

**IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP COMPLEXITIES IN NIKKI MAY'S *WAHALA* AND  
LOLA AKINNADE AKERSTROM'S *IN EVERY MIRROR SHE'S BLACK***

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BENIN CITY**

**DECEMBER, 2022**

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE  
REQUIREMENT OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONS) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE**

**DECEMBER, 2022**

## **CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by **Veno Eberechi GREEN** (Miss) in the department of English and Literature University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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**Dr. Lilian Onyeiwu**  
**(Supervisor)**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to everyone in complex relationship situations where identity and cultural differences is the root of the many challenges faced, it is important that you know that you are not alone.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank God Almighty for the strength, creative juices and grace given to me to write this research. The insight and help I got for this research could only have come from Him.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the core realities of identity and culture within human relationships. It illustrates the major influences culture and identity play within human relationships and various complexities that ensue. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory whose focus on the depiction of various factors, internal and external, that influence human actions. The study examines these complexities in view of how these factors influence human behaviour, actions and inactions in their interactions and relationships with others. The data used in this research was gotten from two primary texts whose focus is on culture and identity. The texts, *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lola Akinmade Akerstorm and *Wahala* by Nikki May both highlight the difficulties found in several types of human connections, including romantic, platonic, and familial ones.. The study examines the multicultural setting and characters as a factor for identity formation and influence to the various complexities that occur within the various character relationships. It also examines the post-colonial feature of the work illustrating the ideas of migration, cultural duality and racism and their imprints on the identities of the characters and their relationships respectively. There is also the examination of the characters and the various qualities that contribute to these complexities. Their fears, imperfections and evolution in perceptions, actions and reactions during the work that contribute to some of the challenges they face in their relationships. There is the illustration of certain strategies employed by these groups to navigate through each of these complexities. The study shows that the evolving breed of multiculturalism, the various constraining realities and complexities that are faced by members of multicultural societies is a major effect of post-colonialism.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

African Literature can be defined as literature that is embellished in African cultural ideals. The very goal of African literature is for the illustration and establishment of African culture and identity. Like Tanure Ojaide says, “Literature in Africa has been and remains an affirmation of faith in one’s cultural ideals” (45). The belief in the authenticity and superiority of the African culture and identity is the reason for which most African writers write. They try to defend and ascertain its authenticity and superiority, rewriting narratives that were once created by unknowledgeable external forces and entities. Ojaide presents this fact by saying, “African writers in affirming their faith in their native culture defend it against alien encroachment and prejudices” (46). This is said to be the goal of African literature.

Furthermore, African literature is founded on the premise of the African experience. These experiences are embedded in our culture and identity as well as external dispositions to it. Taking a cue from Ojaide’s paper on Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches in Literature in which he highlights the opinion that “every literary canon exists in the context of people’s overall experience and aesthetic values”, he establishes the idea that the “African culture is related to the African experience” (4).

It can therefore be said that there would be no African literature if there were no culture or experience. These African experiences often transcend beyond local frontiers into global societies; many of which stem from colonial and post-colonial experiences and narratives. Ojaide, in alignment with Soyinka, expresses the idea that “the reality of Africans has to be acknowledged and the modernist impulse of Europe has to be part of the historical experience of

colonization...” (qtd. In Ojaide, 5). This opines that the African experience is birthed in the light of cultural and colonial experiences and these experiences form the themes of most African narratives, such as racism, classism, gender inequality, oppression, patriarchy and many more. These themes are often one of the many complexities that most African writers try to address when they write. “Every African writer is a negritudinist, one way or another” (Ojaide, 46).

In speaking of the African culture, it would also be impossible to not reflect on the African identity in the light of its representation in African literature. As established, African literature is an embellishment of the African culture; it would not be out of line to examine the representation of the African identity in African literature through its language and origin. There have been several arguments on the proven authenticity of African literature through its language. Many have argued on the notion to define a literary piece of work as African if it is not written in the indigenous African language. Like Chiweizu laments in Ojaide’s paper on African literature and its language where he speaks on the appreciation of the Bantu language to be showcased in its writing. He says, “I have unshaken belief in the possibility of the Bantu languages and their literature provided the Bantu writers themselves can learn to love their language and use them as vehicles for thought, feeling and will...” (6).

Ojaide, however, does not agree with this notion as he establishes the idea that as much as the use of the African language showcases the authenticity of the work as a piece of African literature, it is not a sole determiner for it. He argues that there are diverse African experiences and these experiences are not limited to seemingly authentic features like language. In his words, “Doubtless, literary works by Africans in indigenous African languages such as Ewe, Sotho, Yoruba and Zulu are African works that have a place in the cannon.... However, a people’s experience is so diverse that it is not limited to authentic and pristine features” (6).

There is also the view of African literature to be defined in the light of the identity of its author. Issah Hassan Tikumah in her paper entitled “African Literature in the Making: From Pre-colonialism to Post-colonialism” summarizes Elizabeth Gunmer’s definition of African literature as “the literature of and from Africa” (3). This definition supports Chiweizu’s argument on the use of African languages in African literature as a proof of its authenticity but also aligns with the idea that the author’s origin is a strong determiner to prove the authenticity of African literature. So, if an author from Africa writes about his or her experiences either in English or in his or her native language, that piece of literature can be considered an African literature.

This also speaks to the concept of identity as being a strong proponent in the cultural makeup of an individual. It can make or mar an individual in terms of his or her lifestyle choices and interactions with others. If the origin of an author can be a strong proof for the class to which their work belongs, then the concept of identity is a much needed conversation to be had when it comes to African literature and its expressions.

## **1.1 Purpose of Study**

This research aims to illustrate the many complexities of culture and identity in a multicultural society using European and African societies as case study. It depicts the various challenges and narratives of the aftermath of post-colonialism on human relationships while presenting the troubling challenges of these interactions such as classism, racism, fetishism and several identity problems.

## **1.2 Scope of Study**

The scope of this research paper covers the complexities that exist in human relationships especially when the concept of identity is a strong factor. The use of the texts *Wahala* by Nikki May and *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lola Akinmade-Akerström in this research is to show and depict the interconnectedness and influence of relationships in identity formation. This research would illustrate the themes of identity and relationship complexities as reflected in the texts depicting them as definite representations of the real life. This study seeks to reveal how the characters' experiences make up the thematic scope of the text.

## **1.3 Research Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative method in its analysis. The data for the analysis is sourced from two primary texts, which are: *Wahala* by Nikki May and *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lola Akinmade-Akerström, Lola both by authors currently living with experiences in cultural diversity and relationships. These authors, although possessing several other works besides the ones used in this research, the texts used in this research embodies the focus of this research in its entirety.

The analysis would be done by reviewing the manner in which the texts depicts the subject matter of this research which is the thematic ideologies of identity and relationship complexities. This research would also include data from secondary sources such as online journals, articles and other resources.

## 1.4 Theoretical Background

This research is founded on two theories: the theory of Post-colonialism and the theory of Psychological Criticism. Art Washington Edu Defines the theory of Post-colonialism as “the ways in which writers from colonized countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from their colonizers. They also examine ways in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of images of the colonized as inferior.” This definition highlights two major ideas, the first being the celebration of cultural identities with the aim to reclaim them from their colonizers and the second examining ways of justification of colonization by the colonial masters. This definition illustrates parts of the central idea embedded in the texts used in this research. These authors illustrate the African culture using the characters’ dressing, mannerisms and ideologies to celebrate and highlight the African culture. Nikki May begins the plot of the text *Wahala* with characters eating African dishes in an African restaurant and depicting a character’s adamancy to be in a love relationship with an African. Akinmade-Akerström, illustrates the effects of post-colonialism and political violence by depicting a major character as a refugee and the subtle racial discrimination she faces at the hands of the authorities of the country she seeks asylum in.

In *a Handbook to Critical Approaches*, Wilfred L Gulhern et al define psychological criticism as “an excellent tool for reading beneath the lines” (8). Depicted through the texts, the authors illustrate the state of mind and experiences of most immigrants with a reflection of their personalities in a multicultural society. Through its characters, the texts explore the theory of psychological criticism. The characters’ experiences and interactions serve as means of expression for the author and in certain situations, the readers also.

It is true that the theory of psychological criticism is a slippery slope of critical analysis in literature due to its varying interpretations and excesses. Most which are depicted through the lens of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory. However, it is seemingly impossible to consider the complexities of human relationships without considering the psychological aspects of the human personality and its influence in human interactions and relations. Unlike other literary theories, the psychological theory is one that combines the obvious literary interpretations with the hidden. It exposes the intent of the human mind, actions, causes and influences. Illustrating the theory of psychological criticism using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Wilfred L Gulhern et al illustrates Freud's contribution to psychology in the book "*The Anatomy of Mental Personality*" as the "examination of the conscious and unconscious mental activity" (154). To Freud, most of all human processes are unconscious and are often driven by an external force which might be natural or supernatural. The Freudian Psychoanalytic theory divides the human mind into three parts: The Id, The Ego and The Superego. These sectioning of the human faculty are done by Freud to illustrate the drivers and influences of human thinking and interaction. As illustrated by Freud, The Id is the faculty responsible for the feeling of pleasure especially in extreme cases where it would be a risk and can cause some form of harm to one's self and to others. In his words: "Freud explains this "obscure inaccessible part of our personality" as "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement with no organization and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle" (34). The Id is a major control and influence for conflict in human relationships. This is illustrated in the actions of several characters in the texts used in this research.

The second faculty stratum as illustrated by Freud is the Ego. The Ego is described to be the rational part of our mental faculty and can be said to be a check and balance for the Id. It

orders on the lines of reality and rationality. It's the part of our brain that helps us weigh reality over imagination and feelings over purpose.

Then there is the last stratum which is the Superego. The Superego functions as both the moral part of our mental makeup as well as a form of balance between the Id and the ego. These three strata as described by Freud can be said to be authentic representations of the human psyche. This description and analysis of the Freudian psychoanalysis is a core aspect of psychological criticism and it is very much reflected in the texts used in this research. It portrays the personality of diverse characters and thus helps us understand why the characters do what they do.

The second theory used in this research is the theory of postcolonialism. M H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, give a definition of Post-colonialism as “an abiding concern with the construction within Western discursive practices of the colonial and post-colonial subject as well as the categories by means of which the subject conceives itself and perceives the worlds within which it lives and acts” (5). This definition projects the opinion that Post colonialism is a reflection of the Western opinions and acts on the colonized subject (both during colonialism and after) and its impact on how it views itself and its interaction with the world. The texts used in this research depict colonized entities and how the European ideals about them form their identity and their interaction with the society at large. It portrays the various complexities involved in navigating their post-colonial experiences and how it affects their identity and relationships.

The theory of post colonialism is illustrated and depicted by several factors, one of which is the setting of the work and another which is the nationality of the characters: African characters in European societies. The characters' experiences are entrenched in the ripple features of post colonialism ranging from racism, classism and fetishization, all of which have core representations in the texts. There is the depiction of post colonialism in the romantic relationships of the characters. Due to the effect of being inhabitants of a multicultural society, the characters engage in romantic relationships with partners of culturally diverse identities from theirs.

There is the setting of the works. Most of the actions take place in European societies majorly ex-colonies and these actions are carried out by African characters. The childhood traumatic experiences of the characters are strong influences to the aggravated nature and display of evil. They are governed quite brutally by their Id. An example is seen in the character of Johnny the Swedish Billionaire who develops a fetish for black women due to bad love encounter in his teens. There are several other illustrations of these theories depicted in the text and would be seen in further analysis in this research.

## **1.5 Review of Related Literature**

The texts *Wahala* by Nikki May and *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lolade Akinmade Akestrom are fairly recent works and as such have no clear cut literary reviews. Therefore, we would examine the reviews of similar works which explore the themes of culture and identity.

Idana Nazari in his journal illustrates the identity complexities highlighted by Adichie in *Americannah* by describing the narrative as “a great example of black people's identity crisis due to wrong treatments and misconceptions” (1). This review of the concept of identity crisis as

illustrated by Adichie is a solid reflection of the identity crisis that the characters in the texts *Wahala* by Nikki May and *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lolade Akinmade Akestrom experiences. In *Wahala*, we see one of the main characters Boo suffering from a state of insecurity and lack of acceptance due to an identity crisis that occurs in her childhood. A product of mixed parentage, a Nigerian Father and a British mother, Boo is teased and mocked for her skin colour which is brown. She also struggles with identifying with her roots. Going with her Nigerian heritage by taking her father's surname as her own, her racist classmates make mockery of the name creating hurtful variations of it. She decides to go with her British roots and takes her mother's surname 'Whyte' but that leads to more mockery and her classmates asking why "‘Whyte’ when you are brown?" In *In Every Mirror She's Black*, Muna is a Somalian refugee foreshadowed to have a difficult sense of acceptance into the Swedish society due to her strong cultural roots. This impression is given by her immigration officer. She struggles with the desire to maintain her culture while being integrated into the Swedish society. Her culture is mocked consistently and at the end of the book, we see her engage in an act of violence to defend herself and her identity.

Nwanyawu Augustine in his paper "Transculturalism, Otherness, Exile and Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americannah*" reviews the themes illustrated in the book as a "reading according to the framework of transculture for it offers up the chronicle of a contact zone where ultimately American, European, African-American and African diaspora experiences, histories and cultures meet, merge and with varying intensity, engage." (32). Nwanyawu's description of the transcultural concept of *Americannah* is quite in line with the transcultural and multicultural ideas in *Wahala* and *In Every Mirror She's Black*. In *Wahala*, the contact zone for transculture is seen in the marital relationships of the characters. There's Boo, the biracial

character who's married to an Italian Didier whose family culture is one that is closely knit together and showcases close ties with family with frequent visits each year to Italy especially on festive holidays. This family culture is totally different from Boo's very distant British family where everyone does not really know much about each other and with the constant numerous children Boo grew up with, keeping in touch with family seemed like a chore. In *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lola Akinmade Akestrom, the transcultural concept is illustrated in the dressing of the characters. The Swedes embrace a less ostentatious style of dressing especially in corporate environments and this proves an issue for them when Kemi brings her Nigerian plus American style of bold and exquisite sense of style to Von Lundin Marketing. This causes them to mock her behind her back and increases their distaste for her.

Benedicte Ledent reviews the concept of inter-cultural relationships and its complexities using "The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears" in her paper "Reconfiguring The African Diaspora in Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*." She writes, "Mengestu problematizes the relationships of this individual with white America but also with other African-American immigrants and African Immigrants (1). Lendent's review of Mengestu' depiction of relationships in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*" illustrates one of the core similarities between the themes in the texts used in this study and Mengestu's work. In *Wahala* by Nikki May, the three main characters, Simi, Boo and Ronke are three friends who meet in the university and become drawn to one another due to their similar cultural backgrounds. They are all biracial women navigating the murky waters of racist Britain and facing the complexity of being both European and African. Their mixed race status is the first familiar grounds to build their friendship on and also the attractive quality they find in each other. The similarity in their Nigerian culture which is reflected in their love for Nigerian meals like Amala, Jollof rice and

many more and their chief rendezvous spot being a Nigerian restaurant are one of the many perks that enhance their relationship like Boo one of the characters in the text illustrates it,

“It wasn’t until Bristol (chosen mainly for its distance from home), where she met Ronke and Simi, that she started to feel comfortable in her skin. They were the first mixed-race people she’d ever spoken to and to them, being brown was an asset, not a liability. It meant you could always fit in – with black people, white people and all shades in between. They pitied the poor souls with one solitary culture, who used fake tan (or worse – bleaching cream). They were proud of being half Nigerian and half English. They loved jollof rice and fish finger sandwiches. They had two football teams to support” (21).

*In Every Mirror She’s Black* by Lola Akinmade Akestrom, we see communal feeling, pride and sense of familiarity that Muna and Kemi experience when they meet each other for the first time in Von Lundin marketing. Despite coming from different countries, the shared continent of Africa and the black colour of their skin are more than enough grounds on which their connections happen. Soon, they share friendly talks and Muna even directs Kemi on places to get African food ingredients in Sweden.

Ogochukwu Ikeagwuonu reviews Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street* as a depiction of altered identities. She writes “how the identities of migrants are easily altered in their new environments...” (2). Using one of the characters in the book Sisi who changes her name from Chioma to Sisi to “depict her new life, creating an alter ego for herself as revealed in the very meaning of the new name”. This narrative is also depicted in *Wahala* by Nikki May through Boo, one of the main characters who decide to change her looks to attract her white boss. She installs

a weave, buys expensive and fitted clothing, items she is not comfortable in and would hardly adorn herself with on a normal day. Boo's altering of her image and physical appearance to become acceptable to a white man is a clear picture of how the need for cultural acceptance would drive one to alter their identity in a new environment. *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lola Akinnade Akestrom portrays Yagiz, one of the main character require an alteration of Muna's identity. Yagiz's insistence of Muna's changing from a full hijab to a small scarf to work as a cleaner in Von Lundin Marketing is a reflection of altered identities for migrants. Muna is from a Somalia, a predominantly Muslim country whose culture and traditions are infused with their religious beliefs, beliefs she carries everywhere she goes. Yagiz's demand of Muna's alteration of her dress sense which is concrete reflection of her identity and culture is a depiction of how immigrants often have to undergo an identity alteration not to offend the "supposed sensibilities" of the European society.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

Using the theories of post-colonialism and psychological criticism, this research illustrates a major effect of post colonialism which includes multiculturalism, its various expressions and the diverse constraining realities and complexities that are faced by members of multicultural societies in their relationships and culture and the psychological effect to their identity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CULTURE AND IDENTITY: A MULTICULTURAL WORLD IN *WAHALA* AND *IN*

#### *EVERY MIRROR SHE'S BLACK*

##### 2.1 Introduction

Multiculturalism can be defined as an offshoot of post colonialism. Multiculturalism deals with the management of modern geo-political variety in former imperial centers and their ex-colonies alike (Gunew,1). This concept emphasizes the idea that colonialism's effects and aftereffects served as the foundation for the majority of multicultural cultures. It demonstrates how the cultural diversity of the colonized areas and their colonial rulers are related.

There is also the simple fact that there are a variety of difficulties and complexities that could arise due to cultural interference in a multicultural society whose primary characteristic is the presence of cultural diversity. Although, some may define multiculturalism as the acceptance of the various cultural diversities that exists because of migration and other post-colonial factors, the realities of this interference may be far from the ideal notion. Like Eriksen describes the concept of culture, "Culture can be understood as a synonym for sharing ideas about the world. In all groups and human races there are various viewpoints of the world and life. It is very difficult to find exact barriers between particular cultures". This definition by Eriksen illustrates the idea that multiculturalism is an infusion of cultures that may lead to certain complexities due to its difference. These complexities are reflected in the individual's identity, experiences and general overview of the world.

Using a cue from Langston Hughes in his poem “*I TOO*”, Trotman expresses the idea that “multiculturalism is a dynamic concept that can energize the individual into searching for an authentic depiction of self and group life”. This definition represents the idea of a quest for identity and alienation that multiculturalism often brings. The challenges of multiculturalism, its influences in human relationships, the individual’s identity and sense of self which can be explored through the themes of racism, classism, Fetishism, insecurity and pride are the main bedrock of this research.

## **2.2 Instances of Multiculturalism in the Texts**

In the primary texts explored in this research, the concept of multiculturalism is boldly illustrated. The first idea of multiculturalism is exemplified through the setting of the texts. The two texts contain European settings with characters of different races. *Wahala* is set in London which is a central European city with diverse nationalities as its inhabitants and citizens. *In Every Mirror She’s Black* is set in America and Sweden. The beginning part of the plot set in America showcasing the live of one of the major characters Kemi. Then Sweden, the second setting depicts diverse nationalities.

There is the depiction of multiculturalism in their marital choices. Boo and Simi are strong constructs of the effects of a multicultural society as they are married to men of other nationalities and cultures, one French, the other British. *In Every Mirror She’s Black* by Lola Akinnade Akestrom tells the tale of three women of diverse cultures who find themselves in a society with a totally opposite culture from theirs. The writer’s use of three racially and culturally different characters existing in a foreign society depicts the view of multiculturalism. Kemi, a Nigerian Advertising guru, Brittany, a Jamaican air hostess and Muna, a Somalian

refugee all connected by a man of a totally different culture to theirs. Jon Von Lundin, a Swiss wealthy businessman living in Sweden.

These women's romantic choices reflect an effect of the existence of a multicultural society. Kemi has mostly dated men of other races; from Americans to Europeans and to members of other races and nationalities than herself. The book ends with her in a love relationship with Tobias, a Swedish- Gambian – as close to Africa as she could get. Brittany falls in love with Jon Von Lundin and marries him. The embodiment and illustrious display of cultural diversity breeds the effects of multiculturalism and its effects on human relationships using character interactions and associations as a model.

### **2.3 Culture and Identity Complexities in a Multicultural Society**

As earlier established, a multicultural society is a by-product of post colonialism. It is the direct impact of colonial manifestations. As illustrated in the *Oxford Handbook of Multiculturalism* “The cultural contact and mixing resulting from migration, colonization, economic globalization, multicultural policies, multi-nation states (e.g., Belgium, Spain), as well as fast travel and media exposure explains why more and more individuals describe themselves as bicultural or multicultural” (Benet-Martínez, Hong 1). The concept of migration which is an ideology rooted in colonialism – the movement of several western explorers to foreign lands for economic voyages and adventures – is the foundation on which multiculturalism is built. However, with the evolution and globalization of the world, reasons for migration have evolved and can be identified to be a search for better opportunities, exposure of knowledge and overall desire for growth.

This idea of migration has led to the evolution of cultural trends and ideologies. One of which is the concept of cultural duality. Culture as we know it is the foundation of an individual's identity, as defined by Kroeber & Kluckhohn's analogy identified in *Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity*, "Culture is a network of shared systems of knowledge, consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling, and interacting with other people, as well as a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world" (56). This definition highlights the opinion that culture can be influenced by migration and consistent interaction with other individuals. It opines that one's ideology and known system of actions can be changed due to interactions with members of different cultures that they know. These interactions come with a certain level of complexity for most individuals.

One of such interference and complexity is the concept of cultural duality. Due to migration, individuals experience dual cultural parentage; parents from different cultures and systems. In *Wahala*, the main characters all possess dual cultural identity. Simi, Boo, Ronke and Isobel all have a Nigerian and a British heritage. An infusion of an African and European parentage gives us the first instance of multiculturalism. This concept of mixed heritage creates a psychological effect on the identity and personalities of the characters. It drives their actions and inactions.

## **2.4 Classism**

The existence of a classist society is one of the many examples of cultural complexity. A psychological idea that fosters a perception of cultural superiority within a civilization is a result of the existence of multiple cultures and social systems. The possibility of class stratification in contexts of multiculturalism and cultural variety has been raised. It is possible for certain

members of a race or socioeconomic class to believe they are superior to other identities and cultural groups in a society. There is often the expectation that members of a multicultural society should endeavour to accept and support the plural composition of society especially in the case of culture. Like E. Murdock puts it in his essay “the psychological aspects of multiculturalism involve individuals’ acceptance and support for a plural composition of society...” (2). Unfortunately, this is not the case. More often than not, there is the opinion that one culture is seen to be more superior to the other.

An example can be seen in the text *In Every Mirror She’s Black* by Lola Akinnade Akestrom where Kemi, one of the main characters in the text makes a career move to Sweden in the hope of discovering herself and finding a love match ends in a classist struggle in the modernist classist Sweden. Kemi experiences the unilateral superiority of the Swedish society which is brutal to foreigners who are usually members not of their class or country and a refusal to acknowledge anyone’s skill or intelligence. Like she describes it when she faces the Von Ludin’s Marketing team’s opposition to her idea of portraying Johnny as a face of the Bachman account, “She witnessed that wordless solidarity in action, and it was quite remarkable. This was the superglue that created impenetrable systems for people on the outside like her and protected men like him. But Jonny wanted Bachman at all costs, and Kemi had convinced him how to get what he wanted” (195). The display of classism is further identified when Ragnar is brought in to oversee her work despite her effortless success with the Bachman account because she is seen not as one of them and possessing an inadequate cultural lifestyle.

Her possession of an American background which is a fuel for her lifestyle (dressing and speech) and African background is seen inferior to the Swedish modernist society. Her colleagues acknowledge her difference not with tolerance but with a superior mindset. This is

seen in their conversations about her behind her back which Muna describes as a hatred for her “Americanness”. Muna describes her colleagues’ derision to Yasmin and Khadija and Yasmin’s summation of the regular Swedish attitude:

“There was this beautiful sister there,” Muna continued. “Dressed like she had money. I was so proud of her. But you should have heard what they said when she left.”.....  
“They don’t like her Americanness. But she’s from Africa too. Nigeria. I don’t know what she does, but they were complaining about more brown and Black faces... something like that...” “They could have said worse,” Yasmin said. “Like placing bets on who she fucked to get that fine job!” (143)

Another illustration of classism is depicted in Akerstrom’s winding of the existence of the three female around a rich white man illustrated in the character of Jon Von Ludin. The three women experience an upscale and better life through the influence of Jon Von Lundin. Kemi experiences redemption from her boring life as a result of a job offer from Jon, Brittany experiences a lifestyle upgrade from a middle-class flight attendant to the stay at home wife of a wealthy business tycoon and Muna is extradited from a war-inflicted zone of misery into a life of dreams and opportunities. These complexities induce a psychological effect on the characters’ identity and sense of self. In Kemi’s desire to fit and create a sense of belonging, she makes certain reckless decisions driven by her id as depicted by Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. She almost hooks up with her direct boss Ragnar while in a great relationship with Tobias. She lets her lust and need for acceptance drive her to self-destructive path until her ego steps in, largely influenced by Ragnar’s statement “You would have been one sweet fuck” which brings her to resolution that she would never be seen as one of them but an item to be used for when the occasion demands it. Muna adores Johnny and sees him as her savior. She cowers in his presence

and almost makes herself non-existent whenever she is around him. The constant desire to belittle herself and put the attitude of an ant whose existence is dependent on Johnny's sugar is a reflection of how Akestrom's winding of the three main characters around Johnny impacts their self-worth.

## 2.5 Racial Prejudice

Racial Prejudice is a cultural complexity that is most prevalent in a multicultural society. According to Taylor and Pettigrew, racial prejudice is defined as “a negative emotion or affective feeling toward the target group (antipathy) and a poorly founded belief about members of the target group (a stereotype)” (qtd. In Quillian, 300). *Merriam Webster* defines it as hostility toward people of another race or colour or an alien culture.” (7).

From these definitions the idea of racial prejudice is founded on belief. There is the presence of the belief that one racial group is inferior or superior to another. These beliefs maybe unfounded and based on years of misconceptions but they still exist. There is also the deduction that race is founded on difference and for it to occur, there has to be the co-existence of different cultural and national identities.

We see a depiction of the ideas captured in the definitions above through the experiences of the characters in Akerstrom's *In Every Mirror She's Black*. Khadijah complains on the condescending treatment of the Somalian immigrants in Sweden. Through the use of flashback, she tells the tale of how a young teenage refugee complains of Swedish citizens treating the immigrants like animals, not acknowledging their existence in the Swedish society. In her words “The boys at the center have been talking a lot,” Khadiija adds. “They won't even look at me,”

one boy named Ibrahim said before breaking down in tears. He had just turned sixteen. “Who doesn’t look at another human being? Who doesn’t.” (215).

The immigrants having tasted the racist society of Sweden revolt against it when one of their own is boldly mistreated. Akerstrom tells of the violence that occur using flashback. Gunhild announces Khadijah’s arrest to Muna and Akerstorm fills the blank of the story going back to the onset of the violence

“Gunhild pulled her into a hug and held the younger woman as Muna shuddered in her embrace. The riots had begun when a security guard had dragged a preteen Somali boy on the ground like a goat protesting its slaughter over a chocolate bar he had stolen from a kiosk. The aftermath of Tensta’s riots had lured in a swarm of international media, quick to lap up a story spotlighting trouble in paradise” (232).

Another character in the text, Muna, describes her experience with the immigrant officer who infers the opinion that regardless of the amount of time Muna spends in Sweden, her identity would never be acknowledged nor would she be recognized as an upstanding member of the Swedish Society. “If you’re good, you can get citizenship in five years,” he said. He then stressed the low probability of her becoming fully Swedish, since she came from a “strong” culture that was hard to shake. He spoke this to her without reservation” (70).

These impressions of the racial prejudice on the respective characters induce recklessness to their actions. Khadija, driven by a strong desire to ascertain her culture and system in the society, ignores her state of probationary citizenship and engages in the riots which leads her to being thrown in jail and lose out on ever becoming a citizen of Sweden. Her racist experience becomes a psychological trigger to incite her id to stupid decisions. Muna’s racist experience and

consistent loss of everyone in her fuels her loneliness and alienation that leads to her committing suicide at the end. There is a resignation to the idea that she would never be accepted in the Swedish society and with the crushing loneliness that accompanies Gunhild's death, she resigns to fate's twisted arm of death.

In *Wahala* by Nikki May, the author depicts racial prejudice through the experience of several characters, one of which is Boo. Boo while dropping off her daughter at school is mistaken to be a nanny by a fellow parent (who is white) due to the colour of her skin and overall appearance. The woman's instant assumption that Boo could be a Nanny and not a fellow parent because of her skin colour is an acute representation of the racist atmosphere in most multicultural societies. The white parent doesn't try to confirm if Boo is actually a Nanny, she just asks Boo if she could work for her and thrusts her daughter and a business card at Boo hoping she takes care of the little girl and rushes off to work. The generic assumption that Black people would always be members of the low value labour chain system working as Nannies, cleaners and other low level jobs is a racist ideology the author tries to portray in the text. Another example can be seen through Simi's experience with her boss. The constant assigning to Simi certain projects based on her race and alluding it to an "Urban Vibe" which is a code word for her being black. Like Simi describes it:

"Her boss, a Queen Bitch, had stumped up for real champagne, not cheap prosecco. Everyone had cheered when Simi had walked into the boardroom. She had felt triumphant. But only for a second, until QB's toast. "As soon as I saw the brief," she'd said, "I knew Simi was right for this. This brand was crying out for her urban vibe." Urban was her way of saying black. Simi had downed her champagne through gritted

teeth. She wanted to win because she was good – smart, creative, persuasive – not because she was black” (61).

Simi’s experience is not one that is isolated but can be said to be the experience of thousands of black women in the foreign corporate world. There is also the racist experience that Kayode and Ronke witness after Ronke reports Mr Owen, a terrible stalker to the police. The police arrive at the scene where Kayode is trying to warn Mr Owen off Ronke and instantly assumes he’s trouble. They start to arrest him and go to placate Mr Owen the stalker. The instant assumption that Kayode due to the colour of his skin is the troubling party is a depiction of the modern day racist society. It becomes even sadder that Ronke is crippled by fear to even speak and the police wouldn’t believe her if she did save for Lisa, her white neighbour’s intervention who clears up Kayode’s name and helps him avoid getting arrested. The idea that the police would only release Kayode based off a white person’s testimony who isn’t even the victim of the crime is a shocking revelation of aggressive racism in today’s society. Like Lisa describes it, “Classic unconscious bias,” she said. “I did a course at work. Don’t ask questions, just take one look and decide white man good, black man bad. It’s disgusting.”(182). There is also the depiction of situational irony in the actions of the police officers. The instant assumption of that Kayode, the black man is the cause of trouble whereas in this case, the white man is the actual cause of trouble is ironic. The idea that members of the Caucasian community view themselves to be superior to the blacks especially in cases of misdemeanor and violence is ironic, painting themselves to devoid of wrong acts and actions.

## 2.6 Fetishism

Another cultural and identity complexity is the Fetishism of cultures and identity by members of a race to another. This is not an acceptance of difference but an unhealthy obsession with the personality and lifestyle of a particular cultural or racial group usually one which is seen as inferior by a seemingly superior cultural or racial group. The concept of Fetishism is both a psychological and a cultural complexity. It can be illustrated in line with Freud's psychoanalytic theory in which an external force controls our human actions. Like Guerin describes it "Freud provided convincing evidence, through his many carefully recorded case studies, that most of our actions are motivated by psychological forces over which we have very limited control"

This idea is boldly illustrated in the text used in this research, *In Every Mirror She's Black* by Lola Akinnade Akerstom. The author through the character of Jon Von Lundin portrays the negative effects of racial fetish. Jon Von Lundin, a Swedish Billionaire falls in love (more like lust) with a Brittany Rae, a black Jamaica model turned air hostess. Jon's entire love affair and eventual marriage is based on a fetish he has for Black women and in fact a black woman he once loved. Throughout the entire text, Johnny's love life is described to have been populated with women of African-American or Caribbean origin before Brittany's arrival. Johnny's fetish, an idea known to his family but one they protect quite vehemently until circumstance causes them to reveal it, is relegated not just to the colour of his beloved's skin but to the appearance and personality of a long lost lover. Like the author describes Svea and Anthonia's reactions to meeting Brittany for the first time because of their knowledge of Johnny's annoying fetish, "Jonny called out to two fair women who had been huddled together in conversation. If Astrid had been rude, then Brittany wasn't sure what to make of Svea and Antonia. Because when they turned and saw her, their faces paled like they'd seen a ghost"

(171). Anthonia and Svea's reactions to meeting Brittany for the first time was a silent acknowledgment of Johnny's fetish and a foreshadowing to their revealing of Johnny's fetish to Brittany at the later parts of the story.

Johnny's family and friends secrecy to his fetish is display of the classist and somewhat condescending behavior of the European elite. Johnny's fetish is non-violent but quite harmful habit is a direct effect of a multicultural society. His fetish egged on by his mental condition but started by a teenage relationship which his racist parents were against but led to a long line of sexual and relationship fetishes right until Brittany which took on a brazen turn when he married her.

Like Anthonia explains the history to Brittany at the end of the text, she says: "At sixteen, Jonny had been an exchange student at an international school in London for a semester. He had mailed them this picture with a hastily scribbled note saying he had met the love of his life, a Black Brit named Maya Daniels. The beginning embers of his proclivity" (329)

Johnny's Fetishism of Brittany is carried on down to their child whom he names after his late lover. It streams down to other intimate but not so important details like dressing their Swedish home just like their London home in honour of Maya and he's intense stare of Brittany during intimate moments. Like Brittany describes it:

She caught him staring at her through her vanity mirror. He kept peering intensely through his reflection, his eyes dark and brooding in the low light of their room.... Those thoughts that had been milling within her since she met him— now paired

with this leering look as he watched her undress for the night— pointed to one conclusion: Her husband had a fetish”.

The knowledge of Johnny’s fetish was known even to Brittany but as with most relationships involving wealth and comfort, the ability to accept such notions is seemingly difficult. Johnny’s fetish creates the root for the eventual break in the emotional harmony in his relationship with Brittany.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Culture and identity is a dominant factor of in any society especially in cases of interpersonal relationships. The characters in the texts used in this research undergo several influences of culture in their respective relationships be it romantic relationships, platonic friendships and business relationships. This influence of culture and identity see them grapple with vital decisions, come to honest facts about their relationships and solidify the existing bond between themselves.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RELATIONSHIP AND CHARACTER

#### 3.1 Introduction

Characters are one of the most important parts of every literary work. It is through the characters that the intent of the author or playwright is revealed. According to M H Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, he defines characters as “the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it—the dialogue—and from what they do—the action.”(57). This definition buttresses the earlier stated opinion of characters being the defining feature of a work’s trajectory. Therefore, this goes without saying that a reader’s interpretation of a work is dependent on his understanding and view of the character’s actions and words.

Abrams definition also includes the presence of certain qualities be it emotional, moral and intellectual. These qualities also enhance the interpretation of the character and the central idea of the work. They form the crux of the characters conflict, resolution and the various complexities that would and may exist in a work of art. Like Daniel R. Schwarz illustrates the process of depicting a character in a literary work as “depending upon the selection of one individual from among many possible residents of a city or geographical area, among many possible professions, among many members of a social class” (70). This illustrates the idea that every single depiction of a character is significantly important as it enhances the plot and determines the trajectory of the story. The characters’ actions are what direct the plot of a story. Without the character carrying out specific actions both physical action and inaction a literary

work of art cannot exist. With these truths established, it would be fallible to write a work of research which defines the concept of identity, culture and the principle of relationships in today's world without giving a full consideration to the concept of character in a literary work.

Furthermore, one can define one of the many functions of a character as a representation of certain human qualities as influenced by the human mind. These qualities play a formidable role in the characters interactions and relationships with one another. It is what determines the status of a relationship be it good or bad, strong or weak and its influence in strengthening or weakening the plot of a story. In this research, we would be considering some of these qualities and their influences in light of the texts used in this research.

### **3.2 FEAR**

Fear can be described as a feeling of anxiety that may be fuelled by certain uncomfortable situations. Defined by Paul Ekman as one of the basic self-emotions that human experience, it is founded on the premise that, just like pride, every single human on this earth has experienced the emotion of fear. Fear just like every other emotion plays a crucial role to the development and maintenance of relationships. Like Ekman establishes in his book, *Basic Emotions*: "emotions are crucial to the development and regulation of interpersonal relationships" (3). This illustrates the notion that most relationships are influenced by emotions one of which is fear. Going by this premise, we would be examining the various depictions of fear in the texts and its influence in the relationships and interactions of the characters in the text.

Going by Freud's psychoanalytic theory in which he divides the human psyche into three parts which Azadkhan Niaz explains it thus, "Freud has divided the human mind into three regions: a "conscious" region he refers to a place where individual's current thoughts, feelings,

and effort live. A “preconscious” which is also known as “subconscious” according to Freud it is living place for things individual can recall or retrieve from her/ his memory. And “unconscious” is the deepest level exist which most of the time we are unaware of it” (38). Going by this division, one can input the feeling of fear into the strata of the unconscious mind because the fearful feelings we often experience is driven by factors repressed or hidden within our subconscious. Like Niaz defines it, “The unconscious in personality theory of psychoanalytic by Freud is stack of feelings of the unconscious mind, desires, thoughts and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness. Most of the matters of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of anxiety, pain, or clash” (39). This notion is illustrated by several characters in the texts used in this research.

Akestrom illustrates the psychological impact of migration in human relationships mostly reflected through fear through the character of Muna. Muna, a Somalian refugee battles the fear of loneliness and acceptance. She arrives from a war-torn region of Somalia where she has lost everyone and everything, including the new relationship she develops with Ahmed at Solsidan, which is lost as a result of Ahmed's suicide. Muna's terrifying encounters have only served to increase her terror. Told through the use of flashbacks, the narrator describes Muna’s sorrowful loss in which she watches her mother Caaliyah and brother Aaden drown in the Mediterranean Sea on an escape journey out of Somalia. Her fear is illustrated in her ability to overshare and create an obsessive bond with people even when such bonds are refuted by the supposed participant. This is seen in her constant questioning of Khadijah and Yasmin about their pasts and her being overly interested in their lives, something they are not willing to share. Her nosy nature and intense crave to form a sisterhood with them causes a strain their relationship leading them to tell her off.

“Then tell me about the man who made you run,” Muna demanded, because her sister- friend’s own silence was poisoning her too. Khadiija stopped chewing and locked eyes with the younger woman. Muna stared back, barely blinking. She had caught Khadiija off guard, and Muna saw the armor beginning to form around her once more like a snail seeking protection in its shell.

“Please?”

“Why don’t you mind your own business, eh?”

“What?”

“It’s the same thing with you and Yasmiin. You are always in her business. Always sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong,” Khadiija said, her tone heated. Muna blinked back tears. “Let Yagiz defile her body if she wants him to. It is none of your business!”

“But...” Muna stammered. “I care about you and Yasmiin. I am your sister.”

“You’re not my sister!” (216)

Depicted as a round character who encounters profound change when fate deals her the wrong cards – a change that occurs due to the intense loneliness and fear she feels – Muna driven by loneliness and fear commits suicide when in her bid to defend herself and seemingly take on a bold stand against the harassment she faces in Sweden, she kills a man. Her character migration sees her move from a seemingly timid, naïve young woman to the woman that expresses great bravery at the end. Muna’s self-destructive actions are all reactive responses to the fear of loneliness she experiences. Her knowledge of her lack of acceptance into a society where her

religion and strong cultural background are major grounds of harassment causes her to crave companionship for she believes that if she has the support, she can endure anything in Sweden. In the end, Muna's fear of loneliness drives her to her death as she experiences monumental losses from the loss of her family to the loss of Khadijah, Yagiz and eventually Gunhild who cancer takes from her.

In *Wahala*, May depicts the theme of fear through Simi's deceit in her relationship with Martin. Burdened by imposter syndrome and a refusal to admit her failures, Simi lives in the fear of losing Martin her husband if she tells him of her lack of interest in having children. Illustrated by the narrator through a sense of monologue,

“Just when she had life figured out, the anxiety returned. Out of nowhere Simi would be struck by a crippling fear that disaster was impending. It felt physical – like a blow to the chest. It made her edgy and paranoid. She'd be convinced she was going to be caught out as a fake and lose it all – her job, her home, Martin. It went on for months. She never spoke to anyone about it. And then it stopped, as suddenly as it started. Until now...” (31)

At several points where opportunities come up for her to come clean and tell him, Simi withholds back, afraid that his love for her may not stand the weight of her desires. So on with the deceit she goes until Isobel reveals it to him in a dramatic manner. Martin's feeling of hurt and betrayal is seen in his outburst to Simi, “You had an abortion. You made a decision about our child without me... Martin raised his arm and lunged at her. “Enough of your fucking lies!...” Simi sank to the floor. “You've chipped the wood,” she said. “It's ruined.” “Like us,” he said, stepping around her” (244-245). Simi's fear puts a weight on her relationship with Martin

that strains it and almost causes her to lose it. Martin ignores Simi and it takes a whole of lot begging and a revelation of the true intent of Isobel to bring him back to her.

At the root of fear is insecurity. Defined by Merriam Webster's as a state or feeling of anxiety, fear or self-doubt (1828), Insecurity is a common human quality and often represented through characters in a literary work of art. The idea of insecurity is often driven by a deeper emotion like fear. We become insecure when we are afraid to lose something on someone. It can be seen as an interpretive reflection of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freud's psychoanalytic theory illustrates the idea of the "unconscious mostly made up of internal forces that motivate external behavior" (Niaz, 36). The concept of insecurity is a mental reflection driven by thoughts an individual has of himself or perceives others have of him. These thoughts usually laced with feelings of fear and self-loathing. The character's sense of insecurity is often driven by the first strata of the human mental consciousness known as the "ID" as illustrated by Freud. The feeling of worthlessness and insistence to fill our lives with certain extremes of pleasure or engage in reckless and self-destructive actions are often the many ripple effects of the id. Like Guerin summarizes it in his book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, "The id is, in short, the source of all our aggressions and desires. It is lawless, asocial, and amoral. Its function is to gratify our instincts for pleasure without regard for social conventions, legal ethics, or moral restraint" (157). These examples show the impact of the Id on the human behavior reflected through insecurity is depicted by the authors of the texts used in this research.

In *Wahala*, the author illustrates the theme of insecurity through the actions and dialogue of her characters. Their communal sense of insecurity are the one of the first cracks of their relationship and what gives Isobel the fourth wheel in the relationship, the amour she needs to rip them apart. Simi's story as a successful fashion marketing guru who consistently doubts herself

and feels like fraud despite her hard work is told through the use of flashback. Akerstrom reveals the realities of her insecurities which are fueled by traumatic experiences, her fears, failures and lack of acceptance from her father. A medical school dropout and a Nigerian parent's failed issue, Simi embraces these labels despite her new found status. Like she is described by the narrator in the text:

‘The I’m-a-fraud foreboding had happened twice before in her life, but both times there’d been good reasons. She was only eleven the first time, more than a quarter of a century ago. But the memory of being marched out of Ikoyi Club was still visceral, provoking a swell of shame and self-loathing. The second time was after she dropped out of medical school, halfway through year three. Simi tried not to dwell on that awful chapter’’ (29)

Simi, who has known the feeling of shame and worthlessness from childhood due to her father's wrong career decisions and the subtle childhood comparisons between Simi and her brother Olu which no longer became subtle as they grew older. It leads to the cracks in her marriage with Martin and her friendship with Ronke and Boo. Her insecurities fueled by fear are what drive her to lie to Martin about trying for a baby even though she has no desire to have a baby. It's what makes her an easy prey to Isobel's vileness and makes her not tell Boo and Ronke about her marital issues or when she fails out of medical school.

‘...But the main reason she couldn't tell Ronke or Boo was because it would make her feel like she was failing. Saying we don't want kids would be fine. But saying he does but I don't was not fine. It meant there was a problem. And Simi

and Martin didn't have problems. They were sorted, the perfect couple. Golden''  
(63)

Her insecurity is also egged on by a lack of acceptance by her father. Her father's preference to Olu her brother because of his gender and being a graduate of a respectable career in the eyes of her father even though he can barely cater for his family. Her refusal to stand up to her father and demand acceptance rather than cower in fear in a feeling of worthlessness are all effects of insecurity. She enjoys a strained relationship with her family portraying them in a bad light to whoever cares to listen like she does with Isobel:

“How disappointed her dad had been when she'd dropped out of medical school. How he hadn't spoken to her for two years – not until she had enough money to sub Olu – her fuckwit brother. How he deferred to Martin but spoke to her like she was still twelve. He didn't have a clue what her job involved – fashion was beneath his notice, marketing wasn't a proper job and anyway, she didn't have a degree – to him, she was an embarrassment...Simi banged on, perhaps a bit too much, about Olu, who as far as Mum and Dad were concerned could do no wrong. A law graduate – not a dropout, even if he did get a third and worked in telesales. Simi knew it was pathetic, but she couldn't help resenting Olu for being the favorite. She just couldn't compete: he was a man who would carry on the family name, much more important than paying his own rent. And he'd made them grandparents – the greatest gift – so who cared if it was Simi (well, Martin) who paid his kids' nursery fees” (36)

Simi's insecurities are the foundations on which her relationship experiences a downward turn.

Another character in the work that lets her insecurities wrap her like a cloak is Boo. Nikki uses Boo's character to illustrate the much dissatisfaction and insecurities most married couples face. She sees her family as self-limiting and feels neglected by her husband. Boo is a disgruntled wife and mother who feels utterly dissatisfied with her life. Her sense of self-worth is shattered in her ability to procure a good career and live the life she wants. Boo is enraged by the gift of a husband and child, which most people would consider a blessing because it is ingrained in the roots of rejections and estrangement that accompany her infancy. Boo's insecurity is identified in her use of insulting words on herself and her spouse Didier.

“How could Didier be expected to remember he'd been booked to look after his daughter for a few hours? How stupid of Boo to assume he might take a cursory glance at the calendar, the one she kept up to date. She'd been ridiculous to expect that much of him, not when every morning he stood in the exact same spot and asked, 'Have you seen my keys?' In front of you, moron, she didn't say” (17)

Boo's character evolution occurs as she unfolds into being a round character and engages in an affair with her boss. An affair that was motivated by her anxieties, fueled by her need to be loved and seen. Clinging to Isobel and refusal to see toxicity in their relationship brings to fore front of the readers mind, the need for self-confidence and an assurance of self.

Ronke is the final part of the trio before Isobel's arrival and reflects her insecurities in her idealisms and desire to be married. Typical for an unmarried African woman in her thirties with society's pressure and expectation of her, Ronke is aware of her biological clock ticking and wants to be married. However, he has unrealistic expectations of men as she is fixated on the

idea of her seemingly perfect father and the traumatic occurrence of his death that she expects every man she meets to be like him. She wastes no time in constantly talking about her boyfriend and her expectation for him to commit. She changes her dressing for him and enviously looks at Boo's life from the idealized eyes of perfection which blinds her from seeing Boo's inherent sadness and insecurities. Like she expresses to Boo at the beginning of the story,

“I'm so jealous,” said Ronke. “Sexy French husband. Adorable child. Huge kitchen. If I didn't love you so much, I'd hate you.” Ronke always made Boo realize how lucky she was. Maybe they should swap lives. Ronke would enjoy the cooking and cleaning. And Sofia's endless questions. And Boo would quite like a clean and empty flat”

She plans her life around him, wanting to move in with him, defending him to her family and friends and constantly hoping that he maintains some sense of responsibility to her. There are several instances of Ronke living the bubble of Kayode's expectation and constant insecurities. One of which is when he stands up her and aunt for lunch. Like the narrator illustrates,

“Ronke yanked at her hair. There was a lump in her throat; she felt shaky and sick. He should have called.... As Ronke arranged her peonies she realized Kayode must have known he wasn't coming long before he sent the text. Flowers didn't arrive in seconds. He'd known when they talked at eleven – when he promised he wouldn't be late. She bit her lip, told herself not to cry.” (45)

There is the overall idea that the trio (Simi, Ronke and Boo) are constantly driven by their insecurities that they seem to hide important details from each other and want to portray the stance of a perfect life even when their world seems to be in shambles.

Akestrom's *In Every Mirror She's Black* attacks the idea of insecurity from the standpoint of romantic relationships and cultural ideologies. Through one of the main characters Kemi. Kemi is a successful advertising guru whose desire for love and romantic stability becomes a niggling idea on which she hinges her self-worth. Akestrom depicts that a woman can have it all but be driven by one little tad bit of need and self-doubt. Like the narrator depicts Kemi's love life,

“America had decimated Kemi's love life. It had shredded her dignity and tossed its slivers into the air, cackling like a hyena. Relegated to picking up questionable prospects, Kemi was tired of wearing her invisible armor. A two-ton defense system that screamed to the world she didn't need a man. She couldn't carry that weight anymore. Lately, her dating life read like a dossier of shame. First, there was that one memorable dinner with Deepak. “I think I told you I'm a software developer, right?” Deepak began to overdose on his own voice twenty minutes in. Kemi simply glared at him. She figured his name-dropping his career the sixth time wasn't worth a verbal response. The rest of the evening, Deepak intermittently punctuated his monologues with his love for “Black booty.” Then there was the silent date with Earl, a white accountant from Ohio, who summoned visions of a serial killer. Earl kept staring into nothingness past her face. Each time he tried glancing her way, his hawk eyes floated down her cleavage then darted back to the intriguing void beyond her. She wasn't sure if he was shy or scheming. And how could she forget the Jamaican real estate agent, Devan, whose gaze kept trailing every white woman who sauntered past their table while professing unflinching love for the sisters?” (11)

Kemi's insecurity makes her cloth herself in a cloak of pretense, the desire to act like she didn't crave romantic achievements while putting up the "strong black woman" disposition is something she earnestly desires to put off. Her insecurities are also fueled by her twin sister's life and view of romantic relationships. Kehinde who is happily married with Kids has the typical Nigerian mentality of class and stability when it comes to love. This opinion causes Kemi to almost sabotage her relationship with Tobias even though he's perfect for her. Like the narrator illustrates

“Those months with Tobias had moved like chili beans simmering in a Crock-Pot. Her love for him had grown as a slow burn. Comfort on low heat. He made her laugh and wasn't demanding. He never commented on her hair unless she was fishing for compliments. He regularly baked her cinnamon buns and begged her to forgive them since she had exorcised them from her diet. But that kernel of doubt Kehinde had planted in her months ago had been watered by her sister's words: As long as you're not leaving electricians in America to go find electricians in Sweden. For Kemi, her sister's words smacked of irony in hindsight. God's time was right, but God's electricians were not right for her. Tobias worked the night shift as a security guard. Her perfect Tobias suddenly didn't seem so perfect anymore, and she started pulling at the seams of their exquisitely tailored relationship.”(272)

Her insecurity fuels her weight, her bad eating habits and her desire to place her job as a validation for her self-worth. Kemi's insecurity is a vivid representation of the ideal African woman in African and on global frontiers. There is the constant desire to prove oneself and there is a trail of failure that trails such a woman if she falls short of the standard.

### 3.3 PRIDE

Pride, though a multifaceted concept can be described to be a feeling of haughtiness over others or pleasure often gotten from one's achievements. Jessica L Tracy and Richard W Robins in their book "The Nature of Pride" illustrates Scheff's opinion of pride as having one's passions cluster about the ego" and it being "a central part of human nature" (15). This propels the idea that the human entity cannot exist without the display of pride be it in a form of superiority over others or pride in one's achievements. The concept of pride, however, cannot be defined as one holistic concept as it possesses multi facets and can be diverse and distinct. Pride is too broad a concept to be seen as a single cohesive emotion and may be understood as two or more separate emotions, as Tracy and Robins use this idea to explain in their book using Ekman's and Lewis's opinions of pride as a view of two or more distinct emotions" (264). One definition being propounded by the Ekman and many others is the idea that pride in one's success and relationships , is assumed to promote future positive behaviors in the achievement domain and to contribute to further pro-social investments such as relationship maintenance and altruism" (264). There is the other variant which is the "sinful, hubristic or defensive" pride that is more associated with narcissism and may contribute to aggression and hostility, interpersonal problems, relationship conflict and host of maladaptive behaviours" (264). These two definitions of pride form the interpretation of pride in most literary texts. Most literary works illustrates the concept of the "hubristic" or "sinful" pride. Works like *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, *Beyond Fear* by Iroha Udeh and many more works illustrate the hubristic pride through their characters in the text. These apt illustrations are concrete representations of human realities.

This research aims to illustrate the “hubristic” or “sinful” pride in the characters in the text and its influence on their relationships. In the text *Wahala*, the theme of pride is illustrated through Simi’s character. Driven by a mountain of insecurities and self-esteem issues, Simi’s holds a bloated version of herself when it comes to her friends Ronke and Boo. Her characteristic nature to refuse to acknowledge her failures and seek ways to remedy makes her hold a haughty view when compared in certain situations with her friends. She refuses to tell Ronke and Boo about her abortion and her unwillingness to have children but tells Isobel whose insecurities and failures are splayed open before anyone. Isobel becomes the news bearer of Simi’s issues as she tells Boo and who then tells Ronke. When Ronke decides to show concern and approaches her about her secrets, she becomes defensive and shoves her concern down her throat.

“Simi, I’m your best friend.” Ronke leaned forward, a smile on her face. “You can tell me anything. You know that.” Simi sighed loudly. This was an ambush. And she didn’t need it. Not today. “OK, yes, we’re trying for a baby. But he shouldn’t have told anyone. I don’t need the added pressure. I’ve been on the pill forever – it could take years. “I don’t need help. I’m fine. Everything’s fine.” (150-151)

When Ronke tries to advise her to share her concerns with Martin about having babies and having abortions, she berates and insults her whirlwind love life and single status. “I really don’t need relationship advice from you....How bloody dare you tell me what to do? You of all people. When you’ve wasted your life on a string of losers who treat you like shit! You’ve never had a real relationship. You don’t understand how they work.” (152). One of the numerous rifts in their friendship is caused by Simi's rage and patronizing response to Ronke's worry. It causes Ronke to walk on eggshells over matters that concern her wellbeing and alienates her in their friendship.

Another illustration of pride is reflected in the women's mockery of Ronke's relationship with Kayode at Isobel's party. Boo, Simi and Isobel speak about Ronke's relationship with derision and contempt, condemning her to not having a good taste in men ignoring quite obviously their unhappy marriages filled with several iotas of deceit. Their married state and previously married status-in the case of Isobel- gives them a moralistic and haughty outlook to Ronke's relationship and basically makes them put themselves on a pedestal of amazing relationships. In Boo's words, "She always picks dickheads," said Boo. "By the time she figures it out, she'll be forty. And we know she wants kids."(212). Despite being planned to be held behind Ronke's back, this talk ends up taking place in front of her without their knowledge until the very last moment. Ronke's hurt is not incited by Isobel's remarks but Simi and Boo who she values as intimate pals and sisters even. Boo's remarks are most hurtful and could be seen as ironical because she is unhappy with her marriage and often times wishes she was single. This conversation and several other situations bring a major crack in their relationship as Ronke gives Simi the silent treatment for a while, gets into another confrontation with Boo and loses trust in their love and care for her which gives Isobel the ammunition she needs to drive them apart almost totally.

*In Every Mirror She's Black*, Akinnade illustrates pride from a state of race and supposed ethnic lines. Through Kemi and Brittany's relationship, we see the superiority certain black people possess over other blacks. Johnny in bid to create and provide a racial companion for his wife Brittany, organizes a birthday lunch and invites Kemi as to become companion for his wife on the bases of the their shared racial identities. Unfortunately, Kemi's pride leads to an animosity between her and Brittany that is never quelled till the end of the text. The tension arises when Kemi makes fun of Brittany for not being able to learn Swedish while being a full-

time housewife. Born out of a condescending opinion of Brittany's status as a trophy wife, Kemi opines that if she with an active 9-5 job can make efforts to learn the language, then Brittany with no active job should do the same. Like she says to Brittany, "If I had all that time doing nothing, my Swedish would be a whole lot better by now," Kemi casually said before reaching for her third glass of red wine. She turned to look around when the table fell into a hush." (296). Kemi realizes her hurtful mistake and tries to make up for it but it is too late to alter the impression she had obviously passed across to Brittany, one which Brittany and had been trying to fight off and which she did not expect from a Black sister like her. Kemi's derision and prideful dismissiveness of Brittany's status as a new mother creates and breaks whatever racial bond could exist between both of them, like narrator says "it was at that moment Kemi knew that the warm feeling of sisterhood she had felt with Brittany earlier died an instant death" (296).

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Human characters possess certain qualities. These qualities are what fuels their relationships and interactions with others. It creates its own complexities and oftentimes be the basis on which they enjoy their interactions or associations with one another.

Through literature, the author, poet or playwright depicts these qualities, shining light on hidden areas of the human character, mentally or otherwise that may have been swept or hidden beneath a cloak, revealing the impact of these qualities that may be issues and grounds on which we must check ourselves if we must enjoy a blissful relationship with one another.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

Culture and Identity are major fragments of human existence. It invades every single part of our lives especially our interactions with others. The focus of this study uses Nikki May's *Wahala* and Lola Akinmade Akerstrom's *In Every Mirror She's Black* to depict the many complexities that culture and identity has on human relationships. It reflects the significant cultural differences and its influences on several characters in the book. There is the culture of enacting their own version of the American dream by most African migrants overseas. They strive and work very to attain a certain level of success in bid to wrench out a past of inadequacies and failures. This is reflected in several of the characters in the two texts. Boo and Simi in *Wahala* are concrete representations who strive to attain a certain level of success in different spheres of their lives. Kemi and her sister Kehinde *In Every Mirror She's Black* are examples of this culture. This culture of systematic hard work to create an ideal life influences the relationships of various characters. It is what makes Kehinde push Kemi to date a man befitting of her successful and affluent status regardless of how kind and good-natured he is. It is what fuels Boo's dissatisfaction and resentment towards her husband who seems to have a successful career and seemingly good life. These causes the characters define their identity and self-worth by their seemingly material success.

There is also the culture of derision expressed by members of the European culture on "minority cultures". This is a culture that one may give a symbolic reference of raising one's nose at another's culture. This derision takes two forms, one which is a total mockery of these cultures and the other is a mocking curiosity like the examining of an unknown object. This is

illustrated in *Wahala* where Boo's Boss defines her as exotic when having sexual relations with her giving the assumption that he views as an object of interest and not an actual human being. It is illustrated in Kemi's colleagues mockery of Kemi's dressing and position in the company as seen in *In Every Mirror She's Black*. These cultural reflections create various identity complexities for the characters. In some, there is the putting down of their self-esteem, in others a creation of self-doubt. These cultural reflections are a concrete representation of the effects of a multicultural society, a sub domain which this research explores in the second chapter. The diverse beliefs held by various cultures and their effects on the connections and identities of different characters.

This research also explores the character representation and the qualities they exhibit which is mostly influenced by their culture and identity. These qualities are strong contributors to the complexities the characters face in their relationships. These qualities manifested in varying forms like pride, fear and insecurity are depicted quite vividly in the characters actions. These qualities create a misrepresentation of their identities in their heads and this leads to the many cracks in their relationship.

Finally, the concept of culture and identity is an ever evolving subject illustrated mostly by human experiences and realities. Its influence would mean more or less to each person depending on their present or past realities. However, it is more that is constant and would continue to define our interactions and relationships with one another.

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