild animals.

Oher arrival in the US, Akunna realises that her uncle was not really her uncle but a brother of your father's sister's husband, not related by blood. This she only remembers this when he tries to be intimate with her. According to him, "Life in America is give and take. You take up a lot but you gained a lot too" (1) Insinuating that since he was giving her a place to lay her head, she also had to offer him something in return. Following her disapproval, she had no choice than to leave his house and then becomes homeless in a strange country. Akunna wandered around until she found herself in Connecticut where she got a job as a waitress but she was paid less than what the other waitresses were being paid. Due to the struggles to survive, she had to stop going to school and focus properly on fending for herself while consistently sending half of her monthly pay to her mother back in Nigeria. She is exposed to so much American culture shock that she often wanted to write tell her family back at home but she could not because she could never afford enough perfumes and clothes and handbags and shoes to go around and still pay her rent on what she earned at the waitressing job, so she wrote nobody. (3)

While on the job, she experiences series of embarrassing moments from American customers who were inquisitive about her, her country and her accent. However, she eventually meets a young white man and after severe persuasion, begins to have a relationship with him. Although they were in love, she severally faced discrimination from whites and even whites who saw the both of them together.

> You knew by people's reactions that you two were abnormal—the way the nasty ones were too nasty and the nice ones too nice. The old white men and women who muttered and glared at him, the black men who shook their heads at you, the black women whose pitying eyes bemoaned your lack of self-esteem, your self-loathing. Or the black women who smiled swift solidarity smiles; the black men who tried too hard to forgive you, saying a too-obvious hi to him; the white men and women who said

> "What a good-looking pair" too brightly, too loudly, as though to prove their own open-mindedness to themselves. (7)

Once, when they went to a restaurant, the waiter even though he saw her there, still asked her boyfriend if he had a girlfriend. The Chinese man had assumed she could not possibly be his girlfriend, and her boyfriend said nothing in her defence. (6) The exilic consciousness and diasporic realities dawn on the protagonist when she realises that her father had been dead for five months and she was unaware of it and also unable to attend his funeral. The thing around Akunna's neck symbolises her despair, displacement, loneliness, loss and cultural alienation she faces in another man's country which has now become her new home.

Comparative Analysis

Both Segun Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere* and Chimamanda Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* are based on the 21st century postcolonial realities across the globe in respect to the African diasporic experience. Although the themes of displacement, migration, exilic consciousness and yearnings for a sense of belonging run through both texts, they differ in terms of style and narrative techniques. Segun Afolabi uses both the first person and the third person narrative techniques in his collection of short stories that portray different characters as they navigate life as an African immigrant in Europe. Although the novel is composed of interconnected short stories, it forms a cohesive narration. In the novel, we are exposed to the emotional and psychological impact of leaving one's homeland and adapting to a new environment. This gives the readers an introspective and detailed style of narration while portraying the realities of various African Immigrants in Europe and their conflicts and strife and triumph for survival and better opportunities for themselves and their families. The techniques employed by Afolabi in each story portrays a non-linear narrative structure with each narration providing several perspectives of the protagonist's experience that portray subject matters such as displacements, exile and cultural identity and conflict all in a bid to find a place to call home. The setting of the stories is primarily in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

In *The Thing Around Your Neck,* Chimamanda Adichie through varieties of narrative style and techniques gives us vivid, descriptive and relatable experiences of different Nigerian women who have migrated to the United States for different reasons. *The Thing Around Your Neck* is a collection of twelve different short stories with a broader geographical scope that are thematically connected to reflect the realities of the Nigerians and Nigeria diaspora experiences. The stories reflect personal relationships, marriages gender dynamics and cultural clashes. Her style of writing is simple, engaging, and easy to understand and each story has a linear narrative pattern. The stories are primarily set in Nigeria and the United States and portray the post-colonial state of Nigeria. The characters are strong and central and each narrative is centred around Nigerian women who are face diverse conflicts and undergo personal transformation. In the narratives, the author explores the complexities of Nigeria and Nigerians with the lens of their individual diaspora experiences to examine the prevalent themes of displacement, search for identity, cultural conflict, exile and patriotism. Unlike Afolabi's *A Life Elsewhere,* Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* essentially explores the themes of gender dynamics, political turmoil in Nigeria,

complexities of human relationships and the cultural conflicts and identities they are confronted with. The stories explore the realities of people who have to create new homes in their new worlds.

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