

Different social groups in jumping monkey hill by chimamanda ngozi adichie

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



“ Jumping Monkey Hill” is a short story included in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck*. In the story, a group of writers from different parts of Africa gathers for a two-week workshop at Jumping Monkey Hill, a resort outside Cape Town. The participants write a story during the first week and review their work during the second. The workshop is organized by a white, British man named Edward Campbell, who attempts to mold the writers into his vision of what an African writer should be. Edward and Isabel are represented as privileged, stereotypical, and ignorant to show the discrimination and maltreatment of white Westerners to Africans when they are in power. The African writers are represented as oppressed and quiet to show how they abide by those in power. The Ugandan is represented as being stuck between the two social groups because he is the workshop leader, but also African.

When running the workshop, Edward and Isabel’s privilege, stereotypical behaviour, and ignorance show their discrimination and maltreatment of Africans. Edward is described by the British as having a “ posh” accent, portraying him as a stereotypical rich, old, white man (95). Isabel’s ignorance is evident when saying that Ujunwa must have come from Nigerian royal stock because of her “ exquisite bone structure” (99). This implies that Isabel believes most African women as not capable of being beautiful. Throughout the story, Edward makes several ironic comments while continually dismissing numerous African experiences from the workshop writers. This is because he believes that his perspective of “ the African” experience is the final one. Ujunwa was skeptical of eating ostrich at one of the first dinners and didn’t know that people ate it, leading Edward to

laugh “ good-naturedly” and say that “ of course ostrich was an African staple” (101). Saying “ of course” contributes to Edward’s arrogance and it is ironic that Edward, a European, is telling Ujunwa, a Nigerian, which foods are African staples. Edward’s ignorance is further revealed when he criticizes the Senegalese women’s story about coming out to her parents. He says that “ homosexual stories of this sort weren’t reflective of Africa” (108). This suggests that Edward believes that people do not come out to their parents in Africa, although the story is true. Edward and Isabel are represented as privileged, stereotypical, and ignorant towards the discriminated against and maltreated African writers.

The African writers attending the workshop keep quiet and are oppressed by Edward, however, they abide by him. Over the course of the workshop, Ujunwa tries not to notice that Edward’s eyes were never on her face and instead, fixated on her body. After Ujunwa asks if Edward wants her to stand up for him, he replies by saying, “ I’d rather like you to lie down for me” (106). She laughs at Edward’s comment because many of the women at the workshop have been socialized into believing that harassment is allowed. Similar to the Senegalese woman, Edward criticizes the Zimbabwean writer’s story for being “ passé,” arguing that there are more important issues to write about in Zimbabwe (107). Albeit Ujunwa did not know what Edward meant, the rest of the writers remained silent, said goodnight, and walked to their cabins. Despite Edward’s behaviour being inappropriate, none of the writers call him out because “ Edward was connected and could find [the writers] a London agent” and there was “ no need to close doors to

opportunity” (113). Like many other women in the story, Ujunwa feels that she needs to keep quiet in order to keep the peace. Ujunwa feels betrayed after the other writers have noticed the way Edward leers at her. The African writers are represented as quiet and oppressed, showing how they abide by Edward.

The Ugandan is represented as being stuck between the group of privileged white Westerners and the group of oppressed Africans because he is the workshop leader and African. When getting picked up by Edward at the airport, the Ugandan “ bowed as he shook Edward’s hand with both of his” (97). This is because the Ugandan is meeting Edward for the first time and wants to make a good first impression. The Ugandan won the Lipton African Writers’ Prize the year before and is given the honour of leading the workshop. The Ugandan replies to Edward’s questions with “ toadying answers,” leaning forward to speak only to Edward and ignoring the other writers (98). This caused Ujunwa to dislike him even more. The Ugandan addresses Edward because he must appeal to him. After Ujunwa reads her true story about a young woman who was sexually harassed while working for a bank, Edward remarks that the story is “ implausible” and similar to “ agenda writing” (114). However, the Ugandan praises it as a strong and believable story. Even though Ujunwa thought the Ugandan was obsequious towards Edward, the Ugandan has the confidence to say what he believes being the workshop leader. Being African and the workshop leader, the Ugandan is stuck between the two social groups in this story.

In conclusion, three social groups are represented in this short story in different ways and for different reasons. Edward and Isabel are an elderly, rich, British couple who are privileged, stereotypical, and ignorant of African culture and traditions. The quiet and oppressed African writers attending the workshop abide by those who are in power, specifically Edward. Finally, the Ugandan workshop leader is stuck between the privileged white Westerners and the oppressed Africans.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “ Jumping Monkey Hill.” *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Random House, 2009.