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**‘Soft, Subtle Things That Lodge
Themselves into the Soul’:
Representation of Consciousness
in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s
*The Thing around Your Neck***

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Abstract

Since the initial publication of a bildungsroman in 2003, the work of Nigerian-born writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has received much recognition from scholars and critics. The aesthetics of her fiction could, however, be further examined in relation to recurrent themes in her public speaking. The importance of rejecting stereotypes and the single story of Africa is one such theme. This essay argues that Adichie's depiction of the perceptions, feelings and reasoning of third-person reflector characters in *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009) contributes to telling multi-layered stories. The tools of psycho-narration and narrated monologue, as first developed by Dorrit Cohn, are used to illuminate the ways in which Adichie narrates the consciousness of her nondiasporic characters in order to challenge stereotypes. The essay argues that these narratological techniques of representing consciousness afford a manifold effect of the novelist's storytelling and thereby contribute to her project of telling complex and multiple stories of Africa. These multi-faceted stories, in turn, serve to either complement or to counteract the often-one-sided narratives one encounters in media, fiction and history representations of the African continent in general and of the novelist's country of birth in particular. The essay concludes that, through her fiction, Adichie effectively articulates the link between the public and the private, thus preserving the singularity and humanity of her individual non-diasporic characters.

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Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's work has been much heralded by scholars and critics alike since her first publication in 2003. Thematic readings of her collection of short stories have provided insights into, for instance, the leitmotifs of Igbo historiography, Nigeria's politics as well as national and transnational identity. The use of the English and Igbo languages seems a preferred topic for those critics who venture into the stylistic examination of her writing. More focus could, however, be given to the aesthetics of Adichie's short fiction, especially in relation to recurrent themes in her increasing presence in the public sphere. The importance of rejecting stereotypes and the single story of Africa is one such theme. Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009), a TED Talk with over thirteen million views, argues the case of "engaging" with multiple stories about people and places, because "[s]tories matter. Many stories matter" (17:24-17:28). This essay argues that the representation of the perceptions, feelings and reasoning of focal characters in *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009) effectively contributes to telling multi-layered stories. To buttress my claim, I draw upon theories of psycho-narration and narrated monologue, two narratological techniques for representing consciousness first developed by Dorrit Cohn in *Transparent Minds – Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978).

In Greek mythology, the god Momus, mostly known for being overly critical towards his peers, is believed to have found fault in Vulcan's creation of man. Momus' criticism, so they say, was the lack of "a window in the breast" that could easily bring forth human thoughts and feelings (Cohn 3). Cohn uses this reference and other literary works to introduce three narrative modes for the representation of consciousness, namely "psycho-narration", "quoted monologue" and "narrated monologue" (11-13). As much as revealing people's concealed thoughts can fictionalize real, everyday life, Cohn argues that a skilful depiction of character's deepest feelings serves to authenticate art in its written form. In a comment on Cohn's techniques, Suzanne Keen asserts that allowing a reader access to the mind of a character creates "believable 'substantial hypothetical beings'" (63). Keen also proposes that fictional minds endowed with "polyphony" or multiple voices effectively reveal various discourses that infuse human character (64).

To borrow William James' expression, there is "other mind stuff" (Cohn 11) permeating Adichie's "A Private Experience", "Jumping Monkey Hill", "The American Embassy" and "The Headstrong Historian". The stories' first common feature is that they all are told from a

third-person vantage point. Secondly, the four female protagonists live in Nigeria, though Ujunwa in “Jumping Monkey Hill” is temporally in Cape Town (Adichie 95). The preceding remark is of particular relevance in light of what scholars such as Daria Tunca have referred to as “Adichie’s ‘diasporic’ fiction” (“Of French Fries and Cookies” 294). Lastly, all but Chika in “A Private Experience” practise some form of writing. Ugonna’s mother is a trained journalist who does not practise her craft at the specific time of the story; Ujunwa is an aspiring writer whose entry at the African Writers’ Workshop in Cape Town is embedded in the story; and, Afamefuna is the eponymous historian of the collection’s closing story. This essay investigates how a common reading of the four pieces strengthens Adichie’s ambition to reject the single story of Africa.

In addition to closely examining occurrences of internal focalization based on Cohn’s three models, this essay expands on the work of such academics as Susan VanZanten to further investigate the tools of narration that make up Adichie’s “narrative accomplishments” (98). The theories of psycho-narration, quoted monologue and narrated monologue will be explained in an initial section. Subsequently, Cohn’s models will be applied to the four stories in a three-part analytical section. The first section pays attention to the different narrative levels apparently embedded in at least some of the short stories by means of psycho-narration. The second part examines the meaning of silence or what is left unsaid as well as the effect the writer achieves by denying a name to some of her characters. The final section focuses on the things that Adichie’s protagonists deem worth putting into writing, arguably because of the prestige of the written text today.

Representation of Consciousness in Theory

According to Keen, character is the centre of certain narratives whereas, in others, emphasis is laid on plot (55). This appears to be the case for several characters in *The Thing around Your Neck*. Indeed, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of protagonists in the collection’s third-person narratives could be said to be dominant. Significantly for the purposes of this essay, Keen identifies three categories that succinctly summarize narrative situation, namely narrative levels, the narrator, and the relationship between the narrator and the characters (44). As far as the narrator is concerned, Keen introduces Genette’s traditional distinction between the omniscient narrator and the limited one; but also Franz Stanzel’s tripartite division of narrative situations (Keen 39). Stanzel separates a “*first-person*” narrator inhabiting the story world – “just as the other characters are” – from the “*authorial*” and “*figural*” third-person narrator

(Stanzel 4-5; emphasis in original). In an “*authorial narrative situation*”, the narrator exists outside the fictional realm and transmits the narrative from an external perspective (5; emphasis in original). In a “*figural narrative situation*”, on the other hand, a character endowed with thoughts, feelings and perceptions takes on the roll of “reflector-character” through whom the reader sees other characters (5; emphasis in original). Accordingly, what follows is grounded in the principle that Cohn departs from the division between the conventional omniscient and limited narrators. She elaborates on Stanzel’s third-person figural and authorial narrators in order to develop her three models of representation of consciousness.

Worth pointing out is that a reader knowledgeable in narrative theories might be more acquainted with the “indirect thought and free indirect thought” taxonomy (Herman 248). Herman explains that the renaming came about as a result of theorists subsequent to Cohn seeking to highlight the link between the three modes for the representation of consciousness and their verbalized or “speech representation” equivalents (248). For reasons of transferability, Cohn’s terminology will be kept as much as possible in the ensuing analysis. Where necessary, however, the direct, indirect and free indirect thought terminologies will be used for clarity. The below “thought-phrase” schema exemplifies Cohn’s three models. I rearrange the text in the order in which the techniques appear in the remainder of this section.

psycho-narration

He knew he was late

He knew he had been late

He knew he would be late

quoted monologue

(He thought:) I am late

(He thought:) I was late

(He thought:) I will be late

narrated monologue

He was late

He had been late

He would be late (Cohn 104-105)

The first of the three models, psycho-narration or “indirect thought” in Herman’s and other theorists’ language, enables free movement inside different levels of consciousness and is consequently favoured by authors seeking to reach the deepest layers of a character’s mental life (Cohn 140). Keen explains psycho-narration as the inner content of a character’s mind that he

or she does not necessarily think or feel at the time of narration (60). An obvious implication of this type of a reflector narrator is that s/he renders “a central [character’s] consciousness” rather than reporting “external features, quoted speech, and characters’ action” – as was the norm for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century overt external narrators in the English novel, according to Keen (60). Such a narrator can either be dissonant or consonant, with the narrator either distancing him- or herself from the “consciousness he [or she] narrates” on the one hand, or eagerly fusing with it (Cohn 26). The more a narrator’s and a character’s mind stuff infuse one another, the more thoughts on paper can be read “as insinuations of [said character’s voice] into the narrator’s discourse, rather than as transcriptions of her unspoken thoughts” (Herman 249). In clarifying Cohn’s description, Keen adds that the technique depicts what a character does not think or feel at the time of the story (62). Put differently, psycho-narration captures “rapid ‘movements’ within the mind” (Cohn 46). Better yet, the method renders “what a character ‘knows,’” but does not know how to express without “a narrator’s knowing words” (46). Italicised segments in the following extract from “The Headstrong Historian” illustrate the psycho-narration technique.

Nwambga liked going to the Oyi stream [...] The waters of Oyi were *fresher than those of the other stream*, Ogalanya or perhaps it was simply that she *felt comforted* by the shrine of the Oyi goddess, tucked away in a corner; *as a child she had learned that* the Oyi was the protector of women, the reason women were not to be sold into slavery (Adichie 20; emphasis mine).

The Oyi stream is alluded to one other time in the story. It can be argued that Adichie uses her fiction to depict aspects of Igbo life untouched by her predecessors and compatriots. Speaking of ways in which Adichie does this, VanZanten mentions “the female side of Igbo life” as well as certain “religious practices” pertaining to traditional gender roles in Igbo culture (92). It could therefore be argued that Adichie informs her reader about Igbo history, religion and culture through the representation of consciousness.

In the less direct technique of narrated monologue, there is a “latent” relationship between thoughts and words, which makes it problematic to distinguish between “a character’s opinion” and “a fictional fact” (Cohn 103-104). Because it uses the grammar of the narrator while maintaining a character’s “own idiom”, narrated monologue is difficult to attribute to either the narrator or the character (100). Accordingly, as this will be exemplified in the discussion, this free indirect thought mode or form needs to be contextualized in order to determine whose mental domain it originates from. It is important to point out that narrated monologue is similar

to psycho-narration firstly because tense and person are congruent in both modes of representing consciousness (Keen 62). Things get even hazier because, as Cohn points out, narrated monologue is a synthesis of the two other forms of representing consciousness. The technique keeps the voice of narration in the third-person while the narrator simultaneously uses “his [or her] own medium” to render a character’s inner thoughts (100). In view of the above, the two models can be said to be complementary in that most texts tend to “weave in and out” of a character’s inner thoughts (103). Cohesion or fusion between the narrator and “the figural consciousness” is therefore what most accurately describes the narrated monologue model (107). I use Chika’s thoughts in “A Private Experience” to exemplify narrated monologue and subsequently discuss the story in the section entitled “Things of the Mind”.

The woman sighs and Chika imagines that she is thinking of her necklace, *probably plastic beads threaded in a piece of string*. [...] Chika looks at the threadbare wrapper on the floor; *it is probably one of the two the woman owns*. [...] “We have only spent a week here with our aunty, we have never been to Kano before,” Chika says, and she realizes that what she feels is this: she and her sister should not be affected by the riot. *Riots like this were what she read about in newspapers. Riots like this were what happened to other people*. (Adichie 44-47; emphasis mine).

Contrary to psycho-narration, and as perhaps indicated in the direct thought terminology, quoted monologue overtly refers to a character’s thoughts as rendered by a narrator. It is a “mental discourse” that distinguishes itself from a narrator’s report through basic change in tense and person, respectively from past to present and from third-person to first-person (Cohn 63). Cohn assesses this mode to have been introduced gradually, by means of often loud and always clear tagging, for authors to indicate with clarity cases of inner thoughts. As “exclamation (or even muttering)” was dropped, the technique developed into the widely known aesthetic of stream-of-consciousness (Cohn 58, 60). Hence, long instances of quoted monologue tend to give way to “interior monologues” or to the “forms of self-address” which Adichie does not seem to use in the collection (78, 84). Nevertheless, I will occasionally discuss quoted monologue in contrast with the two modes most highlighted in this essay.

Things of the Mind

“A Private Experience” tells of an encounter between Chika and unnamed Hausa woman who share the safety of a hideout during civil riots in the northern Kano State of Nigeria. The story mostly takes place in a seemingly abandoned store in dismal condition. Chika being “Igbo and Christian” while the “Northerner [...] is Muslim” makes them *de facto* representatives of two factions during post-independence Biafran war in Nigeria (Adichie 44). As Chika’s thoughts wander back and forth, a significant amount of personal detail about her life is gradually exposed. The first thing she notices while surveying the scene is that the place is small, “smaller than [her] walk-in closet back home” (Adichie 43). Although the reader sees the surroundings through the eyes of the central character, references to her in the third-person clearly indicate that a voice other than hers is relating the scene. In addition to Chika’s mind movements in the form of analepses and prolepses, seemingly random information provided through focalization on her inner thoughts includes that the handbag she dropped while fleeing is “a Burberry” and that her T-shirt was purchased during a recent summer stay “with relatives in New York” (43, 46). It could be argued that this narrated mind stuff is nothing Chika feels or thinks about, considering that she can barely catch her breath immediately after escaping danger. Rather, although they are undoubtedly things she knows, these could be read as things she has at the back of her mind, subconsciously, but that do not necessarily cross her mind at this specific time of the story.

Additionally, the abundance of “verbs and nouns of consciousness” suggests the case of psycho-narration (Cohn 32). Perceptual verbs and nouns (“wants to”, “imagines”, “sounds”, “smelled the sweat and fear”) make up a large amount of the text (Adichie 43-47). Though Cohn does not specifically mention them, adjectives and adverbs of consciousness and of perception could be added to the prior list. The following illustrates my point, “‘This place safe,’ the woman says in a voice so soft it sounds like a whisper” (Adichie 44). A similar lexical repertoire is found in “The room is stuffy and smells nothing like the streets outside, which smell like the kind of sky-colored smoke that wafts around during Christmas when people throw goat carcasses into fires to burn the hair off the skin” (45). And again in “‘Nnedi’, the woman repeats, and her Hausa accent sheaths the Igbo name in a feathery gentleness” (47). The text can thereby be said to contain what Cohn identifies as the two most important aspects of the consonant type of psycho-narration, i.e. the absence of a dissonant narrator and the presence of thoughts and feelings are entwined with sensations (31). Instead, the consonant narrator reporting Chika’s thoughts and feelings “yields” to them (Cohn 31). There is cohesion between

the two minds. They are interwoven, and the type of authorial judgement commonly found in dissonant narration is notably lacking.

In his book on how narratives convey stories, Gregory Currie, examines narrated monologue, which he generally refers to as free indirect discourse (140). Currie states that this type of character-oriented narration potentially makes the reader empathize with a character other than the one through whom the story is focalized (145). On the basis of Currie's analysis, I speculate that, in the case of "A Private Experience", the reader is mostly drawn to the character of the woman insofar as one easily disregards the incorrectness of her English grammar or the wrongness of her Igbo accent (for the privileged speaker of Igbo). Instead, the reader's attention goes to the softness of the woman's voice and the gentleness of her accent. What is more, the warmth of Christmas everywhere, even in the midst of socio-political turmoil in northern Nigeria, might prevail in the reader's mind over the awkward image of goat carcasses thrown into fire for example. The fact that the story was first published in a *Virginia Quarterly Review* and again in *The Observer* suggests that the author writes for an audience unaccustomed to linking kindness and Christmas celebrations to popular riots and killings.

The civil commotions that caused Chika to lose sight of her sister Nnedi also led to the displacement of Halima, the woman's oldest daughter. Yet, everything Chika has read in the past radicalizes Hausa Muslims, the "zealots" responsible for attacks on Igbo Christians. She has also read how the latter sometimes retaliate through "murderous missions" (Adichie 49). Being the more interested in politics of the pair, her sister Nnedi often comments on the politicization of "religion and ethnicity", on riots being rooted into something deeper (48). As thoughts of her sister's political debates occupy Chika's mind, she wonders whether "the woman's mind is large enough to grasp any of that" (48). The woman is a small-scale market trader, as is her daughter Halima (51). The thought immediately causes Chika some guilt. According to Cohn, mental verbs such as "wonder", "wish" and "imagine" constitute a reliable indication that thoughts are indeed reported in psycho-narration or indirect thought (Adichie 48; Cohn 104).

Chika's shameful thoughts are particularly meaningful as they are reminiscent of what Carotenuto labels a "univocacy of vision [...] only rendered in abusive and discriminatory traits" (172). These neither thoughts nor feelings – coupled with limited instances of dialogue – steadily inform the reader of a class divide between Chika and the woman. I would therefore concur with Cohn's conclusion that psycho-narration adds "in– depth?, mystery?, complexity?"

where it lacks in immediacy (98; punctuation in original). Also based on the foregoing, I conclude that this way of representing inner thoughts and feelings enables the writer to expand on what can come out of an encounter between two women from different and often antagonistic socio-political backgrounds. Although somewhat shameful, Chika's bare feelings arguably yield unexpected sympathy. To propose that Adichie uses this tool in order to put forward a multifaceted story as a way of countering what the narrative identifies as reports by "BBC radio" or "*The Guardian*" does not seem too farfetched (54-55).

Cohn distinguishes between a dissonant and a consonant narrator in psycho-narration. Although the former type of a narrator focuses on an "individual's psyche", s/he distances him or herself from the protagonist whose consciousness is narrated (26). In the second arrangement, Cohn explains that the narrator "readily fuses with the consciousness he [or she] narrates" (26). To quote her, a text with "no gnomic present statements" (31) – a tense of timeless generalizations – leaves the reader under the impression that the narrator knows nothing more than the character whose thoughts he or she reflects. Rather than using the gnomic present in "The American Embassy", Adichie arguably blends narrated monologue with psycho-narration, the mode mostly discussed in this section. It could be argued that this is done on purpose because combining quoted monologue with the latter mode would require the gnomic present. In the illustration below, I italicize instances of narrated monologue and dot-dash passages in psycho-narration.

The air hung heavy with moist heat. It weighed on her head, made it even more difficult to keep her mind blank which Dr. Balogun had said yesterday was what she would have to do. He had refused to give her any more tranquilizers because she needed to be alert for the visa interview. It was easy enough for him to say that, as though she knew how to go about keeping her mind blank, as though it was in her power, as though she invited those images of her son Ugonna's small, plump body crumpling before her, the splash on his chest so red she wanted to scold him about playing with the palm oil in the kitchen. Not that he could even reach up to the shelf where she kept oils and spices, not that he could unscrew the cap on the plastic bottle of palm oil. He was only four years old. (Adichie 128-129; emphasis mine)

Had Ugonna's mother's thoughts been quoted as I exemplify below, the text would arguably drift into interior monologue, which would most likely lead to the exclusion of the narrator. Also, the tone of voice in this made-up example suggests that the more general gnomic present

yields a different kind of effect on the reader. In an attempt to illustrate the gnomic present, I rewrite the above-italicised text as follows.

How easy to say it must be for him! Does he think I know how to go about keeping my mind blank? Does he think it is in my power? Does he think I invite those images of my son's small, plump body crumpling before me? Does he... the splash on his chest so red... I wanted to scold him about playing with the palm oil in the kitchen... not that he could even reach up the shelf...

The illustration clearly validates Cohn's and Keen's claim that psycho-narration produces characters with whom one easily sympathizes. Cohn also apprises that the time of narration and the narrated time tend to coincide in narrated monologue as well as in quoted monologue – the technique least discussed in this essay. It is open to discussion whether this would add a limiting effect on the text.

"The American Embassy" follows of a particular day in Ugonna's mother's life. The un-named protagonist stands in a queue "of about two hundred" trailing from the closed gates of an embassy in Lagos (Adichie 128). Just like in Chika's story, the protagonist's perspective provides the story's central view, making her another reflector-character in the collection. Paragraph after paragraph, the reflector zooms in and out of Ugonna's mother's thoughts consciousness, alternating between her present location at the embassy, and flashbacks of a most recent past. Only four days earlier, she led the life of a normal mother of a four-year old boy that needs not "to take a passport photo" – one of the numerous visa application requirements for Africans desiring to visit the U.S. (Adichie 131). That day at the embassy, when the crowd is mainly preoccupied with how to most convincingly present their case, fighting images of her son is what absorbs her most. Conversely to "A Private Experience", which is narrated in present tense, the story is recounted "in the tense and person of narration", both of which are strong features of psycho-narration (Keen 60). One advantage of rendering fictional minds using psycho-narration is that the method allows "almost unlimited temporal flexibility" (Cohn 34). The technique makes it possible to expand or to condense time at will, which is why the theorist talks about "temporal elasticity" (38). This process on Ugonna's mother's mind takes us back a few days earlier, when her life was still normal. I will discuss below the devastating effects of her husband's journalism on their personal lives. Thus far, applying Cohn's psycho-narration and narrated monologue has shown an uncommon perspective of the effects of political tensions on individual lives.

Things Unsaid, People Unnamed

This section looks at instances where Adichie's characters choose to remain silent and those who, by all accounts, are intentionally denied a name. In "Jumping Monkey Hill", a Writers' Workshop takes place at an eponymous resort outside Cape Town, South Africa. Ujunwa Ogundu is the story's leading and reflector-character. Upon her arrival at the resort, Ujunwa deems the resort's name "incongruous", given the absence of monkeys on site. She quickly presumes the place to be popular among "affluent foreign tourists" (Adichie 95). Her imagination gives way to a picture of tourists darting around and capturing lizards on camera. By all appearances, animal-themed cabin names such as Baboon Lodge, Porcupine Place, and Zebra Lair add to Ujunwa's discomfort. She judges rather harshly the tourists to return home "still mostly unaware that there [are] more black people than red-capped lizards in South Africa" (95). "[The] white South African woman from Durban" is the only non-Black workshop attendant (97). All writers are solely introduced in relation to their country and town of origin, except Ujunwa from Lagos, Nigeria. Hence, the reader never finds out what their names are.

Conversely, the white British organizer of the two-week event Edward Campbell and his wife Isabel are known by name, and so are their friends Simon and Hermione, who came "with them from London as paid staff" (96). It bears mentioning that the second couple never materializes again in the story-world – which further underscores the seven characters who are repeatedly deprived the singularity and uniqueness of a name. Speaking of racialized categories, Cheryl Glenn states the necessity to "unname even as we rename", mainly in relation to today's societal constructs (Preface xxi). Beyond the irrefutable psychological and cultural effects of race at stake in Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, I would argue that purposefully denying these Africans a name may reverse otherwise expected negative effects. The act of un-naming usually erases one's individuality. In this case however, the reader might be compelled to relating to them not just as Africans, but also as nationals of multiple countries. At some point, for instance, the only West African woman in the group cries out in protest, "*I am Senegalese! I am Senegalese!*" (Adichie 109; emphasis in original). This seems an unsophisticated attempt to point out that Africa is not a country. The rather clichéd statement may be trite and unoriginal but insisting on the matter apprises the reader that this is perhaps still not as unwonted as one would expect. At the very least, it seems to be very much part of the problem for the Senegalese. The intrigued reader might therefore begin, perhaps unconsciously, to engage with Africa not as a whole, but as a continent with multiple nations. Further investigation of the seven countries could possibly illuminate for readers particular aspects of the aspiring writers'

specific countries. All in all, the slightly annoying repetition of different nationalities on a dozen pages could be read as a rather loud act of silence.

Similarly, when circumstances put Chika and the woman face to face in “A Private Experience”, the protagonist is forced out of her world. She is confronted to otherness, the “other people” for whom riots are common (Adichie 47). She quickly realises that the woman does not fit her stereotypical picture of the Muslim Hausa community, of the lesser educated and non-privileged. Where she expects “sarcasm or reproach”, the woman meets her with kindness and generosity (48). Just like the Africans at the writers’ workshop, the Northerner has no name. She is oddly referred to as “the woman” more than sixty times in a little over a dozen pages. The same goes for the female protagonist in “The American Embassy”. “I’m Ugonna’s mother”, she states on two occasions, as the only way of identifying herself (140-141). Her son’s name, on the other hand, is mentioned up to two dozen times in the course of fourteen pages.

In analysing “The Headstrong Historian”, VanZanten uncovers the absence of direct speech from any of the female characters. Had the text been authored by a male writer, VanZanten posits that it would undoubtedly have been translated as an instance of “patriarchal ‘silencing’” (95). In view of VanZanten’s observation, a pattern of silence, either through silencing or un-naming characters, appears to be imprinted in the collection. At the same, the reader continuously accesses the mind of the narrator through psycho-narration. Moreover, a flexible effect on time earlier noted in “A Private Experience” seems frequent in “The Headstrong Historian”, especially at the pivot point when focalization shifts from Nwamgba to Grace’s perspective (VanZanten 95). I concur with VanZanten that the narrator accomplishes the above using “the rare future-in-the-past tense” (96). The same future in the past tense possibly enables the reader to follow the trail of Ugonna’s mother’s thoughts in “The American Embassy”. A similar pattern emerges in “A Private Experience”, where the reader progressively puts together missing information by means of Chika’s thoughts. Connected to this is Cohn’s worthwhile statement that “narrated monologue is a choice medium for revealing a fictional mind suspended in the present, between a remembered past and an anticipated future.” (126) I would therefore put forward the claim that all these texts unarguably feature psycho-narration in conjunction with narrated monologue.

To exemplify the above claim, in “Jumping Monkey Hill”, whenever the text renders Ujunwa’s perceptions, it appears to leave narrated monologue and shifts back into psycho-narration. One

possible explanation to this phenomenon is that a certain dimension of depth, or complexity, or mystery is lost in narrated monologue, making it necessary for the narrator to fall back into psycho-narration whenever the need to expose a character's inner thoughts arises. This is the case when Ujunwa is in Edward's and Isabel's close proximity. Arguably, it does not take long before what Cohn calls searchingly introspective thoughts come on the surface. For instance, despite feeling mildly irritated at Isabel's suggestion that the Nigerian woman's fine bone structure must be due to royal lineage, Ujunwa opts not to openly show it. Instead of asking Isabel whether she ever needs "royal blood" to explain the beauty of "friends back in London" she tauntingly plays along (Adichie 99). The unexpressed thoughts – a case of narrated monologue – are however interlaced with what can debatably be read as yet another paradigm of psycho-narration. The young woman invents the story of "a Portuguese trader in the seventeenth century" who was held captive in a "royal cage" (99). The irony goes unnoticed, as is the veiled hint to historical events of slave trade. The narrated monologue technique, with its clear undertones of irony, has a direct effect on the reader – whether through the evocation of feelings of sympathy or of dislike. This is reminiscent of cases where passages of narrated monologue and psycho-narration are interlaced to render Chika's perceptions in "A Private Experience". There is a strong suggestion that both modes are compatible with psycho-narration throughout Adichie's short fiction, precisely as it was the case in the various twentieth century novels featuring in Cohn's extensive analysis.

Moments where the writers' muted silence alternate with times where they openly voice their opinion – notably almost always in the absence of the workshop organizers. That all participants seem to be aware of Edward's perverse tendency to stare at Ujunwa's body is a case in point. The day she finally breaks the silence, in utter frustration, none of her peers can explain their persistent muteness. At Ujunwa's insistent question, "But why do we say nothing? [...] Why do we always say nothing?", they all burst into complains about the food and the wine at the resort, the absence of any African staple foods, the meal times and even the sickening smell of Edward's pipe (112). Most, if not all of their responses appear to be in direct correlation with many of the ideas Edward previously expressed, as though shifting the blame onto the British man. For instance, somebody finally addresses his claim days ago that, "of course ostrich [is] an African stable." (101). That evening, Ujunwa reads her text to the group, a story charged with overtones of sexual harassment. Predictably, Edward does not shy away from saying that women "are never victims in that sort of crude way and certainly not in Nigeria" (113). In a final retort before she walks away, Ujunwa lets everyone know that the story is her story. Nevertheless, the closing paragraph suggests that she does not say everything she wants to say.

The reader knows enough to conclude that this is a reference to her parents' recent separation following her father's unfaithfulness to her mother.

Earlier on, when the Kenyan questions the real cause behind the young woman's almost imperceptible anger, only the reader knows that the underlying reason is linked to her parents. But the story she reads at the workshop contains numerous insinuations of this. Until then, the closeness between Ujunwa and her father is mostly perceived by the reader, but also by the other writers. This is because one evening, during which all the writers talk about their fathers, Ujunwa, refers to hers as the one person who ever bought her books and who read her early poetry and fiction (Adichie 103). Here, I draw a link between Ujunwa's decision to keep some things to herself and Glenn's identification of "language and silence as reciprocal rather than opposites" (155). In all respects, Ujunwa's preference to not reveal her father's shortcomings is better understood in light of Glenn's postulation of silence as a rhetoric of domination and persuasion. Simultaneously, Glenn speculates that silence can be a "rhetorical listening that leads to understanding" (155). While Glenn's discussion is not necessarily geared towards silence in fiction, it may be argued that Ujunwa's choice to keep some things to herself can be read as a form of resistance, a refusal to go so low as to proving the veracity and plausibility of her writing to Edward. The Kenyan's ability to read Ujunwa's unspoken words further sustains the case of silence as a powerful tool that can lead one's interlocutors to truly listening.

Another of Adichie's protagonist who opts for silence is the unnamed woman in "The American Embassy". She gets plenty of opportunities to talk about her husband's writing for *The New Nigeria*, a pro-democracy paper, and how the latter was consequently forced to flee the country. After several tongue-tied responses before and during the interview, Ugonna's mother eventually decides against "hawk[ing] Ugonna for a visa to safety." (Adichie 139) This is all the more surprising in view of her obsession with the image of splashed fresh palm oil, which the reader eventually figures out to be blood on the chest of the little boy's lifeless body. By dwelling in the mind of the son's mother, Adichie's narrator uses the harrowing iteration to move the narrative forward but refuses to use it where the reader most expects it, when the text reaches its climax. What is more, the woman shows no evidence that the government caused her son's death three days earlier, and neither does she mention her husband's involvement in politics, through the newspaper that employs him. In the same way, she refuses to mention his latest piece, "'The Abacha Years So Far: 1993 to 1997'" (137). And yet, the piece attracted so much attention after being carried on BBC radio, forcing her husband to flee the country and live her and their son Ugonna behind. The young woman opts for silence in lieu of verbal

persuasion. I suggest that her muteness at this point in the narrative, right before she walks away, makes her silence speak louder than words.

Silence, according to Glenn, is an inescapable form of speech and “an element in every dialogue” (5). Glenn suggests that tackling its “purposeful uses and deliveries” as rhetoric *per se* can potentially lead to a rhetoric of listening that favours understanding (154). To conclude, in the two stories discussed in this section, the decision whether to listen to and understand the unsaid remains in the hands of Edward on the one hand and of the woman at the American embassy on the other.

Things on Paper

Adichie often identifies herself as “a storyteller” (“The Danger” 00:00-00:02). The following discussion follows how incorporating Igbo oral storytelling devices into writing enables “revision and ownership of the narrative” (Egbunike 17). I connect information on precolonial Igbo storytelling to Cohn’s claim that authors who prefer psycho-narration aptly achieve depth and complexity and argue for the importance of said feelings, thoughts and perceptions to end up in books. Grace or Afamefuna is Adichie’s eponymous heroine of “The Headstrong Historian”. She holds a degree in history. Critics have suggested that Grace’s degree change from chemistry to history implicitly alludes to Achebe’s life as well as Adichie’s insofar as both writers first went to medical school before an academic switch to the humanities. More importantly, it may be argued that by making a clear link “between education and dignity, between the hard and obvious things that are printed in books and the soft, subtle things that lodge themselves into the soul”, the protagonist realises the importance of not only telling one’s own story and history, but of writing it as well (Adichie 216).

The historical narrative spans three generations and mostly recounts the life of Grace’s grandmother Nwamgba, from the perspective of the latter. Focalization shifts to Grace towards the end of the narrative, when Grace joins Nwamgba at her deathbed. VanZanten’s argument that the text lacks dialogues or exposition aligns with my own analysis of Adichie’s other texts. VanZanten further states that the narrative “directly reports thoughts” and notes the adroit “slides into free indirect thoughts” (94). Significantly, VanZanten assesses the case of intensive focalization to allow deeper empathy for Nwamgba, adding that, unlike dwelling in Nwamgba’s mind, words can be misleading (95). Importantly, she highlights two exceptions to this focalization, both of which are linked to male characters disapproving of the stubbornness and

assertiveness of the two heroines (94). Arguably, the few cases of direct discourse augment the gap between the reader and those characters unsympathetic to the protagonists.

In “A Private Experience”, the woman’s profession and that of her daughter as onion and groundnuts market sellers and her broken English signal a non-learned background, or at least one not literate in the way the West understands it (48). Had this been pre-colonial Nigeria, however, Egbunike claims that the woman would have contributed to the process of “communal knowledge” production that was part and parcel of storytelling (17). Put otherwise, the Nigeria Chika and the woman inhabit, unlike that of their ancestors, no longer favours their contributing “to the cultural capital of the community” (Egbunike 17). Perhaps precisely because neither of the two women is a writer, their text and their world are infused with the BBC’s and other media’s “accounts of the deaths and the riots” (Adichie 54). It is debatable whether, by reading the media reports alluded to as a story within the story, the attentive reader might better perceive how a mostly Western perspective on the conflict dominates Chika’s worldview until that day. All of the above perhaps constitutes an example of what leads to Egbunike’s critic of “Britain’s epistemic terms of engagement with its colonies” that disrobed Africans of their role of “active producers of knowledge” (17). The researcher condemns the former colonialist’s denial of “the existence of more than one truth”, which, she claims, stands in sharp “contradistinction” with “the Igbo’s philosophy of duality” (17).

In a combined reading of “Jumping Monkey Hill” and “The Headstrong Historian”, Eve Eisenberg lays the claim that Adichie denounces the expectation for African writers to perform a certain type of authorship. This, Eisenberg observes, ironically threatens to turn texts about the African continent into the kind of discourses that first led Chinua Achebe to write. That Achebe did not recognize the Nigeria portrayed in the literature he read in his youth is a largely known fact. For Eisenberg, Adichie’s fiction writers are faced with a different type of resistance when attempting to craft the world as they perceive it. Through the perspective of Ujunwa, the protagonist in “Jumping Monkey Hill”, a third-person narrator pointedly makes fun of British workshop organizer Edward. That which starts off as an ironic slant develops into something decisively not humorous. The old man with “two front teeth the colour of mildew” repeatedly opposes the writers’ stories, apparently because they do not fit the African narrative of disease and disaster (96). Edward deems the Zimbabwean’s story “terribly passé [...] consider[ing] all the other things happening in Zimbabwe under the horrible Mugabe” (107). None of the participants dare voice their opinion for much of the account.

Considering Eisenberg's observation above, I would suggest that the writers' silence in the first half of the story is not without effect on the reader. Cohn explains that when narrated monologue "borders on spoken or silent discourse, it takes on a more narratorial quality" (106). The narrator is thereby able to rightly communicate a character's "inarticulate" outlook on his or her surroundings (106). Translating Ujunwa's thoughts and perceptions as narrated monologues contributes to uncovering the deeper feelings implicitly expressed through her uneasy reaction towards the resort, especially once she begins to interact with the other writers. More to the point, revisiting the group's gathering on the second evening reveals that Chinua Achebe is not the only writer they "invoke" in their discussion about books and writers. (Eisenberg 13) They talk about the "astonishing" Dambudzo Marechera, the "patronizing" Alan Paton and the "unforgivable" Isak Dinesen (Adichie 102). They also discuss the possibility of Conrad being "*on [their] side*", as "a professor at the Sorbonne" once suggested to the Senegalese (102; emphasis in original). More than a simple conversation about "good and bad writers", this, in Eisenberg's judgement, is about "good and bad representers of Africa" (14). The conversation begins to shed some light on the source of Ujunwa's discomfort upon her arrival at the resort. One might indeed wonder what effect reports by those touring contemporary Cape Town during the twenty-first century could have; if readers of the Danish writer Isak Dinesen's "racist remarks" took her comments "about Kikuyu children" at face value (Adichie 102). By combining the narration of Ujunwa's inner thoughts with dialogues among the aspiring African writers, the narrative aptly articulates the group's uneasiness in the face of their disquieting conviction that things inscribed on paper are apparently timeless.

The evening after the Zimbabwean's reading comes the Senegalese's turn. Edward's verdict is that "homosexual stories of this sort [aren't] reflective of Africa" (108). "Which Africa?" Ujunwa finally blurts out involuntarily (108). The fact of the matter is that the Senegalese did tell the rest of the group that the "story really [is] *her* story" (102). Though participants at the workshop are unaware of this, the same applies to Ujunwa's text, an account embedded in the short story, which is to be her entry into *The Oratory*. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, oratory, or "the rationale and practice of persuasive public speaking", is characterized by immediacy, especially in relation to audience rapport and response. Connected to this is Egbunike's claim that Adichie denounces the oppressive and abrasive practices of the colonial project in at least two of her works, including "The Headstrong Historian". In her paper, the Nigerian critic elaborates on the rich precolonial Igbo oral culture, where both the orator and audience were equal participants. Knowledge production was the object of collective production and history was both multi-faceted and evolving. In contrast with the situation at the workshop,

where only Edward seems the only judge of what a good, plausible story is, pre-colonial Igbo storytelling process constructively acknowledged the existence of more than one truth. Justifiably, therefore, Egbunike suggests that one of the harshest brutalities on the Igbo people to have been the imposition of a Eurocentric and essentialist view of the world, in a society where dual concepts were not mutually exclusive and could coexist in harmony.

Arguably, although neither Chika nor the woman are writers per se, the common theme of writing as detected by Carotenuto in Adichie's collection of short stories is applicable to "A Private Experience". The reader learns that, until this day, Chika knows nothing about riots, beside what the media reports (Adichie 49). "Them not going to small-small shop, only big-big shop and market", the woman warns her (47). This and other information she provides strangely point toward a certain familiarity with riots, thus highlighting the gap between Chika's world and that of the type of people usually trapped in political tumult. To this day, the closest Chika had ever been to any form of rioting is through Nnedi's involvement in protests at university. Putting this into thought brings Chika to the realization of an underlying feeling that she and her sister should in fact not have been there at all, especially given that they had never been to Kano before (47). Riots happen to "other people", she silently reasons (47). And this, Carotenuto writes, is when Adichie inscribes "alterity on the page, the alterity of the ones never included in the Western single story" (172). The encounter challenges Chika's stereotypes and prejudice; where she expected "sarcasm or reproach", she "experienced the gentleness of a woman who is Hausa and Muslim (Adichie 48, 55).

Adichie wrote "The Headstrong Historian" in an attempt to reconsider her great-grandmother's life and to complete Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (VanZanten 88). VanZanten, for instance, suggests that Adichie "brings a woman from the margins of Achebe's narrative into the center." (90) Hence, the story may be read as yet another way the younger author tackles the issue of the incompleteness of the single story. As Adichie herself puts it in quoting Achebe, she creates "a balance of stories" ("The Danger" 14:19-14:22). She takes over the torch from her senior compatriot and – using psycho-narration's "temporal flexibility" – condenses three generations originating from Umuofia village into the short fiction piece. In "A Private Experience", on the contrary, the same technique elaborates and expands mental instants of Chika's thoughts. Should the story be told in the two rival techniques, the text might have necessitated expansion into a full-size novel, or perhaps only just into a novella. The account would in all likelihood contain a detailed description of Chika's family home, including the walk-in closet, events such as the family's regular trips abroad and so forth. Part of the novel would of course be dedicated

to lengthy passages of dialogue between Chika and the unnamed Hausa woman; the latter's name would perhaps even be revealed to the reader.

The text Ujunwa writes during the narrative account of "Jumping Monkey Hill" serves as a very informative metanarrative device. Unsurprisingly, Edward is as much dissatisfied with it as he is with most stories written and presented at the workshop. The Tanzanian's level-headed advice is to focus on opportunities somebody as influential as Edward might lead them to in the publishing world. The former goes as far as openly pleading with Ujunwa not to "antagonize" the man and to aim for connections with London agents Edward potentially represents instead (113). In "What is Africa to me now?", scholars Bénédicte Ledent and Daria Tunca apprehend the question of who determines what text "make[s] it into print" (7). The questions they put forward mainly concern "writers of the new diaspora", a group in which Adichie is often included (7). In a reaction towards "contemporary postcolonial critics" on the one hand and "the publishing industry" on the other, Ledent and Tunca question whose entitlement it is to decide whether a text is either susceptible to prolonging "stereotypical views of Africa as war-torn [and] AIDS-ridden", or to perpetuating "indecent pandering to the Euro-American literary establishment" (7-8).

Naturally, during the writers' workshop, Edward proclaims the Tanzanian's piece so "urgent and relevant" it will have to be "the lead story in the *Oratory*" (109). To Ujunwa, however, with its prurient, violent militiaman narrating killings in the Congo, the story "reads like an article "from *The Economist*" (109). Interestingly, Ledent and Tunca report "the cold and often brutal reality" that only four scholars who reside on the continent attended the conference where these issues were discussed (10). A number of invitees based in Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal were unable to travel to Belgium either due to lack of funding or lack of visas. Ledent and Tunca use this anecdote to deplore the absence of those interlocutors whose say is perhaps most important in this conversation. They rightly identify this symptom as central to what hinders us from seeing "the multifarious Africas present in literature" (8). Relevant to this is Adichie's revelation in an interview that this particular text is "quite autobiographical", adding that it was "propelled by rage" (Mustich).

Again, going back to the Writers Workshop, Eisenberg posits that, for the reader familiar with "Adichie's public performance of her authorial personae", the manner in which the novelist invokes Achebe takes on a peculiar twist when the younger writer enters the realm of short fiction (12). Related to Ledent and Tunca's proposition above, Eisenberg means that Adichie,

in a fashion consistent with other contemporary African writers in the diaspora, refuses to go along with the assumption that the art of literature mimics or is representational of “political efficacy” (12). With this in mind, I propose that rather than imagining answers, Adichie’s characters reach closure when their mind stuff is let out. This is the case of Ujunwa, Ugonna’s mother and Grace who, arguably thanks to the monologic mode of narrating consciousness, are able to confront their inner selves and find closure. In the case of Chika, it could be argued that one reason why she does not appear to reach closure is that her inner thoughts are mostly recounted in psycho-narration and never fully explored. As a matter of fact, neither does her family. The reader is told that they would never offer Masses “for the repose of Nnedi’s soul” (52).

I use the case of Grace to exemplify the foregoing claim. Although her father gives her a Christian name at birth, her grandmother stubbornly names her Afamefuna, ““My Name Will Not Be Lost”” (214). Nwamgba does so in the certitude that “the spirit of her magnificent husband Obierika” has returned, oddly, “in a girl” (214). Grace goes by her European first name throughout her life, but officially changes it to Afamefuna during “later years” (218). The act of officially having her Igbo first name on paper burden takes away a lifelong feeling of rootlessness (218). Even so, in describing a gesture of affection by the heroine towards her ancestor, the collection’s closing lines arguably put Grace’s humanity over her determination as a historian to rewrite her people’s history.

But on that day as she sat at her grandmother’s bedside in the fading evening light, Grace was not contemplating her future. She simply held her grandmother’s hand, the palm thickened from years of making pottery. (Adichie 218)

Conclusion

This essay has offered a narratological analysis of Adichie’s *The Thing around Your Neck*, mainly employing two of Dorrit Cohn’s models for the representation of consciousness. The resulting discussion argues that Adichie’s conviction that many stories matter remains centre of her fiction, even in the short-story genre. It emerges that third-person-figural narratives constitute a preferred tool of the novelist for conveying mind stuff, whether unspoken or inscribed on paper. The essay hence distinguishes silence and metanarrative as rhetorical devices in Adichie’s mission to multiply the stories of Africa. In a world prone to generalizations, Adichie represents her characters as valuable humans whose stories deserve to

be told. This essay validates the claim that Adichie's way of dramatizing the inner thoughts of her characters contributes to resisting the single story of Nigeria while also moving Nigerian nondiasporic fiction to the centre stage of world literature.

An interesting way to extend this project would be through an assessment of the impact of Adichie's writing on young readers who often come into contact with her fictional and nonfictional work on national school curricula in Nigeria, in Sweden, and in some parts of the U.S. Other literary initiatives arguably contributing to Adichie's agenda to tell many stories are the reestablishment of local publishing houses in Nigeria, including at least one present in the U.S. and in the U.K.; the digitisation of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba novels – a collaboration between the Nigerian and Norwegian national libraries; and a writers' workshop which Adichie leads every summer in Nigeria.

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