

Representation of a social group in jumping monkey hill from the thing around you...

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



“ Jumping Monkey Hill” from “ The Thing Around Your Neck” is a short story published in 2009, written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The story revolves around the ideas of how Africans are perceived by Europeans. Adichie narrates the anecdotal encounters of African scholars at a writer’s workshop. The writer’s workshop happens at a resort in South Africa called “ Jumping Monkey Hill”. Besides the namesake of the retreat and short story, ‘ Jumping Monkey Hill’ uncovers the generalizations that depict Africans as a primitive people. This essay will focus on how and why Europeans [as a social group] are represented in a particular way.

‘ Jumping Monkey Hill’ is an ironically fittingly title of the short story. It serves to fortify the generalizations of simple people and indigenous African culture and yet, the African writers or characters at Jumping Monkey Hill do not support this primordial role. Though later the reader will learn that the resort was chosen by Edward, a European workshop coordinator.

Throughout the short story, Adichie investigates the bogus impression of Africa that Edward, accepts to be valid. Immediately shes kicks off the story by, portraying Jumping Monkey Hill as “ the sort of place where she imagined affluent tourists would dart around taking pictures of lizards” Through this setting, Adichie depicts Europeans as individuals who are progressively keen on affirming their current ideas of Africa- a crude place of unadulterated wilderness and safari- than really learning about Africa, its kin and culture. Adichie appears to accept that the reader additionally has these preconceived ideas and decisively indicates them to be false, for she states how tourists “ return home still mostly unaware that there are more black

people than red-capped lizards in South Africa". This doing begins to challenge the reader's very own impression of Africa, and the reader starts to become critical of characters in the story who keep up these generalizations. This is the first time Adichie exposes the ignorance of Europeans to break down the image that the 'West' has constructed for Africa.

Edward is the embodiment of somebody who clutches on to his own view and he belittles those whom he esteems do not perceive Africa the same manner in which he does. This is first shown during a supper at the workshop. When Ujunwa, becomes wary of eating ostrich- she isn't aware people eat ostrich. Edward then laughs and says, " Ofcourse ostrich is an African staple'. The expression ' Ofcourse' adds to Edward's haughtiness and ironically Edward, a European, tells Ujunwa, a local Nigerian, which foods are African staples. His ignorance is uncovered through the way that he puts forth broad expressions about Africa overall instead of taking into account the regional cultural differences. Here Adichie not only brings to light how Africa is misperceived as a country but also suggests how the arrogance of Europeans builds on to the stereotyping and reveals Europeans as deeply misinformed people who would rather believe what is necessary to add to the image of wilderness and safari.

On a particular afternoon Ujunwa and other writers come together in the dining room and discuss " why beer should be banned at the dinner table because Edward thought it was proper and breakfast at eight was too early nevermind that Edward said it was the right time and the smell of his pipe

was nauseating”. This is an example of how Edward believes his nature of European etiquette is superior over African culture and further evidence especially that Edward thought it was “ proper” confirms his view and reinforces the stereotype of an uncultured and primitive Africa. This could also contribute to the colonial image that Europeans represent in Africa where Edward imposes his culture on the African writers. In response to the discussion Ujunwa shouts at Edward, “ This kind of attitude is why they could kill you and herd you into townships and require passes from you before you could walk on your own land!”. Ujunwa’s words refer to the lack of resistance from the writers and to the ‘ Apartheid Era’ which lasted in South Africa from 1948-1994 also marking South Africa’s colonial transfer from the British crown to the Dutch. Her use of the pronoun ‘ you’ refers to the Africans and ‘ they’ referring to Europeans.

Edward further uncovers his ignorance and faked enthusiasm for Africa when he investigates the Senegalese writer’s short story about revealing her sexuality. Her story is however completely non-fictional, yet Edward does not trust it to be plausible. He declares that “ homosexual stories of this sort were not reflective of Africa” and how he doesn’t talk as an “ Oxford-trained Africanist, but as one who is keen on the real Africa and not the imposing of Western ideas on African venues”. Adichie clarifies that Edward only needs writing that strengthens African stereotypes. Regardless he keeps up a ‘ us-versus-them’ mentality and holds that Africans are completely different from the rest of the world. He neglects to perceive that the Africans he associates with every day are the no different to his ‘ Western’ counterparts, and more

so asks “ how African is it for a person to tell her family that she is homosexual?” Through Edward, Adichie exposes Europeans who see Africa not as a part of the modern world, rather as demonstration of primitive human behaviour.

Adichie moreover conveys the dissatisfaction that Africans – and maybe other minority groups- feel when they encounter these smaller scale animosities and comparative remarks. Ujunwa is continually made irate by Edward’s remarks, and asks to her kindred essayists, “ Why do we always say nothing?” In spite of the fact that this inquiry was in light of Edward’s suggestive remarks to Ujunwa, it applies regardless to the hostile behaviour that she and others witness. Adichie implies frustration of encountering people misinformed about Africa and leaves it an open question as it applies to the Europeans who rather ‘ mean well’ which contributes to the image of the ‘ charitable white saviour’ as seen typically amongst UN workers.

In relation to the ‘ charitable white saviour’, Adichie goes on to challenge this stereotype. When Ujunwa wears a white-toothed shaped pendant which Isabel, the white South African and animal rights activist praises for being faux ivory. Ujunwa sarcastically says that it was in fact real ivory and almost adds that she has killed the elephant herself. Here Adichie tests the humour of Isabel falling perfectly into the role the ‘ white saviour’.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. London: Fourth Estate and Knopf publishing houses, 2009.