CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE is one of the bestselling contemporary authors from Africa. She is a Nigerian novelist. She has three novels and one short story collection to her credit. Her debut *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) describes a patriarchal Nigerian family. She has written a touching novel about Biafra war entitled *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Her only short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009) has twelve stories that describe Nigerian people in Nigeria and in America. *Americanah* (2013) is the latest novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Adichie’s debut *Purple Hibiscus* won Chimamnda Ngozi Adichie Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 2004 for best first book. Adichie’s second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* was awarded prestigious Orange Prize for fiction in 2007. In 2008, she was the recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. Her books have been translated into more than thirty languages. Her stories have been published in journals in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain. She was selected for the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association award as well as the BBC short story award. Also she was short-listed for the Caine Prize for African Writing 2002. The same year she was a runner-up in the Commonwealth Short Story Award. Her story “Half of A Yellow Sun” set during the Nigerian civil war won the 2003 PEN/ David Wong short story award. In 2003, Adichie received the O’Henry Award.

*The Thing around Your Neck* is the most representative work by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, both in theme and style as well. It has twelve short stories that depict the diverse themes such as gender, history and diaspora. The present paper aims at exploring the theme of gender in the selected text.

*The Thing around Your Neck* is a collection of 12 short stories published earlier in the magazines and journals. It includes –
1. Cell One
2. Imitation
3. A Private Experience
4. Ghosts
5. On Monday of Last Week
6. Jumping Monkey Hill
7. The Thing Around Your Neck
8. The American Embassy
9. The Shivering
10. The Arrangers of Marriage
11. Tomorrow is Too Far
12. The Headstrong Historian

These stories mostly shuttle between Nigeria and United States. Several are set in Nsukka, the university town where the author grew up. Several take place under the brutal regime of Sani Abacha, who ruled Nigeria from 1993 to 1998. Family, marriage, gender, history, diaspora, race and exile are recurrent themes in these stories.

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines gender as, “the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex”. Wikipedia entry on gender states that ‘gender’ is the range of physical, biological, mental and behavioural characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. As per the contextual need it may refer to biological sex, sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity. In ‘gender studies’ the term ‘gender’ refers to proposed social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities. In this context, gender explicitly excludes reference to biological differences, to focus on cultural differences.

In these twelve absorbing stories, Adichie realistically portrays the lives of (mostly) women in contemporary Nigeria and the United States. The Nigerians living in the United States have come for variety of reasons: one wife joins her medical-student husband after a six-year separation, a young woman enters into an arranged marriage, and the wife and children of a wealthy businessman enjoy an upper-middle class suburban existence in the U. S. while he travels back and forth to Lagos. All characters struggle to find their identity in their unfamiliar settings.

The stories set in Nigeria depict a range of concerns: a woman stands in line to apply for political asylum at the American Embassy after the flight of her journalist husband and murder of her son; an Igbo Christian medical student takes shelter with an older Hausa Muslim woman in an abandoned store while machete-wielding mobs randomly kill people in the streets, and a brother and sister from the U. S. visit their Nigerian grandmother one summer and experience an
Edenic fall into sin and death. According to Jane Shilling, “many of Adichies heroines find themselves at similarly enigmatic moments of crisis”.

All of these stories revolve round the women either as protagonists or as narrators. These stories reveal that on every walk of life including family, schooling, economy, politics, literature and religion women are either neglected or exploited. In the Los Angeles Times book review of The Thing Around Your Neck Susan Salter Reynolds writes, “… What it might be like to visit your brother in a Nigerian jail, to be the new bride in an arranged marriage, to arrive in Flatbush from Lagos to meet your husband or to hide in a basement, waiting for riot to subside, wondering what happened to younger sister who let go of your hand when you were running. How would it feel to be a woman who smuggled her journalist husband out of Nigeria one day and had her four year old son shot by government thugs the next?”

In a Tedxeutan interview with Belinda Otas, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says – “The problem of gender is that it prescribes who we should be instead of recognising who we are. Imagine how much freer we would be if we did not have to live under the weight of gender expectations. Culture does not make people; people make culture. A feminist is a man or a woman who says there’s a problem with gender and we must fix it.”

Works Cited:

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie website: http://www.l3.ulg.ac.be/adichie/