

Cultural Hybridity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Zikora"

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Abstract

The paper explores the physical and psychological effects of cultural hybridity in Adichie's *Zikora*. The research adopts a content analysis approach wherein the text is qualitatively evaluated based on the psychological excerpts culled from it. The text is interpreted in line with the ideas of Kathrin Boerner et al. and Elizabeth Kubler Ross' Grief model, which defines and states the five stages of grief. These stages of grief include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The main character, Zikora, goes through the five stages in addition to the physical effect of hybridity and alienation. The paper concludes that migrants who leave their countries of origin for the new countries face beliefs and values that are not peculiar to their cultural beliefs, as is the case of Zikora.

Keywords: Migration, Cultural Hybridity, Culture shock, Psychological and Physical Effects

Introduction

Migration is one of the solutions to survival due to the social, economic and political milieu of the 21st century. In recent times, migration has gathered great concern worldwide as there has been a growing surge of immigrants from second and third-world countries to first-world countries in the late 20th through the early 21st centuries, respectively. Economic recession, world wars and natural disasters in third-world countries have fostered the need for migration.

The post-colonial period in Africa is marked by massive economic and academic migration to stable and prosperous Western countries. The concept of migration is usually portrayed in African literary texts by diasporic writers. These are writers of African descent who live outside the continent and continue to expose the experiences of people of their race and colour on other continents. That is why Mark Ighile and Charity Oseghale assert that "Immigration literature is a dominant genre in the oeuvre of African Literature which has continually captured the imagination and attracted much literary output from writers across different literary generations" (2) Migration literature involves the subject matter about the tradition of the host nation and the migrants' responses, narratives, and adaptations to these traditions.

The scope of the paper will focus on migration as a phenomenon, the inevitable hybridity in a culture which takes place and the cultural shock which leads to issues for the migrant, Zikora, as portrayed in the short story, "Zikora".

The Concept Migration

Migration is as old as humanity and involves the movement of people from one place to another. Migration entails movement across historical spaces. Migration evokes visions of continuous movements of part and whole populations over considerable distances. In the 21st century, the most palpable reasons for recurring migration involve the human search for better economic conditions, improvement in the quality of education, intellectual opportunities, medical opportunities, security through asylum seeking, grounds of war and legal immigration procedures. Georgina Florentina Tataru submits that:

Migration has been a constant and persistent feature in the history of humankind, being among the most important and pressing global issue of our time. When people cross a country's border, a metamorphosis happens to their legal status.

Ernest Ravenstein sees migration as a core and inseparable part of development and further draws attention to the negative and positive effects. Massive migration leads to intellectual brain drain, reduction in skilled labour, and loss of identity (cultural values, language, and beliefs) in the affected country.

Migrants from third-world countries migrate to first-world countries for jobs that pay more and make them more productive. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a migrant, understands the issues of migration and has continued to create characters who are migrants or aspire to be migrants. Most of her novels and short stories depict characters leaving Nigeria for better living conditions. She understands the plights and issues migrants face in First World countries. In her novels and short stories, she continues to reiterate the issues of racism, vulnerability, exploitation, and loss of identity the migrants face. Andre Kabore examines the reasons for massive migration. He says, "Upon examining post-colonial African Literature that deals with migration, one realises that the generally known migration story for African migrants is that of fleeing poverty or war. Adichie's works abound with examples that buttress this migration theory" (3). Migration can be influenced by factors which may be economic, political, social and cultural. Consequently, migration creates many transcultural issues due to the confrontation with an entirely new system. The migrants inevitably must adjust to the novel conditions they face in the new country.

Cultural Hybridity in "Zikora"

Cultural hybridity refers to the attempts by individuals to sustain a perception of stability among beliefs, values, and traditions of two or more different cultures. It involves devising a means to maintain balance to avoid cultural shock because of unusual encounters within cultural boundaries. Andreas Ackerman opines that "The concept of Cultural hybridity started its academic career early in the twentieth century when it was taken up in various disciplines, particularly sociology, anthropology and history." (5)

Cultural hybridity gained eminence in the 1980s, most notably within studies in culture, globalisation, and other post-colonial studies. It can be described as the confrontation of two different cultures. It also involves blending and fusing two cultures' values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns. When Cultural hybridity occurs, there is always a form of reaction that can trigger a need for adjustment in the individual or group. In some cases, where there is no balance between both cultures, it can sometimes lead to cultural shock due to the overwhelming changes that happen consciously or unconsciously to the individual. Ighile and Oseghale say that:

The term hybridity is used in Post-colonial studies to represent the mixture of people and cultures and the resultant birth of new transcultural forms. Hybridity manifests in situations where the cultural orientation of the country influences people who migrate to other countries, and their identities consequently become entwined with elements of the foreign culture. (3)

Ighile and Oseghale's claim is valid as it relates to the main character, Zikora, a migrant who leaves her home country, Nigeria, for the United States of America, tries to fit into the American societal system and sees herself living aspects of her dreams until she gets to a point where her African cultural beliefs and consciousness begins to push through. When these migrants arrive at these first and second-world countries, there are cultural adjustments and perceptible changes in their behavioural patterns, as seen in Zikora's situation, as the years go by. Zikora's problems begin when she gets pregnant by Kwame, who is not ready to be a father and consequently gets abandoned.

Discussing the diverse representation of the African and American society, Irina Cruz Pereira, in her paper on the diasporic identities in Adichie's works, opines that "the dichotomy between the so-called American system and the Igbo tradition is present in most Adichie's stories, and it is dealt with in different ways. Most of her diasporic characters show little balance in their attitudes towards cultural integration or assimilation" (53). Zikora experiences this imbalance in her confrontation with the African and American cultural systems.

Adichie portrays two significant characters who are both of African descent. Kwame is a Ghanaian-American born and raised in America who fully imbibes the American culture. Zikora, on the other hand, is a Nigerian immigrant who comes to America to school and experiences another culture. She reveals this in the story: "my father wanted me to go to America because America was the future, and my mother wanted me to go to the UK because education was more rigorous there. I want to go to America! 'I said'... her addiction to dignity infuriated me, alienated me." (25-26) Zikora, in the extract above, reveals why she chooses to study in America. Kwame is an African American whose mother is an African -American resulting from the four hundred years Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and whose father is a Ghanaian immigrant who comes to America in search of a better life for himself. Zikora's words about Kwame's background say: "he grew up with his dreams already dreamt for him." (9)

Hybridity Issues in "Zikora" Marriage, Parenthood and Commitment

Marriage is a crucial issue in "Zikora" and affects the characters' outlook. Zikora is a thirty-nine-year-old accomplished Nigerian lady by the American standard, but in the African culture, being married and a mother equates to being a fulfilled woman. The institution of marriage in Africa is held in high regard. Zikora narrates her mother's ordeal as her husband marries a younger wife in order to produce sons. Marriage for a woman is essential in African society. Zikora's mother endures so many insults and neglects from her husband, tolerating all he dishes out to her. This can be seen in the short story when her sister-in-law, aunty Uzo, tells her, "You are the senior wife, nothing will change that..." (25) after her father moves out of the house when his second wife births a son. However, Africans idolise the idea of marriage. In the story, we initially perceive Zikora as an accomplished Nigerian immigrant who carved a niche for herself in a free country like America. Zikora's African cultural orientation comes to play when she realises she is almost forty and decides to go off the birth control pills and get pregnant. In some African societies, being financially stable is the basis for marriage as a man. Africans, in most cases, equate financial capabilities with commitment in marriage. In Africa, it is considered shameful to give birth out of wedlock. Zikora understands and hopes Kwame marries her when she informs him about her late period. Disappointingly, he rejects her and the baby.

Furthermore, as soon as Zikora reveals the news about her pregnancy to Kwame, Kwame's response is surprisingly shocking to her because they had been together for years and inseparable during that period. Zikora's response to Kwame's disapproval of having a baby seems pathetic as it portrays desperation and shock. She thinks, "I'm thirty-nine, and you are thirty-seven, employed and stable; I have a key to your apartment, your clothes are in my closet, and I'm not sure what conversation we should be having, but it shouldn't be this one." (11) Zikora's predicament border on the idea of mutual parenthood and contemporary values on sex, a striking moral response in an age that tries to dismiss virtue. To Kwame, children's births are to be planned for and not tossed to parents who are not ready yet. This is what happens between Kwame and Zikora. Kwame represents some Americans who do not want to feel pressured to do anything. He believes every decision in life must undergo planning. Zikora's dependence on the fact that they are both financially stable and have a copy of each of their room keys shows her level of comprehension concerning relationship commitment. In Nigeria, being financially stable is a license to get married. The news of Zikora's pregnancy turns their beautiful and perfect relationship into a bad situation, as she recalls in these words: "ours is like the ancient story, the woman wants the baby and the man doesn't want the baby and a middle ground does not exist." (13) The misconception and misunderstanding concerning having a child between Kwame and Zikora stem from their different cultural upbringing. Zikora's family background affects her, as her father marries a second wife to have more sons. She also

recalls Kwame's beautiful relationship and fondness for her two-year-old nephew while visiting her cousin in Delaware who had come from Nigeria to have her baby. Zikora expresses this erroneous conviction when she says:

... it surprised me how quickly Kwame displaced the nanny for the length of our visit and was on his knees, slipping his palm into a puppet and wiggling his fingers; his voice tuned to a funny high pitch. I had watched the two-year-old, who was riveted and adorably giggly, and saw the father Kwame would be. (14)

Kwame, in the future, might have been a father figure in the eyes of Zikora but was not actually ready to be a father under pressure. He feels Zikora betrays him by intentionally getting pregnant in a bid to persuade him through her text messages while at the hospital and at her apartment after she is discharged. He texts her; thus, "It's manipulative to send this. You know you made a decision that excluded me. I didn't want things to end this way. I'm hurting too." (13)

The fact that Kwame takes Zikora to meet his parents and travels to Nigeria to see her parents confuses Zikora into thinking the time is right to have a baby and seal their relationship. However, to Kwame, meeting each other's families does not constitute marital commitment and parenthood. Mainly in Africa, when a lady or gentleman brings their long-time partner home, it signifies that the couple is engaged or about to get married. This African orientation envelops Zikora's mind. Zikora's mother expresses this norm when she says, "on the phone, I heard her say to a friend, 'Zikora's fiancé.'" (24)

Zikora reveals her assumptions about her relationship with Kwame as thus, "we didn't talk about marriage itself, but we often talked of the future, what we could do and wouldn't do in five years, in ten years, as though we both knew it was inevitable that we would be together." (9) Zikora's assumptions in the above quotation show her reliance on the beauty and strength of her relationship with Kwame. She sees herself married to Kwame, being a wife and mother and getting promoted at work to partner. All these can be achievable, but in Zikora's case, she loses on all sides except motherhood. Zikora contends with two different worlds, the African world, which expects her to have a baby as age is not on her side, get married and excel in her career. Also, on the other hand, she finds herself in an American setting where pressures on marriage and parenthood are liberal. Zikora's mother in the short story reminds Zikora of the ability to have a child at thirty-nine, a case of luck. This shows the amount of pressure African parents place on their children directly or indirectly concerning marriage and parenthood. In the short story, Zikora recounts her mother's attitude towards her relationship with Kwame; she goes as far as introducing Kwame to relatives as Zikora's fiancé. Zikora strives to achieve everything and becomes alienated as a single mother, at the risk of losing an opportunity to become a partner at the law firm and her lover Kwame.

Kwame's intentions towards Zikora are unclear; this shows that one can love and care about someone without any marital commitment, like Kwame being in a relationship. Kwame strives to make Zikora happy without any definite matrimonial commitment. Although without a definite mapped-out plan for Zikora in his life, Kwame brings fulfilment and joy to her being.

Psychological Effect of Hybridity in "Zikora"

Grief

Grief involves reacting to the irreparable loss of a loved one or possession. The loss may involve the death of a loved one, a special relationship or a job opportunity.

Kathrin Boerner et al. define grief as:

The emotional experience of the psychological, behavioural, social and physical reactions caused by the death of a loved one, loss of health or the health of someone you care about, end of a meaningful relationship one has, loss of a job, or financial

security, loss of a dream to reach an expected goal and trauma which causes one to grieve about the sense of safety and security which one used to have (1).

Zikora clearly suffers from grief due to the total collapse of her relationship with Kwame. As a psychological effect, grief causes a severe change in the attitude of the person who mourns. Zikora's grief consists of a sense of disbelief, recurrent pangs of painful emotions, guilt over the circumstances leading to the loss of her relationship, numbness, the constant replaying of the happy times shared with Kwame, intense yearning and longing for companionship and imagining alternate outcomes of her decision to get pregnant.

Grief comes in stages, and only some people go through every stage. In her 1969 book titled *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler Ross outlines that grief could be divided into five stages. The five stages of grief include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Her theory became known as the Kubler-Ross grief model.

The Denial stage involves overwhelming emotion and sudden feelings by pretending the loss or change is not happening. Denying the situation gives the aggrieved more time to absorb and process the news gradually. Zikora is in denial about the abrupt end of her relationship with Kwame. She puts up a front at work to avoid being seen as a weak, jilted pregnant woman. This is seen when Donna asks about her well-being in the following words, "do you need anything Zikora?" she often asked, especially when the men could hear, her eyes hard and bright. 'I don't have a debilitating illness, Donna, I am only pregnant,' I would say". In actual fact, Zikora is not okay as she informs, "on weekends, I lay blankly on my couch reading Kwame's past text messages, as the hour slid one into another. Time spent on remembering, time lost on remembering." (12-13). While pondering over the loss of Kwame in her life, Zikora is in denial and questions how a beautiful and happy relationship suddenly turns sour. She laments in the following words, "...I didn't question whether it was real, because I knew it was. How could emotions change? Where did it go, the thing that used to be?"(13)

Stage two is the Anger stage which involves hiding many of the emotions and pain one carries. This anger may be redirected at other people and can involve bitterness or resentment. Zikora goes through the anger stage during her grief. Zikora's anger stems from her mother's cold attitude towards her in the labour room by not assisting the doctor in administering the epidural and refusing to encourage her while she goes through labour contractions. Zikora redirects her anger to the nurse, who judgmentally glances at her in reaction to her mother's cold attitude. She expresses:

I felt angry and I felt ugly, and I welcomed both like a bitter refuge... It made no sense to be angry with the nurse, but I was angry. Tears filled my eyes; my anger began to curdle into a darkness close to grief. It really should be Kwame here with me, holding me, sitting on the chair my mother was in finding a way to make a joke about Nutty.

From the above excerpt, Zikora exposes the real reason for her anger which is the alienation she experiences from Kwame in a time of utmost physical and psychological pain.

Stage three involves the Bargaining stage, where the grieving person may feel vulnerable and helpless. In those intense emotions, looking for ways to regain control is not uncommon. Throughout the short story, Zikora displays vulnerability and helplessness as she goes through the emotional break in her relationship with Kwame. The only family member she confides in is her closest cousin Mmiliaku who has gone through a series of trauma in her marriage. She recounts countless the events leading to the birth of her son and her traumatic pregnancy journey. She expresses: "I began to weep because my cousin had grace, and I lacked grace. I cried and cried. I no longer had friends. All the time, I was focused on Kwame. I cried and cried, and even though

people said crying made me feel better, it made me feel frightened and small" (14). The fears Zikora expresses come from the new reality of being a single mother, rejected and left to cater for her son. The fourth stage is depression. This stage may be a quiet stage of grief. Isolation and alienation oneself set in. The victim may feel foggy, heavy, and confused. This stage involves total mental and physical alienation from people. The person grieving deals personally with the grief by wallowing in self-pity, guilt, and regrets. Zikora blames herself for being quite selfish towards becoming a parent and casually informs Kwame about going off the pills. Zikora questions and blames herself in the following words:

Was it how I had told him? Was it because I said it so lightly, so playfully, that there was no question of how I felt? Did he know, too, as I knew, that I was pregnant even as I was telling him that I might be?... I could have been clearer when I stopped the pill, we could have talked plainly, as we talked about so much. I didn't want to give him a chance to say he didn't want a child? Now I was blaming myself (14-15).

The fourth stage is the most emotionally draining stage, which in some cases, can be harmful. Depression, in some cases, leads to suicide, where the grieving person might feel a sense of worthlessness about life.

The fifth and last stage is known as the Acceptance stage. The acceptance stage is not necessarily a happy or uplifting stage of grief and does not mean one has moved past the grief. It does, however, mean that one has accepted it and understood what it means in your life now. Zikora, towards the end of the story, accepts that she might end up being a single mother to her son. She has fully come to terms with Kwame's rejection. Zikora does not heal entirely but is ready to move on with her life and focus on her newborn son. Zikora ponders the need to reach Kwame again to repair their relationship, but she accepts his decision. Zikora expresses thoughts of acceptance in the following words:

I missed Kwame. I looked ahead and saw a future dead with the weight of his absence. I thought of getting a new number and calling him to tell him we could make it work, that he could do as little as he wanted as a father just as long as he was there. But I was wearied of his rejection, his ignoring my texts, his blocking my number, and I felt translucent, so fragile that one more rejection would make me come fully undone. (27)

Physical Effect of Hybridity in "Zikora"

Alienation

Alienation involves self-division, isolation, estrangement, the duality of experience, the deep unrest from human beings, and some essential aspects of their nature or society, often resulting in feelings of powerlessness or helplessness. Alienation can be internal or external. It identifies a distinct kind of psychological or social ill. Internal alienation stems from being out of touch with yourself in different ways, mainly being unable to coordinate one's thoughts and circumstances of one's actions. External alienation involves estrangement experienced by people and the environment at large.

Zikora, the main character, expresses internal and external alienation due to the pain caused by grief surrounding the conception and birth of her son. Psychological pain in the form of frustration, anger, hopelessness, helplessness, and shame envelops Zikora. These psychological pains of grief transform into physical pain. She explains: "My head pounded and throbbed, and my vision fogged over. I worried that my stress was harming the baby, and the worry added layers to my stress. I called Mmiliaku again sobbing, saying I was scared to do this alone, I was scared to be alone" (16). Zikora isolates herself from colleagues and some close family members and wallows in self-guilt, shame, disappointment, and confusion. She does this to avoid prying and judging stares. In her

words: "everyone at work knows I was dumped while pregnant, I told Mmiliaku. 'I hate the way they look at me'" (13). Pregnant women need company, support, love, care, companionship and less stress during their journey. Zikora does not enjoy any support and experiences alienation from her mother until she returns home from the hospital. Her mother exhibits a cold attitude towards Zikora by refusing to assist the doctor in administering the epidural and proffer words of encouragement while in labour.

While in the most profound form of pain from childbirth, she still reaches out to Kwame, who ignores her calls and texts. The physical pain transcends to psychological torture beyond comprehension. She reacts thus:

I checked my phone, still nothing from Kwame. I sent another text: **your son**. I felt ragged and hopeless, high on my desperation. I had already ripped up my dignity, so I might as well scatter the pieces... I closed my eyes. In my head, there was a queue of emotions I could not name, wanting to be tried out one after the other. A fog blanketed me, a kind of deadness. I didn't cry; crying seemed so ordinary to this moment (19).

The excerpt above represents the climax of the torture Zikora feels. Tears are no longer suitable to express the level of hurt from alienation.

Conclusion

The study has shown how the blending of two cultural values can trigger an urgent need for adjustment, and when there is little or no balance, psychological and physical effects set in. The short story, *Zikora*, portrays the protagonist who grieves over the pathetic strain in her relationship with Kwame. As stated in the earlier parts of the paper, migration in the twenty-first century has become the most recurring international phenomenon as thousands of people leave their home countries for their host countries mainly for economic, safety and educational purposes. Migrants are often faced with the problem of adapting to the culture and values of the host country.

With the adoption of Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief, the study showed the possible psychological and physical effects of grief and alienation and raised awareness of the need for intending migrants to be psychologically ready for unexpected occurrences relating to the issues in "*Zikora*".

Zikora represents one out of many migrants who are faced with issues that stem from hybridity.

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