

The Establishment of Transcultural Citizenship in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novels

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ABSTRACT

The socio-cultural patterns of the twenty first-century have increased people's mobility across the planet. The cultural complexities and interactions that these combined factors generate seem to foster an emerging transcultural orientation. This study recognises that literary works are mirrors of the society and these patterns have not eluded literary writers. By way of characterisation and manipulation of a variety of stylistic resources, Adichie's literary works provide resourceful forums for describing the essence of these new cultural domains. Against this backdrop of denationalisation, new arrangements of form and content in literary works that have adapted to a changed cultural and social paradigm need to be investigated. This study acknowledges Adichie's novels are platforms upon which the concepts of denationalisation have explored. Using the multi-dimensional construct of critical hybridity (a conceptual framework that interweaves the ideas of Fanon, Homi, Mikhail and Said), this study interrogates Adichie's to demonstrate how émigrés navigate their way through new cultural environments as they strive to attain a cultural equilibrium. It demonstrates how the émigrés of Adichie's novels establish transcultural citizenship. This paper concludes that the cultural complexities of new environments compel émigrés to embrace a new notion of internationalism, one that is manifested in the creation and proliferation of a new cultural discourse which is both international and transcultural in nature. Progressively, the émigrés develop a cosmopolitan dimension to life, one that is borne out of the fact that through dialogue (as established in Mikhail's theory), cultural boundaries are broken down and the émigré is able to interweave apparently opposed cultural identities to establish a transcultural identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are living in an age of increasing interconnectedness, where political borders and cultural edges tend to blur and growing numbers of people throughout all layers of society are 'on the move' across the planet, experiencing the effects of dislocation, deterritorialisation and cross-cultural acculturation. Even though their numbers may still be relatively limited, their mobility patterns and strategies are impacting on societies at large and call for new social, political and lifestyle configurations and conceptualisations. Thus the growing influence of views and approaches related to transnationalism, neocosmopolitanism in its rooted/situated/vernacular variants, flexible citizenship, neomadism, transculturalism that are trying to grasp and theorise the dynamic nature of our global modernity. Transculturalism may no longer be approached as a dialogue internal to Europe or EuroAmerica, but is a global discourse in which many participate, producing different formulations of the modern as lived and envisaged within their local social environments.

In the context of literary productions, it is becoming even more evident that this socio-cultural scenario is also giving birth to a new generation of culturally mobile writers. This study regards their works as transcultural literature. That is, imaginative writers who, by choice or by life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, live transnational experiences, cultivate bilingual/pluri-lingual proficiency, physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures/geographies/territories, expose themselves to diversity and nurture plural, flexible identities. While moving physically across the globe and across different cultures, they find themselves less and less trapped in the traditional migrant/exile syndrome and become more apt instead to embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility bestow upon them. It is thanks to this specific status, I argue, that these mobile writers have found themselves at the forefront in capturing and expressing emerging transcultural sensitivity – 'the freedom of

every person to live on the border of one's "inborn" culture or beyond it' (Epstein 334). This transcultural mode of thinking appears better suited to the needs of a rapidly globalising society. In this way, not only do they contribute to the development of a transcultural literature able to 'transcend the borders of a single culture in its choice of topic,' vision and scope, but they also promote a wider global literary perspective (Anders 1). In this article, I explore how the identity and cultural metamorphosis inherent in the 'dispatiation' process (the transcultural process that may be triggered by moving –physically, virtually and imaginatively – outside one's cultural and homeland borders) allows these writers to adopt new creative modes through a transcultural lens, 'a perspective in which all cultures look decentred in relation to all other cultures, including one's own' (Ellen and Epstein 312). It is through this process that internationally renowned writers like Adichie have acquired their transcultural mindset, developed their orientation towards the world at large and showed us the path towards a transcultural attitude/mode of being.

This study expressly focuses on a specific and extremely narrow segment of the mobile global population, that is those middle-class progressive creative intellectuals among the so-called 'knowledge workers' or, in Ulf Hannerz's lexicon, people with 'decontextualized cultural capital' who are privileged enough – by census, educational background, life opportunities/circumstances, creative/expressive abilities – to benefit from and get the most out of their transnational life-patterns and imaginations (246). These are individuals who, moreover, have been particularly affected by their multiple displacements and have developed an acute sensibility towards a cosmopolitan consciousness. Adichie articulates transcultural consciousness through characters are able to relive their memory of Africa – enslavement, new births, misery, pain and joy – as they create new worlds in their cultural environments. This chapter teases out a series of articulations that are suggestive of both resistance to cultural dominance and the search for new cultural paradigms. The task entails searching for interrelated discourses that critically interrogate issues of imperialism, patriarchy and other retrogressive practices and, in response, seeking liberated spaces and worlds.

2. TRANSCULTURATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CITIZENSHIP IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S NOVELS

Navigating through new cultural environments, émigrés go through a process of cultural transformation and in this process, three stages can be identified: deculturation, neoculturation and transculturation. Transcultural citizenship is still an indistinct cultural phenomenon. Opinions are still divided on the definition of this emerging concept, yet in an increasing mobile society, there is need for crystallization of debates around this concept. Attempts are made at transcending, at crossing, literally as well as figuratively, are shown again and again as fraught attempts, articulated by the key characters in *Half of Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. In *Half of a Yellow*, Jomo's rare hunting skills earn him the name of Kenya's great man 'Kenyatta' (15). The intertwined history of the struggle for liberation in Africa leads to a corralling of identities, which is a relatively recent layer in the contemporary cultural palimpsest. *Americanah*, Adichie's third novel, lends itself very well, both thematically and structurally, to the framework of critical hybridity. It offers a powerful contact zone where historically and culturally African, English, Native American and African American histories and cultures meet, and with varying degrees of intensity, engage.

It revolves around the character Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who travels to the United States to further her education and embarks on a journey of socio-economic adventure. In this adventure, the novel accords the reader an opportunity to think through gaps in discourse and the dismantling of traditional cultural narratives of sorts, including notions of superiority of the host's culture over the émigrés', and allows for the articulation of the transcultural. Ifemelu's story provides room for a gradual alteration of the cultural bases and addresses the disproportionate patterns of power relations in a variety of cultural environments. She, like Obinze and his ilk, makes deliberate efforts to create a platform for alternative cultural spaces. Her story reads like a continuation of Kambili and Olanna's tale in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* respectively. Critiqued together, one gets the impression that they fall within the same fictional frame. Kambili's transculturation process is not triggered by physical displacement from the national borders but rather an imaginative movement outside the traditional Nigerian boundary. This chapter will delve deeply into the third novel. In illustrating the establishment of cosmopolitan citizenship, this study argues that transculturalism has become ever more interwoven and susceptible to many applications, interpretations and meanings. On account of its polyvalence, it can no longer be understood holistically in a one-way flow of cultural data. Adichie's novel provides a useful platform for deliberation on the multivalent nature of the concept of transculturalism and its establishment.

In *Americanah*, the central character Ifemelu goes through a process of neoculturation and transculturation in her new-found hobby: blogging. She stays in the American society but rejects the mainstream American culture. She, for instance, frowns upon the irresponsible and irritating behaviour of grown up American men eating ice cream cones in public, the escapist thinking that race is no longer an issue in the contemporary American society and the coated language of the American adults, unnecessary euphemism that makes the use of such words a 'fat' derogative so that fatness becomes a social stigma. In America, the word 'fat' is bad and connotes such negative moral judgement as 'stupid or bastard' (*Americanah* 6). Initially, she attempts to acculturated herself into the mainstream American culture and when she blogs, comments from 'readers like Sapphic-Derrida, who reeled off statistics and used words like 'reify' in their comments, made her nervous, eager to be fresh and to impress, so that she began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people's stories for something she could use.'

This resigned and lackadaisical attitude to her social life, an intellectually lazy attitude to scholarship, which is encapsulated in her unoriginal blogs, one that pushes her to live other people's lives and to imitate their views about life, robs her of confidence in self. She begins to make 'fragile links to race. Sometimes not believing herself. The more she wrote the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false.' This naked and false self represents the deculturation stage. She is awoken from this nakedness by the rude man at the supermarket, who says that 'fat people don't need to be eating that shit' as she paid for her giant bag of Tostitos. What is originally framed as an offensive remark turns out to be an eye opener for Ifemelu. She recognises that she has been living a lie. When returns home, she takes her time to re-examine her life. The 'mirror' she uses symbolically reveals the grim reality of her pretentious life. She begins to internalise an anti-American sentiment and thus a new consciousness begins to shape her cultural experience.

Adichie engages the reader in a transitional in-between interpretive space where notions about culture and identity are challenged and renegotiated. Ifemelu's cultural awakening suggests a significant step towards rebirth as she makes a bold move towards the establishment of new borders of cultural identity. Bhabha views the in-between space of border transition as 'neither a new horizon, nor a leaving of the past ... [émigrés] find themselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion' (*Location of Culture* 1-2). Ifemelu, triggered by the insolent man's physiological spat, re-evaluates conventional notions of American identity. It would appear that the literary focus of *Americanah* is not an effort to amalgamate opposing cultural ideas, but to transcend the differences and generate an 'other space' where the writer's remonstrance of traditional Americanism can be evaluated. She resolves to pursue her original dream:

But back home, as she stood and faced the mirror's truth, she realised that she had ignored, for too long, the new tightness of her clothes, the rubbing together of her inner thighs, the softer, rounder parts of her that shook when she moved. She was fat. She said the word 'fat' slowly, funneling it back and forward, and thought about all the other things she had learned not say aloud in America. She was fat. She was not curvy or big-boned; she was fat, it was the only word that felt true. And she had ignored, too, *the cement in her soul*. (*Americanah* 7)

Adichie, using her protagonist Ifemelu, explores, in Ashcroft's terms, how 'hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth' (Ashcroft 183). Ifemelu rejects Ginika-ism, the false illusion (propagated by her friend Ginika) that coating reality with would make one happier and comfortable. Ginika, like the Nigerian taxi drivers in America, is living in denial. Like Nigerian taxi drivers who do not want to identify themselves as drivers and are aggressively eager to tell their countrymen in the States that they have a master's degree and taxi driving is their second job, she advises Ife to avoid the use of the word 'fat.' Nigerian taxi drivers take false identities to shield themselves from public scrutiny; they take 'on all sorts of false names' and this is the reason Ife becomes wary when a taxi driver introduces himself as Mervin Smith. She (Ife) shuns them because they are not proud of who they are and the kinds of jobs they do to earn a living. She projects her rebellious self, one that is critical of the hypocrisy of the socio-cultural dogmatism. Apart from denouncing the cultural paradigm of hollow decency, she embarks on a journey of introspection, self-discovery and reincarnation. The mirror's truth, an image that repetitively appears in the novel, reveals that she is fat, offers her new of opportunity, a chance to get back to her original track. The 'cement in [Ifemelu's] soul,' is something that 'had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness,' 'amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that had melded into piercing homesickness,' suggesting an exhibition of a mixed cultural sensitivity. The use of the word 'cement' metaphorically captures an element of determination and steadfastness; she still had a strong will to explore and make discoveries about life. Yet she had temporarily stopped living her life. The impressionistic

façade of happiness had overshadowed her real self. Her exploratory research on Nigerian lifestyles display a certain measure of craze for home:

She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. (*Americanah* 7)

Obinze is a critical part of this homesickness yet that is not all. The American culture had reinforced had traditional alignment to the Nigerian culture and the need for exploration of new cultural vistas. She resolves to end their three-year creaseless relationship Blaine, one that had defied blame and friction because Barack Obama, ‘bonding anew over their shared passion.’ The insolent supermarket man reinvigorates her boldness: ‘she had not had a bold epiphany and there was no cause; it was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her, and formed a mass that now propelled her’ (*Americanah* 8). Barack Obama placates the animosity between them and offers their relationship a semblance of peace. Nigerian culture, like Obinze’s love, offered her some form of contentment and nudged her to disregard existing cultural borders. It was ‘her relationship with him [which] was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out’ (*Americanah* 9). Her uncertainty about the future and what it holds for her complicates the situation. Her unfinished business with Obinze puts her at crossroads. She makes plans about her future and evens dreams but he deliberately shuts her boyfriend Blaine out of this side of her life. She applies for jobs in Lagos behind her boyfriend’s back because she wants to ‘finish her fellowship at Princeton and then after her fellowship ended, she did not tell him because she wanted to give herself time to be sure.’ Evidently, her boyfriend Blaine does not represent her cultural vision; his presence does not paint the picture of the life that she envisages. He is a temporary distraction from Ifemelu’s path towards cultural transcendence. She radically departs from Blaine’s vapidly academic thoughts and embarks on a new journey. Her remarkable objectivity on racism is significant point of reference. She notes that there are several ‘racisms’ and the idea that traditional manifestations of racism are no longer prominent does not mean that racists cease to exist:

In America, racism exists but racists are all gone. Racists belong to the past. Racists are the thin-lipped mean white people in the movies about the civil rights era. Here’s the thing: the manifestation of racism has changed but the language has not. So, if you haven’t lynched somebody then you can’t be called racist. If you are not a bloodsucking monster then you can’t be called racist. Somebody has to be able to say that racists are not monsters. They are people with loving families, regular folk who pay taxes. (*Americanah* 390)

The perceptive that Ifemelu offers in regard to what would ordinarily appear to be a clichéd subject injects some elements of novelty, freshness to its treatment. The sarcasm that underlie the title of this blog post deliberately foregrounds her declaration for a new cultural outlook: ‘Job Vacancy in America – National Arbiter in Chief of ‘Who is Racist.’ Racism has mutated over the years and manifests itself in different forms, so that the sufferers of the so-called ‘Racial Disorder Syndrome’ should be placed into different categories of ‘mild, medium and acute’ syndrome. Adichie, it would appear, creates a protagonist who deviates from the typical character of an *Americanah* (a blind imitator of American mannerisms); she does not rely on external approval to gain fame, neither does she depend on other’s validation to remain relevant. Rather she defiantly maintains her objectivity to retain her *genuine* honesty. She rejects the notion of gaining undeserved fame by writing ‘terrible things about his own people’ (*Americanah* 394).

Obinze exhibits a transcultural mode of thinking. Against all socio-cultural odds in his native Nigeria, he remains humble and deliberately avoids the high-handedness and exploitative tendencies of the plutocrats, something that seems to define traditional Nigerianness, yet he rises through the ranks to become a very successful businessman. After his humiliating and seemingly unceremonious return from England, he learns that ‘Big Men and Big Women did not talk to people, they instead talked at people’ (*Americanah* 30). This is the experience he encounters when he is introduced to Chief, a very rich and amorous Nigerian man. When Nneoma takes him to the Chief’s residence, he finds an opportunity to obtain first-hand information on the stereotypical demeanor of Nigerian capitalists. The chief literally monopolises the discussion, ‘pontificating about politics, while his guests crowded.’ Yet his audience, despite their fussy looks – wearing the uniform of the Lagos youngish and wealthyish (leather slippers, jeans and open-neck tight shirts, all with familiar designer logos), displayed ‘the plowing eagerness of men in need.’ Yet Obinze, like Olanna and Ifemelu, is typical of the modern isolated characters of African fiction. In *African Literature*, David Cook’s comment on these characters has been particularly insightful:

The key figures in African novels are typically at variance with their societies, however closely wedded to them they may be in certain respects ... In the challenge that these protagonists offer to group behaviour, they are unrepresentative. While the issues they raise may be those unavoidably facing their societies, they themselves become atypical. It is normal to be a unit in the close-knit social pattern; so that to break the set design is abnormal. (Cook 4-5)

Obinze, like the hero of the novel (*Ife*), does not seem to speak for the Nigerian society; he cuts the figure of an outsider and in this sense one he gives the impression of an anti-hero of the typical Nigerianness. His travels open the eyes of his mind and allow to have a better perception and understanding of the world around him. Exposed to cultural plurality and diversity by choice as well as life circumstances, he manages to transcend the borders of a single culture and begins to promote a global cultural perspective. Material comfort, what Armah calls ‘the gleam,’ does not seem to attract him (*Armah* 35). The background that the narrator provides does not mould him in the typical sense. His encounter with the Chief reinforces his rejection of the greed for material wealth for its sake. He devotes his life, it evident, to the pursuit of his own form of social fulfillment. From

Obinze's outsider perspective, the Chief and his ilk do not realise that *the wretched of the earth* have to, as a matter of exigency, 'start over a new history of man and take account of not only the occasional prodigious theses maintained by Europe but also its crimes, the most heinous of which have been committed at the very heart of man, the pathological dismembering of his functions and the erosion of his unity, and the context of the community, the fracture, the stratification the bloody tensions fed by class, and finally, on the immense scale of humanity, the racial hatred, slavery and exploitation' (Fanon 238). That Edusco's success story is an easy appeal to his conscience does not come as a surprise. The fact that he acquires material wealth does alienate him from his original social background. The plight of the rank and file of the Nigerian society has not eluded him. This is the reason, it would appear, he admires men like Edusco, 'men who did not know any Big Man, who had no connections, and had made their money in a way that did not defy the simple logic of capitalism' (Americanah 560-561). In open defiance of the 'Big Man' syndrome, he begins, with 'only a primary school education,' to apprentice for traders, starts off 'with one small stall in Onitsha and now [owns] the second largest transport company in the country' (561). In the face of moral decadence, Edusco's success demonstrates, though not the Krishna way, that rising through the ranks honestly is still not a myth, but a social reality. He, like Obinze puts it, understood that they 'lost the Biafran war and learned to be ashamed' (561). Losing the Biafran did not dampen the spirit of Igbos; it taught to appreciate the value of social cohesion. This explains why successful Igbo men who had 'learned' from the experiences of war do not find the parochialism of shallow ethnicity any attractive. Obinze appreciates social justice and value of human dignity. The narrator says:

[Obinze] imagined Edusco talking about him in a gathering of other self-made Igbo men, men who were brash and striving, who juggled huge businesses and supported vast extended families. *Obinze ma ife*, he imagined Edusco saying. *Obinze is not like some of these useless small boys with money. This one is not stupid.* (Americanah 562)

Obinze's assessment of these men's demeanor reveals an independent and transnational view of Nigerian life. *Diaspora-isation* has set him apart from the typical thinking of the postcolonial Nigerian bourgeoisies, who do not associate themselves with the plebian masses. He incisively notes that there is a measure of discomfort in the submissiveness of the capitalists' institutionalisation of loyalty or sycophancy; they are evidently suffocated, confined and trapped by the social constructs of the hegemonic control of the power brokers like Chief, who believe in the myopic principle of 'no-one-knows-tomorrow.' This is a highly selfish and individualised perception of life, one that does not see the society beyond its present state. This parochial view of social life denounces the notion of posterity and celebrates excesses of the spur of the moment; it celebrates economic plunder and self gratification. The Chief speaks 'with a triumphant tone, mundane observations delivered as grand discoveries.' It amuses Obinze how frank Nneoma is in her flirtations: her exaggerated animation and shiny ego-burnishes. She (Nneoma), it would appear, displays a Nigerian version of *Ginika-ism*. She enthusiastically urges Obinze to keep hanging around until Chief does something for him. Like Ifemelu's meeting with the rude man at the supermarket, Obinze's meeting with Chief significantly transforms his cultural worldview. The narrator says:

Chief's steward always served fresh pepper soup, deeply flavorful pieces of fish in a broth that made Obinze's nose run, cleared his head, and somehow unclogged the future and filled him with hope, so that he sat contentedly, listening to Chief and his guests. They fascinated him, the unsubtle cowering of the almost rich in the presence of the rich, and the rich in the presence of the very rich; to have money, it seemed, was to be consumed by money. Obinze felt repulsion and longing; he pitied them, but he also imagined being like them. One day, Chief drank more cognac than usual, and talked haphazardly about people stabbing you in the back and small boys growing tails and ungrateful fools suddenly thinking they were sharp. Obinze was not sure what exactly had happened, but somebody had upset Chief, a gap had opened, and as soon as they were alone, he said, 'Chief, if there is something I can help you do, please tell me. You can depend on me.' His own words surprised him. He had stepped out of himself. He was high on pepper soup. This was what it meant to hustle. He was in Lagos and he had to hustle. (*Americanah* 30-31)

Like Ifemelu, Obinze's cultural vision is gradually unclogged; he expresses a desire to have the experience of other more amicable worlds, worlds that are receptive to the flourishing of new humane possibilities. He regains his clarity of vision from his consumption of pepper soup. Initially, the glamour of luxury fascinates him, more like the impressionistic blogs that clog Ifemelu's judgment. Momentarily, clamour for easy life consumes him, pushing him to an obsession with materialistic fantasy so that he bears very close semblance to the rich who are consumed by money. He develops mixed reactions to material success: 'repulsion and longing.' When Chief reveals that he has been betrayed by young confidants, Obinze promises to offer an honest departure from the perfidy of 'the small boys' and 'ungrateful fools.' His sudden transformation into a typical Nigerian opportunist surprises him. The fact that he takes advantage of Chief's unfortunate past to rake in material capital does not in any way differ significantly from Ifemelu's hacking into other people's stories to popularise her blogs. When Chief praises him on account of good home training, he puts on a half smile to conceal the oddity of Chief's ridiculous compliment. Yet when his boss observes that hunger and honesty is a rare combination in the country, he nods but 'he was not sure whether he was agreeing about his having this quality or about the rarity of this quality' (33).

Obinze succeeds but he does not derive any happiness from his material success. Instead his new social status offers him a perfect opportunity to examine traditional Nigerianness and Americanism even more carefully. He learns that banks in Nigeria, like most banks in the world, give loans to people who do not need money and that there is a certain measure of racial attachment to success in business when Nneoma advises him to find a white man and employ him as the General Manager. When he takes his offer letter to the bank, he feels 'surreal saying fifty and fifty-five and leaving out the million because there was no need to state the obvious.' The ease of it all dazes him, 'how even the semblance of wealth oiled paths.' Adichie, it is evident, spares no pains in exposing the cynicism and hypocrisy of post-independence African elites. Using Obinze, Adichie forcefully registers her concern at the excesses of the African bourgeoisies and the exploitation of the toiling masses. On account of his integrity, Obinze stands above this material filth and drifts away from the typical Nigerianness. Impressionistic lifestyle attracts in Nigeria just like it does in America, so that all he needed to do was 'to drive to a gate in his BMW and the gateman would salute and open it for him, without asking questions.' Interestingly, even the American embassy was no

different: 'He had been refused a visa years ago, when he was newly graduated and drunk with American ambitions, but with his new bank statements, he easily got a visa' (33). The immigration officer at the Atlanta Airport treats him warmly, a great departure from the harsh treatment he had encountered in England. The officer is warm and chatty and easily asks him how much cash he has. In fact, the officer is surprised at the little money he declares as opposed to the 'thousands of dollars' that other Nigerians of his class declare all the time. This general ease does not satisfy him; he feels a certain longing and hollowness. Wealth essentially brings him social comfort and he is unable to reconcile his social stature and his true self. There is evidence of a rift between these two conflicting selves.

This was what he now was, the kind of Nigerian expected to declare a lot of cash at the airport. It brought to him a disorienting strangeness, because his mind had not changed at the same pace as his life, and he felt a hollow space between himself and the person he was supposed to be. (*Americanah* 33)

Obinze's critique of his wife's demeanor at Chief's party reveals something of a transcultural perspective. Kosi's pretentiousness makes him uncomfortable. 'There was something immodest about her modesty: it announced itself' (34). It is like the marketing director's 'unbearable politeness that is worse than any insult' (*Americanah* 393). Adichie employs paradox in this instance to foreground the exaggerated nature of Kosi's plastically overdramatised mannerisms. She dramatises them, it would appear, chiefly to draw attention. Her behaviour is not natural; it is simply acted out in a rather Jerzian manner. Her charm, like 'Curt's kind, with its need to dazzle, to perform ... in that well-oiled way that slightly embarrassed Ifemelu,' does to excite Obinze (*Americanah* 268). A woman who pigeon-holes herself in the traditional cage – what Femi Ojo-Ade calls 'the gilded cage' – does not appeal to him. This is equally quite typical of Nigerianness where woman is a flower and it is Femi who captures the typical Nigerian scenario quite aptly:

Woman is considered to be a flower, not a worker. Woman is supposed to be relegated to the gilded cage; she is not the contributor to, the creator of, a civilisation. So the new black bourgeoisie, all awash with the off-white paint of civilisation, emerged in the arena of inhumanism. (Femi 158)

Kosi's conventional wisdom does not appeal to Obinze. She has relegated herself to the periphery and ironically feels comfortable in this position. She ridiculously seems to derive joy in playing second fiddle to men and does not recognise that times have changed. That Obinze feels deeply attracted to Ifemelu can be understood in this context. Ifemelu sets her record straight, revolts and breaks free from her false sense of security. Determined to take a new path, new beginning; she resolves to find her own moorings and identity. She casts off Americanism, which impedes the psychological and intellectual awakening of émigrés and inflicts a paralysing and numbing influence on the émigrés' psyche. She begins a fresh exploration of the existing space, identity and generally American life. She does not give in to conventional perceptions, those that seep into the émigrés who submit to their fate without resisting and rebelling. They, Ginika and her ilk, accept and conform to the social conventions and in turn become perpetrators of American hypocrisy. Seemingly devoid of option and voice, perhaps fearing that objecting to the

cultural norms of the dominant group would alienate them from their newfound company; they mould new émigrés to accede to these conventions. Ifemelu refuses to be content with conventionality and instead embraces a more liberal and emancipated standpoint. Transculturalism, in her view, or so it would seem, entails the acknowledgement of the idea that ‘the only race that matters is the human race’ (Americanah 5). Miss Adebayo’s argument is in tandem with this philosophy; she avers that in ‘the bigger picture, we are all one race’ (HYS 20). One would contend that other notions of racial differentiations are constructs of the white man; ‘[we are] black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white’ (HYS 20). Ifemelu, Obinze and Odenigbo, are, in Achebe’s terms, ‘lucky in their wrestle with multiple-headed [cultural] spirits.’ Achebe opines:

We lived at the crossroads of cultures. We still do today, but when I was a boy, one could see and sense the peculiar quality and atmosphere of it more clearly ... But still cross-roads does have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple-headed spirits, but also he might be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision. (Achebe 67)

Yet even traditional notions of nationhood like the tribe (what Odenigbo claims to be the naturally constituted and ‘authentic identity for the African’) have been dismantled. It no longer carries the national image that it held for the African citizens; it has been barbarised as it is a colonial product. Nothing puts this better than Professor Ezeka’s observations; most African citizens have become aware that they are members of a given tribe because of the white man: ‘... you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race’ (HYS 20). This view of tribe as presently constructed demonstrates the near lack of indigenous cultural purity and thus the inevitability of denationalisation.

These traditional notions should be re-conceptualised and re-evaluated. Adichie appears to suggest that transculturalism resides outside the restrictive boundaries and myopic confines of race and thus foregrounds a claim to an identity that rejects narrow social constructs. Transculturation is, it seems, a process initiated by the realisation that long-held notions about culture must be reassessed. This standpoint is a repudiation of uncritical notion of pan-Africanism as it too is a creation of white man. The tragedy of post-independence African citizenry is the intransigent hold on traditions that no longer have a bearing in a fast-globalising society. There are claims to definitive and distinct cultural shapes that do not exist in reality. To a large extent, Odenigbo tragedy is the tragedy of many an African citizen who still cling on to tribes yet as they are currently constructed, they only serve the interests of the imperialist administrators. In this way, Adichie’s novels endorse the transformative nature of literary creativity as they seem to demonstrate the power of fiction to ‘slip the restrictive noose of race’ in its efforts to realise a transcultural quality (Caryl 131). This statement is akin to what Obama calls ‘wanting to grow into a human being’ – a figure of speech that this study regards as a euphemism for transculturalism. And for one to realise humanness fully, Obama argues, they ‘need some values’ such as ‘honesty,’ ‘fairness,’ ‘straight talk,’ and ‘independent judgment’ (49).

The arrival of Olanna, an émigré, presents a linguistic dimension to transcultural discourse. Her exposure to London lifestyle does not affect her mastery of the Igbo language. In what looks like Master Odenigbo's ability to blend English words in his Igbo sentences musically and sonorously, a quality that excites the young Ugwu; she (Olanna) does not 'stumble in her Igbo.' What is interestingly ironic is the effortlessness with which Olanna demonstrates the mutual co-existence of English and Igbo in her talk; '[Ugwu] had not expected English that perfect to sit beside equally perfect Igbo' (HYS 23). This illustration points to Pratt's observation that the 'third' space is as an ambivalent contact zone, that, on the one hand, offers perspectives of 'co-presence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices' (7). She cuts the image of African scholars whose dalliance with West education has only re-invigorated their aspirations to authenticate and reinterpret their traditional African values. Olanna has an exemplary mastery of the English, something that comes naturally to her, yet this artful mastery does not alienate her from Igbo. She is the perfect antithesis of Ojiugo, who impresses upon her children to elevate the foreign at the expense of her own. Unlike Odenigbo's English which is 'music,' Olanna's is 'magic' – 'a superior tongue, a luminous language, the kind of English he [Ugwu] heard on Master's radio, rolling out with clipped precision. It reminded him of slicing a yam with a newly sharpened knife, the easy perfection in every slice' (HYS 22).

Contrary to Ugwu's expectations, Olanna carries out herself modestly and even offers to 'show [him] how to cook rice properly, without using so much oil,' an indication that her stay in London had not alienated her from a natural life. It would appear that her distaste for 'so much oil' figuratively speaks of her disregard for flashiness. 'There was something polished about her' yet she exhibits natural emotions – 'moaning loudly, sounds that seemed unlike her, so uncontrolled and stirring and throaty' (HYS 25). She downplays the ticket seller's fury at porter for supposedly failing to take her to the VIP lounge at Enugu Airport. She comfortably sits at the general lounge 'opposite three little children in threadbare clothes and slippers who giggled intermittently while their father gave them severe looks' (HYS 27). In spite of the highly placed position that her father holds and her exposure to Western lifestyle, she still feels passionate about communing with the underprivileged in her society. The musty smell in the crowded lounge does not nudge her to leave. Her exposure to foreign lifestyle prompts her to adopt a transcultural view. In what looks like a plea for a transcultural approach understood as a solution for a harmonious cultural dialogue, Brooks describes transculturalism as a 'converge' of cultures, in which each social group contributes 'something of value to a new, blended mainstream culture' (24-25).

Adichie delegitimises and deconstructs 'Oriental fallacy.' Against Olanna's oratory finesse, her Igbo words are softer and equally perfect. Her efforts at perfecting both languages signify her acknowledgement that no culture is superior to the other. The hyperbolic description of her spoken English would ordinarily suit alienated African scholars like Obi Okwonkwo (Achebe's *been-to* in *No Longer at Ease*), who believe that their uncritical adoption of western speech mannerisms place them above their 'pan-African' counterparts. Olanna, unlike Ojiugo's investment in assimilation to whiteness, appears to have deterritorialised cultural belonging through self-invention. In this way, she, and Adichie for that matter, makes deliberate attempts to shift the restrictive cultural boundaries of her traditional Nigerian society as well as the typified whiteness and deconstructs established cultural formations,

norms or notions to reassert legitimate belonging on individualistic grounds. She vouches for cultural transcendence as opposed to cultural authenticity. The stature that her father (Chief Ozobia) holds does not separate her from the mainstream plebian society. Her exposure to Western education, something that excites ordinary Nigerians like the grandmother at the airport who believe that studying overseas sets *been-tos* apart from other Nigerians, does not seem to thrill her. It is little wonder that the reaction of the grandmother startles her. She gives the impression of someone who has incorporated the entirety of her experiences ‘into [her] character and personality and respond to all subsequent experiences from the perspective of [her] new self’ (Storti 65).

The flashback that comes after the airport incident further reifies the Olanna’s cultural re-invention. She nostalgically recalls that their first meeting was orchestrated by a similar drama. A ticket seller had signalled a white man to jump the queue in an obvious preferential treatment, in what loudly indicated the racially afflicted mindset of the African citizens. Putting on what the narrator humorously calls the ‘contrived ‘white’ accent of ‘uneducated people,’ he had pronounced: ‘Let me help you here sir’ (29). Olanna reveals that it is Odenigbo’s bold protest against the injustice at the airport that attracted her to him. He had ‘walked up to the front, escorted the white man back into the queue and then shouted at the ticket seller,’ an incident that stands out as the most blatant and daring move against social injustices perpetuated by African employees who are brainwashed by Oriental fallacies. To show his disgust at the employee, he had said: ‘You miserable ignoramus! You see a white person and he looks better than your own people? You must apologise to everybody in this queue! Right now!’ (HYS 29). By doing this, he transcends the conventional myths and notions of white superiority and prompts one Olanna to, in the writer’s own words, ‘think of the least hurtful way to untangle herself from Mohammed.’ Odenigbo projects a transcultural perspective that resonates very well with her ideas. He dismantles stereotypical notions of white dominance and presents a new cultural outlook. His rejection of an Orientalised social space points towards the possibility of transcending the boundaries of the traditionally oppressive identity categories upon which human beings are defined and evaluated. The transcultural ‘space’ that Odenigbo projects ‘here is hybrid, shifting, and reflective of the elaborate relationships that construct our sense of space in the contemporary world’ (Sara 15).

As opposed to her cousin Arize, who regards marriage as the epitome of bliss and social fulfillment, Olanna thinks differently and markedly departs from the traditional stereotyping of marriage as the hallmark of a traditionally acclaimed femininity. She turns down Odenigbo’s marriage proposal because it is a threat to their happiness. ‘Each time he suggested they get married, she said no. They were too happy, precariously so, and she wanted to guard that bond; she feared that marriage would flatten it to a prosaic partnership’ (HYS 52). Prose, in this context, metaphorically suggests monotony and consequently boredom. She disabuses of the notion that women, and indeed the two main players in the marital arrangement, have to secure their happiness by rushing into marriage. In doing this, Olanna subscribes to Oprah Winfrey’s observation, a deconstructed view of the marital institution as it were, that she and her long-term partner Steadman Graham ‘wouldn’t [have been] together’ if they had formalised their partnership in marriage. Speaking to *Vogue*, Oprah indicates that Steadman, a partner she has known since 1986, has a very traditional view of married household, which she insists she would never ‘fit in with.’ ‘His interpretation of what it means to be a husband and what it would mean for me to be a wife would have been pretty traditional, and

I would not have been able to fit into that' (Oprah). She admits, ridiculous as it might seem for traditionally oriented characters like Kosi, to being impatient and not regretting 'never having children,' as she does not believe she would have made a good mother. Olanna's reluctance to marry Odenigbo can be best understood in this context. Adichie, like Oprah, seems to suggest that the traditionally dogmatised position that marriage entitles one to happiness is misguided. In subscribing to this view, Olanna establishes transcultural citizenship. She also believes that beauty goes beyond physical attractiveness and to reduce it to appearance alone is myopic. Nothing describes her cultural views than what Ali Mazrui calls the 'third phase of cultural nationalism.' In *The Anglo-African Commonwealth*, Ali Mazrui postulates:

A third phase of cultural nationalism is the capacity to take pride in some aspects of African culture without feeling an urge to renounce western [or any other foreign] culture at the same time. But when a cultural nationalist reaches this stage ... [they are] beginning to accept the proposition that there is such a thing as a global pool of mankind's cultural achievements from different lands. (Ali 108)

According to Gilroy, the 'movements of black people' from Africa to Europe and America has not only resulted in 'slavery and exploitation,' but it has also led to the creation of groups involved in 'struggles towards emancipation, autonomy and citizenship.' Hybridity, then becomes, Gilroy argues, an pertinent aspect of what he regards as a 'black Atlantic,' which he describes as an 'intercultural and transnational formation' and which 'provides a means to re-examine the problems of nationality, location, identity and historical memory' (16). The development of colonial hybridity should therefore be canvassed in the context of the 'political and intellectual cross-fertilisations' that have been borne out of the black diaspora. 'Black Atlantic' is a tag that is borne out of neoculturation. In the same vein, Hall contends that the contemporary black identities in the west emerge from the 'cut and mix' process of 'cultural diaspora-isation' (447). Transcultural citizenship, in this regard, becomes the end product of the cultural cross-pollination that is occasioned by the movements of individuals across the planet.

Ife's perceptions about physical intimacy are nothing short of transcultural. She does not traditionally regard sex as an absolute indicator of infidelity and she is honest about it. To assume that colour or race difference would not propel one to some sort of 'intimate' discovery is to overplay the holiness card. 'There was something fluid, almost epicene, about his lean body, and it made her remember that he had told her he did yoga. Perhaps he could stand on his head, twist himself into unlikely permutations' (Americanah 382). Apparently alluding to Rama Krishna in Armah's famous novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ifemelu, and Adichie for that matter, dismisses this perfection in cultural isolation.

The artificiality of emotions baffles her, the Blaine's ability to 'switch his emotions on and off is a case in point. Blaine's 'slipping on of the condom with such slow and clinical concentration' betrays her sense of emotionalism and her quest for the 'improbable.' She is persuaded to think 'of him as a person who did not have a normal spine but had, instead, a firm need of goodness' (Americanah 383). The use of contraceptives like condoms is a Western-oriented concept; it is an acceptable mode of guarding against sexually transmitted diseases and

unpremeditated pregnancies. Yet its use raises questions about the spontaneity of emotions. Ifemelu is finding it difficult to understand how someone who is emotionally consumed would still find time, in midst of intense emotional feeling, to switch off his emotions to think rationally and then switch on his emotions. The ability exercise emotional restraint at the point of its greatest intensity exudes a measure of plasticity. It is this artificiality that makes certain aspects of emotions quite unreal. To question the conventional notions of contraception is beyond the traditional conception of culture or even Western civilisation. According Ifemelu, Blaine cuts the figure of ‘a perfect father, this man of careful disciplines’ – he runs every morning and flosses every night. ‘It seemed so American to her, flossing, that mechanical sliding of a string between teeth, inelegant and functional’ (*Americanah* 384). Blaine, it is evident, is symptomatic of the black elites who are deeply consumed by western life; their lives are purely ‘academic,’ and it is therefore small wonder that he pushes Ifemelu into his routinely bookish lifestyle, one that is characterised by strict dietary habit and regular physical exercises – ‘she began to floss, as she began to do other things that he did – going to the gym, eating more protein than carbohydrates – and she did them with a kind of grateful contentment, because they improved her. He was like a salutary tonic; with him, she could only inhabit a higher level of goodness’ (384). He, more like Armah’s escapist character Rama who does not realise that ‘there is too much of the unnatural in any man who imagines he could escape the inevitable ... [realities of social] life,’ allows himself to be blinded by extreme attempts to escape from the real construct of his cultural heritage (Armah 48). He is the subject of the writer’s biting sarcasm and ridicule; his obsession with the desire to live up to his elitist background sets him apart from the rest of the society. He is figuratively likened to ‘a salutary tonic’ – his lifestyle is predictably vapid and predicated on a civilisation lane that is largely destructive. He lives ‘in a parallel universe of academia’ and does not – or so it seems – ‘really know what’s happening in the real world’ (*Americanah* 220).

To understand cultural diversity as contemplated in the framework of critical hybridity, one has to acknowledge, much like McClintock argues, the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexuality and class. Any attempt to regard the aforementioned as distinct realms of experience is bound to be futile. McClintock posits that these aspects of identity do not ‘exist in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways’ (5).

Hardt and Negri, in *Empire*, theorise that an ongoing transition from a modern phenomenon of colonisation centred on individual nation-states to an emergent postmodern construct created among ruling powers. There is a progressive decline in the sovereignty of nation-states and the emergence of a new form of sovereignty, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rules. This new global form of sovereignty is what they call ‘Empire’ – a consolidation of power that represents ‘the real subsumption of social existence by capital’ and ‘post-modernised global economy’ (222-224). This identity, it appears, is a product of neoculturation; it parallels the Black Atlantic identity, which is a result of the weakening of pan-African identities. This citizenship is borne out of social and economic coercion and as such it typifies the post-Cold War identity: ‘The Cold War forced people to choose, and it was either you became an internationalist, which of course meant

communism to Americans, or you became part American capitalism, which was the choice African American elite made' (*Americanah* 418). Transculturation becomes the 'only way to change the conversation' and 'people who are doing new things, pushing boundaries' are created (*Americanah* 421).

In *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, they (Hardt and Negri) the term 'multitude' to refer to the population of the world that they believe is increasingly networked and has the potential to resist 'Empire' and establish genuine democratic principles. The challenge for the 'multitude' in this era is 'for the social multiplicity to manage to communicate and act in common while remaining internally different' (xiv). Yet the said population, Edwards avers, is 'defined by diversity rather than commonalities' (16). In *Americanah*, marriage and sexual relations are symbolic sites for exploration of cultural diversity. Obinze, in spite of the luxury and prestige that his social status attracts, remains steadfast in his quest for a new cultural vision. He openly admits, for instance, that he loves cooking yet his wife thinks that his 'wanting to cook [is] an indictment of her [womanhood], a perspective that he 'found silly' (*Americanah* 555). He abnegates what he regards as 'basic mainstream ideas of what a wife should be' as it mechanises the marital institution. That he loves cooking and cannot do it because it affronts traditional womanhood is pretentious as it is dishonest: 'There's a lot of pretending in [his] marriage.' Besides cooking, his marriage is guided by the natural desire arising from self fulfillment, rather parties feel obligated to stick to the union in spite of its artificiality. Obinze discloses that he had married Kosi 'when [he] was feeling vulnerable; [he] had a lot of upheaval in his life at the time.' This disclosure speaks of the unnaturalness of their union, one that is informed by a feeling of 'a great responsibility' for the other party 'and that is all.' He feels compelled to take of Kosi because he had rushed into a union with her to make himself less susceptible to social upheavals. To shun the possibility of finding himself in a similar situation, she asks Ifemelu for more time to enable him 'put things into perspective' (557).

The return of Ifemelu re-ignites Obinze quest for a new cultural space. He dedicates a lot of his time to reflect on the genesis of his relationship with Kosi, their marriage and all. He recalls that Kosi had apologised to him for giving birth to a girl, saying 'Darling, we'll have a boy next time.' This reaction revealed to him that 'she did not know him' (*Americanah* 565). The writer uses the oxymoronic expression 'gentle contempt' to show his reaction to Kosi's unwarranted apology. He frowned upon her for displaying her loyalty to traditional perceptions about the place of the girl-child, yet he pitied her for what the writer sarcastically calls 'wanting a boy because they were supposed to want a boy.' Obinze discovers that what his perceptions about life are entirely different from Kosi's; 'the questions he asked of life were entirely different from hers' (565). Separation offers him a new lease of life; stories of 'children [who] are more contented with separated parents than with married unhappy parents' excite him and he finds it difficult to dam up his emotions when one person observes that he had felt relieved by his parents' divorce because his parents' unhappiness had been 'heavy.' The metaphor 'heavy' accentuates the emotional burden that unhappy marriages impose on innocent children. At the end of the day, his decision to leave Kosi is largely informed by his desire to lead an honest life, one that can be emulated by Buchi: 'I want to raise Buchi. I want to see her every day. But I have been pretending all these months and one day she'll be old enough to know I'm pretending' (*Americanah* 588).

As evident in the aforementioned examples, Adichie represents a new generation of transcultural mobile literary writers, who, by sheer chance, by choice, or by life experiences, expose themselves to cultural plurality and diversity. Her transcultural and transnational experiences are mirrored in the lives of characters in her novels. Through these novels, she succeeds in transcending the borders of a single culture and manages to promote a global cultural perspective. Concurrently, she also vouches for a return to an idealistic historical past and its tradition which is encapsulated in her more-phantom-than-physical geography 'Nsukka,' which only compares to Wole Soyinka's Aiyero in *Season of Anomy*. Consequently, in Adichie's novels, transculturalism coexists in a symbiotic relationship with a newly rediscovered feeling of natural awareness and self-consciousness. Not only can Adichie's protagonists be easily described as pioneers of a new cross-cultural trend (borne out of transcultural citizenry), but they can also be seen as preservers of African past and traditional heritage, which is, in *Americanah*, for instance, manifested in Ifemelu's predilection for the remote past. In *Americanah*, Adichie's heroine nourishes a certain freedom of treatment and attempts to reinterpret African myths and their heroes in a bid to create her own cultural mythologies.

Through her quest for eternal truths, she strives, rather ceaselessly, to chart a path to a better society. Adichie's expressed purpose in writing her novels, or so it seems, is to present her sense of the anomic conditions of the universe represented in its social, political, religious and economic upheavals to a gradual change in that condition and, finally, to celebrate the glory of the universe thus transformed, a renewed world in which man knows how to admire, hope, trust and endure among others vicissitudes of life. In this world, she projects universal values such as love. This, it would appear, is Ifemelu's cultural 'Ceiling.' When she allows Obinze to 'come in,' she figuratively demonstrates that she has accepted his cultural strivings towards this universality. Obinze has recognised that her marriage to Kosi – one would note that this marriage symbolizes the social upheavals that define Nigerianness such as materialistic glamour, the tragically submissiveness of women, the overbearing attitude (hubris) of maleness that submerges womanhood, the complacency of woman and other plebian, rather unprivileged citizens and the general unwillingness to break away from oppressive cultures among other cultural anomies – is no longer feasible. He understands only too well what their options are: 'to accept the things [they] can't be for each other and even turn into the poetic tragedy of [their] lives. Or [they] could act' (*Americanah* 588). By acting, he means dispatiating, charting a new cultural path, one that is not anchored on hypocrisy. Living a fettered life which is defined purely by a desire to reciprocate submissiveness by showing gratitude is untenable in a real world. He makes a bold and radical admission: 'I should never have married her.' This is a clear indication that even though he had declared allegiance to her (Kosi), he seemed 'to be always moving away.'

That is why he knows 'something was missing.' He understands that he is duty-bound to raise Buchi, his daughter. He wants to see her every day, but he also knows he has been 'pretending all those months' and one day her daughter will be old enough to determine that he is pretending. Adichie here confirms Manguel's position that 'home is always an imaginary place.' Like Bukenya's Kitandawili whose 'most focused and most meaningful years of life' begin when he becomes honest to his mermaid, Obinze's decision to move out of the house marks the

beginning of his real life, the start of his journey towards ‘home.’ (Bukenya 10; *Americanah* 588). This new-found allegiance is best explained by Manguel when he posits:

Even when declaring allegiance to one place, we seem to be always moving away from it ... Nationalities, ethnicities, tribal, and religious filiations imply geographical and political definitions of some kind, and yet, partly because of our nomad nature and partly due to the fluctuations of history, our geography is less grounded in a physical than in an imaginary place (Manguel 145).

As a transcultural writer, Adichie demonstrates to us what it means to live within a multiple sense of belonging, made of plural affiliations and a rather dispersed sense of allegiance and of place or home. In such cultural set-ups, borders of a single nation are transcended in favour of a planetary view of humanity (and of community). This planetary view of humanity – the development and acquisition of a plural, elastic, metamorphic identity with multiple states of belonging – is a new direction, a new solution to the eternal problem of identity. Using Brian Castro’s words, ‘hybridity; a mixture of forms, a mixture of character types is what’ Adichie injects into her novels. It is what she is and evidently what her protagonists envision. Castro calls this ‘a proliferation of selves’ and ‘a juxtaposition of differences’ (115). Adichie, and her main character Ifemelu for that matter, is not only American and Nigerian but she is writing herself ‘out of crippling essentialist categorisations out of the control exerted over multiplicities’ (Castro 115).

3. CONCLUSION

The foregoing arguments demonstrate that émigrés go through a process of denationalisation that propels them to the attainment of transcultural citizenship. Its own creativity, when being enacted in a dialogue with other cultures, changes itself only to a new sense of its existence. Comparatively speaking, the creativity of individual cultures exists through permanent re-interpretations of their own image of identity. While taking into account the processes of cross-cultural interactions and the permanency of re-interpretations in the formation of individual cultural identities, the role of the marginal and peripheral and their validity has evolved into a new context. In a cultural dialogue that results in overcoming monolithic or hegemonic views and statuses, demarcations between majority cultures and marginal cultures become thin and almost indistinct. Enacted dialogism is democratic in its origin and in its essence. In history, the marginal and the peripheral has proved influential through its will to power. The role of the marginal, following Bakhtin’s philosophy of Otherness, has ultimately changed the historical transformations of thought in the twentieth century and Adichie’s novels have, using the words of one of her characters (Blaine), attempted to ‘prove that the world can be like [a] room. It can be a safe and equal space for everyone. We just need to dismantle the walls of [cultural] privilege and oppression [in order to establish transcultural citizenship]’ (*Americanah* 418). To a certain extent, the cultural essence (or the quintessence of identity) is represented by the ‘paradoxical, [contradictory] (or simply narrative) coherence of a transformational and constantly dynamic process of becoming with its multiple entries.’ As Ellen Berry and Epstein posit, the goal becomes to ‘mutate’ beyond any singular or bounded mode of cultural identity – even a hybridised identity – in order to ‘become transcultural’ (Berry 130).

In our rapidly globalising world, cultures, as well as societies and identities, tend to be more fluid and intermingled, less irreducibly different and less ‘territorially fixed’ than in the past (Engler 27). Especially now, when cosmopolitan issues and pluralistic sensibilities – driven by transnational and transcommunal experiences – tend to become more relevant. It is within this emerging social context that a new generation of mobile writers, on the move across cultural and national boundaries, has started expressing a ‘transcultural’ sensibility and mode of being, fostered by ‘the process of self-distancing, self-estrangement, and self criticism of one’s own cultural identities and assumptions’ (Berry and Epstein 307).

In this thesis, the main element that distinguishes these early ‘transcultural writers’ from their precursors and/or ‘cousin species’ (migrant/exile/diasporic/postcolonial writers) – albeit all belonging to the wider ‘genus’ of ‘the literature of mobility’ – is their relaxed, neo-nomadic attitude when facing issues linked to identity, nationality, rootlessness and dislocation. It is an attitude that reflects itself also in their creative outputs, which can already be inscribed within the realm of ‘transcultural literature’, a literature able to ‘transcend the borders of a single culture in its choice of topic’, vision and scope, thus contributing to promote a wider global literary perspective (Pettersson 1).

More than the stylistic solutions, which can belong to different literary genres and approaches, it is the intentions and the cultural dispositions of transcultural authors while writing their works of fiction that mostly count and should be taken into consideration when (at least initially) dealing with transcultural literature. Evidently, it is by expressly analysing the lived experience of creative dispatiation that a better understanding of the nature and the content of transcultural literary outputs – more attuned to current cosmopolitan and pluralistic sensibilities – can be arrived at. It is not just a question of literary definitions and genres. It is instead a question of changing mindsets, different cultural approaches, heterogeneous identities, deterritorialising dynamics and, subsequently, of emerging new imaginaries that are being created in the process, through the active interaction between transcultural writers and transcultural readers. As Dominic Sachsenmaier points out, ‘In the near future, it will be a major intellectual, political and also economic challenge to harmonize claims to diversity with global commonalities and responsibilities’ (42).

Hence, the significance of a transcultural ‘transforming’ approach and experience, enhanced by (or simply conveyed through) its literary expressions, that instead of heightening conflicts and culture clashes promotes the value of ‘confluence,’ fruitful encounters and mutual respect; dismantling boundaries instead of erecting new barriers, encouraging a new sense of communality. Welsch’s intellectual submission summarises the kernel of this chapter; he observes that it is possible for us to transcend the narrowness of traditional, monolithic cultural ideas and constraints and develop an increasingly transcultural understanding of ourselves (201). West African literature’s capacity to dismantle traditional borders, a capacity to transcend regional cultural boundaries is equally demonstrated by Jones. Of West African literature, she has commented:

West Africans are savoring at firsthand the thoughts, the ways of life, of peoples all over the world; and many of our writers, actual and potential, have travelled in what are for them, new areas ... their contacts

with Britain and America have deepened and widened. Even those who stayed at home have been involved in a revolution of ideas, religion, architecture and political systems, but inevitably, in West African writing. At the same time, the resources of traditional inspiration for those who wish to draw from them are far from dry. West Africa is therefore capable of producing a whole gradation of types and standards of literature, for the new influences touch at all levels. (Jones 93)

There are so many challenges to human life in the contemporary society. Some of these challenges, like the cross-cultural complexities of living in a new world, appear undefeatable. There is need for adoption of a common cultural vision from different perspectives all essentially oriented by the belief that living together can only be fully achieved when the business of living espouses diversity and care for the other as the principle of unity, when the unifying principle is difference. Ifemelu and Obinze are the embodiments of social positives in *Americanah*. Both characters are realistically painted and together they act the forces of cultural regeneration in the novel. It is Ifemelu who attests to the proposition that Adichie has been gradually leaning over to transculturalism as the solution to the cultural complexities that émigrés encounter in new worlds. Adichie, through her mouthpiece Ifemelu, seems to imply that transculturalism is a natural way of life, one that is not influenced by the artificiality of vain material quests. Transculturalism is, as such, a product of eternal elements of traditional African cultural heritage and the Western culture. Ifemelu's yearning for a return to Nigeria is not rooted in blind African cultural nationalism, but a realisation that the traditional life in the African society has a significant bearing on cultural regeneration. Nsukka, Adichie's idealised symbol of perfection, purity, dynamism and vitality, definitely becomes Ifemelu's new desired location; it brings to her vocation as a voyager a drive and intellectual power which puts static characters like Kosi in the shade. Unlike Kosi and her ilk who are associated with closed spaces, Ifemelu's dynamism and vitality are suggested by her desire to explore the untrodden cultural paths.

There are both literal and metaphoric manifestations of displacement in Adichie's novels. Adichie's novels stretch the debate on displacement beyond its superficial association with physical dislocation. 'For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man' (Fanon 239). The cultural complexities of new environments compel émigrés to embrace a new notion of internationalism, one manifested in the creation and proliferation of a new cultural discourse which is both international and transcultural in nature. Progressively, the émigrés develop a cosmopolitan dimension to life, one that is borne out of the fact that through dialogue cultural boundaries are dismantled and the émigré is able to interweave apparently opposed cultural identities. This transcultural spirit manifests itself in the novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Each one of the émigrés in the novels discussed in this thesis seems to have individual perceptions about their culture and the culture of the Other but no matter how much these views may differ, due to their own, unique temperaments, they are still dominated by a tendency to promote a large diversity of transcultural sensitivity. Adichie's dominant preoccupation, it would therefore appear, lies in her interest for cultural diversity and otherness. This concern is nurtured and facilitated by the cultural interactions made possible to Adichie's characters by the empire and by the rich flow of information and the eclecticism occasioned by the dialogue between the émigrés and the citizens from the European countries and the west in general but also by

intrapersonal dialogue with the African cultural experiences. *Americanah*, in sharp contradiction to its association with a Nigerian citizen who is blinded by American culture, is a metaphor for ‘citizen of the world.’

Notions of individual cultural identities packaged as European, African or American, among other tags, defy the natural order of social progression. Such notions suggest stagnation, aloofness, and immobility against the reality of increasingly mobile societies. It is an insufficient and reductionist view on culture and literature, for example, the ‘soul of nation’ (Herder) was, in fact, already conceptualised by Goethe when he constructed the concept of world literature. But any gesture of openness in the ‘intellectual history’ or ‘history of ideas’ can be understood as self-affirmation of the romantic absolute and autonomous subject (Fugmann 22; Bontempelli 69; Crossley 6). Any notion of an understanding of openness as a feature of transgressing or of the self-revaluation of the romantic self can be found only in the phenomenon of romantic irony. Thus, the problematic of cultural identity undoubtedly refers us to a question of cross-cultural interactions. Considered this way, it is pre-eminently a concept belonging to the field of comparative literature. Literary works, genres, trends, and periods of artistic orientation in a given nation, as manifested through history, cannot exist as isolated events of the closed national existence of cultural history and cannot be understood without contacts with literary phenomena of other national cultures. No cultural identity can be identified or analysed only on its national ground. Any national culture was given form on the borders of other influential cultures. The three novels selected for this study bear evidence, among others, of untenability of cultural absolutes. No society can lay claims to the existence of a distinct cultural identity. Clearly, literature cannot be but an intercultural historical phenomenon of mutual artistic and other influences from several cultures, of mutual interactions of artistic expression produced in different cultural circumstances, and thus of mutual reception of Otherness.

Despite being labelled as an émigré, Ifemelu, the protagonist in Adichie’s *Americanah*, just like Richard in *Half of a Yellow Sun* who is tagged as an Oyinbo, ‘operate[s] outside the confines of a nation and consequently address[es] questions of multiple forms of cultural, sexual and existential belonging’ (Claudia 5). Her primary cultural allegiance, it would seem, is to her motherland Nigeria, yet this does not limit her perceptions about life. She assumes the figure of a culturally unfettered personality. She deliberately sheds off and, in some instances struggles to overcome the ethnic, national, imperial and religious boundaries imposed by previous categorisations of cultures. She understands the inherent limitations in their making and refuses to be swayed by them. Ifemelu’s identity and allegiance (to wit, whether she feels ‘more’ Nigerian or ‘more’ American) is not distinct. She is poised between geographies and several cultural traditions. Her stay in America, her travel to London and the other excursions she partakes of do not initiate a process of cultural subtraction or denial, rather it inculcates in her a cultural newness, one in which inclusivity reigns supreme. She embraces a vision that encapsulates disparate cultural entities in a single affiliation. These encounters prod her to adopt an all-embracing cultural visualisation, one that repudiates partiality, secretarism, intolerance and domineering stances. In this all-encompassing visualisation, ‘just about every other category has deconstructed, or at least has self-destructed’ (Herzfeld 46).

The protagonist exudes a revolutionary cultural spirit. This spirit creates the ideological basis upon which her radical social stance is built. Ifemelu's desire to break with the traditional artificialities of cultural dogmas and to reject sophistication of any kind and to plead for a common cultural sensibility, all have their roots in revolutionary ideals that she embraces. She gradually, but profoundly and irreversibly transforms her cultural attitudes. She embraces this new notion of internationalism, one that is manifested in the creation and proliferation of a new cultural discourse that is both boundless and transcultural in nature.

Adichie's protagonist, Ifemelu, exhibits a cosmopolitan citizenry in the sense that she breaks down cultural boundaries and manages to interweave apparently opposed cultural identities. This very spirit manifests itself in practically every facet of her life. She displays a unique temperament, but overall, her actions are dominated by a tendency to promote a large diversity of transcultural sensitivity. As Arianna puts it, if migrant writers were still concerned with the main question of 'how to traverse, intellectually and emotionally, the distance between a familiar 'here' and an alien 'there', transcultural [citizens like Adichie's protagonist Ifemelu or Richard for that matter] have already accepted or restored their inner Other' (12). Ifemelu, for instance, has 'already incorporated,' to use Arianna's words, 'the stranger within [herself]' (12). It is particularly on the basis of these cultural crossings that Adichie's creative works are built. Her novels, to this end, are literary expressions of 'what it means to understand the nuances in cultural transaction and transformations' (Arianna 12).

Cultural transformations and interactions have always been part of human history, but what the contemporary society is facing today is a more and more rapid growth in their dynamics and practices. As has been noted in this thesis, contemporary literary writers like Adichie have positioned themselves (circumstantially, intellectually or as chance would have it) at the vanguard of transcultural encounters emerging from biographies and lifestyles that can no longer be placed in somewhat established or unchanging cultural milieus. Characters in Adichie's novels find themselves negotiating, compromising and, at times, in conflict with several cultures on a daily basis, thus affecting their cultural dispositions and imaginations. Adichie, like other transcultural writers, is decidedly sensitised towards the processes of cultural arbitration, convergence and transformation. Her characters are often confronted by the same kind of cultural complexity and heterogeneity. It would appear that they operate in a cultural environment that is bereft of any fixed borders. Therefore, the geographic, national and homeland boundaries as well as allegiances of Adichie's transcultural characters are self-made, self-chosen and perhaps continually re-conceptualised. This re-contextualisation is cultural dispatiation, post-nationality, neomadism, frontier-lessness or digitalism.

I.

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