

## Negotiation of Cross-Cultural Complexities of New Worlds in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novels

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### ABSTRACT

There is increased mobility today. These movements are either voluntary or involuntary. These movements are informed by several socio-cultural challenges. In new places of residence or locations, émigrés are compelled to confront the complexities of new cultural environments. These cultural intricacies have attracted the attention of contemporary literary writers. In Africa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works, particularly her novels, delve into these emerging cultural discourses. This paper investigates Adichie's novels with a view to exploring how negotiation of cross-cultural complexities is depicted. This study employs a multi-dimensional construct of critical hybridity. Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism has been identified as the primary theoretical springboard. This multi-faceted construct encompasses the ideas of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Franz Omar and Gayatri Spivak among other post-colonial theorists. This study concludes that through these cross-cultural interactions, émigrés are usually forced to embark on a process of cultural renegotiation. In what can be perceived as an intricate process of 'Othering' and cultural evolution, new conflicting cultural identities are created. This conflict is usually aporetically presents as cultural ambivalence.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper carries further the formal and thematic pattern of discussion as set in the preceding articles on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works. It discusses the suitability of the dialogic principle as established in Bakhtin's theory, Said's Orientalism, Bhabha's 'othering' and Fanon's 'wretchedness.' It explores Adichie's novels as platforms upon which émigrés' navigation of cross-cultural complexities are imaginatively depicted. Adichie's novels are interrogated in this section as fictionalised accounts of cross-cultural complexities of new locations. Subjected to atrocities, social evils and difficulties in conflict situations or other unbearable circumstances, civilians are forced to flee their homelands. The flight nonetheless does not, in a number of cases, put an end to émigrés' plights. A long struggle for survival, settlement and return await them at the places they migrate to. Female and male émigrés deal differently with trauma of dislocation, renegotiating identities and rebuilding social networks. Although the initial impact of violent displacement is comparatively severe for women than men, the former generally adapt more quickly to their new environment, finding new spaces through informal support networks to meet their needs. Women, on the other hand, as actors in their own survival may show resilience in adverse conditions and in the process become empowered. Thus, migration presents a double-edged implication for a woman; it leads to untold suffering yet it may have some positive impact.

Having to live in a new environment, émigrés or displaced persons engage in 'artful negotiation' to navigate the cultural complexities that they are exposed to (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 22). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin suggest that post-colonial theory 'is the most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted' (2). Adichie's novels, which are the subjects of this interrogation, are set the world during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on African citizenry and the African diaspora. In the words of Arthur Gakwandi, 'Nationalism and modern African literature have followed closely parallel courses and derived reciprocal inspirations one from the other,

both being part of an awakening and a search for a new place in the world for the African' (1). *Purple Hibiscus* heavily dwells on the post-independence challenges within the African environment that compel individuals to move out of their traditional locations. The movements highlighted in the discussion that precedes this chapter are not strictly physical. Even the physical movements cited mainly fall within the country. For purposes of the discussion in this paper, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* form the crux of the arguments on cross-cultural complexities of new environments. The primary focus is on how acculturation and deculturation processes complicate the cross-cultural interactions between natives and émigrés.

## **2. DEPICTION OF STEREOTYPING AND DIFFERENCE AS CROSS-CULTURAL INTRICACIES OF NEW WORLDS IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S NOVELS**

Adichie's novels paint migration to new cultural environments as an experience that exposes the émigré to a number of challenges. One of these hurdles is the inescapable reality of having to face the cultural intricacies of a new world. Though both male and female émigrés have their share of difficulties in such new cultural environments, it would appear that women bear the greatest brunt. On the one hand, women share common cultural experiences with the other émigrés (men) as a major constituent of the civilian population. On the other hand, there is a gender-based component to socially ascribed roles. This gender dimension to experiences for émigrés is rooted in the culture of discrimination that denies women equal status with men and, among other things, deprives them of basic rights such as access to education, mobility and participation in decision making. Women émigrés meet variegated consequences of violence – economic, socio-cultural, physical, sexual and psychological.

The section deals with the stereotyping and difference as some of the complex hurdles that émigrés in Adichie's novels encounter. Brislin argues that stereotypes 'refer to beliefs about a group of people that give insufficient attention to individual differences among the group's members' (*Understanding Culture's Influence on Behaviour* 198). Crawford and Unger, in a similar vein, aver that 'stereotypes occur whenever individuals are classified by others as having something in common because they are members of a particular group or category of people' (*Women and Gender* 37). Stereotyping, in the contexts highlighted by the aforementioned scholars, occurs in relation to religious, racial, and ethnic groups where it is common to attribute 'a range of fixed characteristics to individuals on the basis of their group membership' (Goddard *The Language of Advertising* 126). The primary focus of this study is to demonstrate how Adichie's novels provide imaginative platforms upon which the issues of stereotyping and difference are articulated. Interest is placed on characters that are displaced from traditional homelands and are, subsequently, forced to confront cross-cultural hurdles.

*Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie's first novel, to begin with, explores the cultural intricacies of new non-physical worlds. The protagonist, Kambili, does not physically move to a different world (one that is set apart from her traditional Nigerian location) to qualify as an émigré in the strict sense of the word yet she experiences several cross-cultural complexities. She fits the description of a transcendental émigré. She suffers frustration and slavery as a result of her father's preoccupation with the white man's delusion of superiority. Her cultural prison is not a physical establishment but a mental one. It, as such, expresses the psychological sense of inferiority and subservience in the face of colonial edifice. This situation necessarily involves turmoil and disturbance for it consists of competing and

contesting ideas. For her, the escape from this cultural prison entails breaking from this sense of inferiority and establishing a clear identity and a sense of pride and dignity. This pride is her awareness of the past heritage. This is captured in the realm of imagination in which her grandfather's apparition appears to her. It is her village (her grandfather's company) and her aunt's place where she finds redemption. Besides, it is this new non-physical space where the dialogue and debate concerning the true essence of her being are explored. Because of transcendental displacement from her homeland and community, she undergoes a crisis of cultural identity. She struggles with the question of cultural identity since she is unable to trace her original ancestral community. The fact that she meets people from different cultural groups complicates her situation. She attempts to construct for herself a definite and unique cultural identity. In this quest, she hopes for a genuine emancipation through a spiritual and cultural identification with her African roots. She makes deliberate attempts to purge her psyche of the colonised mindset that defines her father's life and has consequently afflicted her mind. Her father's world evidently represents, though vicariously, the West while her aunt's depicts the Nigerian socio-political reality. She goes through the process of acculturation and deculturation. The writer, therefore, attempts an exploration of the non-physical migration, an interesting dimension to relocation which calls for a detailed analysis. This perspective is worthy of acknowledgement despite the fact that the biggest chunk of the findings in this paper will be attributed to characters that have physically moved out of their traditional locations, more specifically individuals that have gone out of their national boundaries in their bid to chart new cultural paths.

In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, it is through the character Chiaku that the portrait of cross-cultural complexities in foreign environments is introduced. In her conversation with Ifeoma – a talk that is laced with sarcasm – she reveals that her life in England was characterised by racial prejudice. The racially segregated environment in England, in Chiaku's opinion, is representative of all new cultural environments. This explains why she suspects that the Americans must be treating Philipa as a 'second-class citizen.' Her comments are replete with racial stereotypes; she homogenises the diverse white population and forces them into sameness. In this way, she subscribes to what Said calls 'Oriental fallacy.' 'Oyinbos,' the equivalence of whites, are stereotypically racist and consider black émigrés as second-class citizens. In London, blacks are regarded as 'monkeys.' The substance of her claims is captured below:

All my years in Cambridge, I was a monkey who had developed the ability to reason. ... That is what they tell you. Every day our doctors go there and end up washing plates for *oyinbo* does not think we study medicine right. Our lawyers go there and drive taxis because *oyinbo* does not trust how we train them in law. (*Purple Hibiscus* 244)

Chiaku's description of the English cultural environment is a stereotyped portrait. She reveals the complexities of new cultural environments. The émigré is excluded from participation in the socio-political and economic destiny of the host's nation. Émigrés from African countries like Nigeria are generally and collectively regarded as intellectually inferior. The whites, on the other hand, see themselves as superior. This creates the nexus of 'us' and 'them' as the prominent dichotomy that highlights existing cultural difference. This difference is what creates the 'other.' The 'others' are constructed by the dominating culture and the positions they occupy are pre-determined.

The neo-colonial structure is basically alienating, excluding the displaced persons from belonging to certain privileged classes or taking up certain jobs that are considered more dignified and with higher remuneration. The émigré is meant to be exploited for labour and material gain. This sense of political, social and economic alienation is variously explored in Adichie's novels. The result, as evinced in the case of Chiaku, is a sense of bitterness and anger; she feels that the treatment accorded to Nigerian citizens in London is humiliating. Her statements are borne out of rage and disgust. The use of the word 'monkey' in reference to black émigrés evokes the image of cultural stagnation. Its employment reinforces the stereotyped feeling that black have not evolved from their ape-like or primitive lifestyle.

In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna's father dismisses Odenigbo, a senior lecturer at Nsukka University, on account of the presumption that the quality of education in local universities still pales in comparison to American and British universities and sarcastically regards the 'idea of Nsukka University' as a 'silly' one (32). That Olanna's uncle proudly regards her ability to finish a Master's degree at London University a herculean task is not surprising. 'It is not easy,' so he claims. Yet the idea of Nsukka University, in the perverted logic of the native, is 'daft' (40). This fallacy does not escape the writer's satiric attack and it is the young Abdulmalik who becomes the subject of the writer's ridicule: 'He looked as if it were he who was receiving the gift; he had that expression of people who marvelled at education with the calm certainty that it would never be theirs.' It is striking to note that the young boy in question represents the future of the black populace. The possibility of the perpetuity of cultural perversion is disturbing; 'Mother England,' to borrow Nazareth's words, is seen as 'a superior country in which everybody lives, and has always lived, on a high economic and cultural plane' (20). Adichie's novel demonstrates the weak-kneed readiness with which the assimilated black colonised persons can be persuaded to throw on a white mask of culture and privilege. Kainene dates 'so many white men in England' in spite of their 'false validations' and 'thinly veiled condescension' because she imagines that the perceived superiority of the whites would compensate for her physical unattractiveness. She does realise that this crave for validation, which arises from an apparent inferiority, merely perpetuates the dominance of an essentially unchanged centre. She does not recognise the potency of racial stereotyping that is at the centre of oppression because she is an emotionally drowned victim. In the colonial dichotomy of coloniser-colonised or white-black, it is evident that white is privileged in the discourse of the colonial relationship. It is the prologue of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* that crystallizes this dichotomy. Aside from deliberately hiding the identity of his protagonist, Ellison provides an interesting background to the invisible Griffin:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imaginations, indeed, everything and anything except me. (1)

This grounding of Orientalisation in the Western education system draws heavily from Ellison's idea of invisibility. The white man recognises everything except black. The Orient is culturally 'invisible' to the white man or a white-dominated mindset. The layout of the world map physically projects Africa as a subjugated region. 'The world is round, it never ends' yet 'the people who drew the map decided to put their land on top of our ours' (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 10). This argument suggests that Oriental fallacy is, by design, a well-orchestrated myth in the very architecture of the European education. To transcend this fallacy, members of the Orient have to sift the materials that gather from the schooling system. Uncritical consumption of unsifted knowledge is not only detrimental to the Orient's cultural growth, it is also misleading:

There are two answers to the things that they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books. They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo. (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 11)

The problem of cultural identity involves the question of the self and of culture. In other words, this means reflecting on the essence of culture itself and the implication that there is a reasonable motive of self-questioning. In turn, we may also ask whether the self-questioning is motivated in the problematic, uncertain, or insufficiently reflected idea of our selves or in a desire to analytically reaffirm the fragility of culture. Odenigbo, for instance, rejects the tag 'sir,' regarding it as an arbitrary title that cannot serve as a permanent identity tag (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 13). From a face value, one would argue that this rejection is informed by Odenigbo's modesty, yet its literal interpretation is a metaphoric one that displays a repudiation of the permanence of social class. He regards class as an arbitrary and transient phenomenon. It is illogical to use the tag as it presupposes social fixation and rigidity and an attempt to suggest that societies are stagnant is inaccurate. The Western culture, in apparent stereotyping, regards such titles as marks of civilisation, so that what he (Odenigbo) projects as a real self is regarded as a mark of crudity, discourtesy or lack of civilisation. This problematises the self and culture.

The image of Africa as 'the Dark Continent' pervades the cultural dialogue *Half of a Yellow*, especially as seen through the eyes of 'Susan's *pretty boy*,' Richard. In the expatriate parties, the men that Susan always nudged him to join (mostly English, ex-colonial administrators and business people from John Holt and Kingsway and GB Ollivant and Shell-BP and United Africa Company) 'have the familiar superiority of English people who thought they understood Africans better than Africans understood themselves' and as is stereotypically expected of their supercilious kind, they claim that Africans are 'not quite so ready to rule themselves after all' (36, 53). As expected, Richard is dissuaded from investing in Igbo-Ukwu art because 'it does not have much of a market' and understanding that he is dealing with capitalists comprising former colonisers and modern African imperialists, he does not bother to explain that he is not interested in money but the 'aesthetics.' Susan, unlike Richard, espouses the White Supremacist ideology that only permits an intra-personal cultural dialogue. This is a stereotypical depiction of Western artistry. Susan portrays African art as lacking in the aesthetic of Western art. Bartolome, in 'Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education: Radicalising Prospective Teachers,' says:

Members of the dominant culture typically tend to border cross without compromising their position of cultural and social privilege. This type of border crosser can travel the world, study the 'Other' in a detached and curious manner without ever recognizing that cultural groups occupy different positions of power and status and that many cultural perceptions and practices result from such power asymmetries. Often, these types of ideologically and politically 'blind' border crossers assume 'tourist' or 'voyeur' perspectives that are very much tainted by their unconscious deficit and White supremacist ideologies. (109).

Bartolome juxtaposes Susan, the monolithic tourist border crossers with those who, she says, cross 'ethnic and socio-economic borders and come to the realisation that some cultural groups, through no fault of their own, occupy positions of low social status and are marginalised and mistreated by members of higher-status groups.' This is the position that Richard occupies. This new cultural environment is a stereotyped one. African art, which falls within the Oriental geography, is collectively branded as less compelling and, therefore, less likely to attract the choosy affluent class that is accustomed to the superior art forms from the West. This realisation has enabled him 'to authentically empathise with the cultural 'Other' and take some form of action to equalise asymmetrical relations of power and eradicate the stigmatised social identities imposed on subordinated students' (Bartolome 10). The White Supremacist has constructed a monological world for himself. Everything is supposed to be seen through a single consciousness. *Others* have value only in relation to this monolithic perspective; they are reduced to an inferior status. They are not recognised as 'another [artistic] consciousness' or as having rights. From a Bakhtinian point of view or dialogic perspective, monologism is taken to close down the world it represents, pretending to be the ultimate word.

In monologism, 'truth,' constructed abstractly and systematically from the dominant class, is allowed to remove the rights of consciousness. Each subject's ability to produce autonomous meaning is denied. Qualitative difference is rendered quantitative. This performs a kind of discursive 'death' of the other, who, as unheard and unrecognized, is in a state of non-being. African art becomes 'dead' because the West, which represents the dominant perspective has determined that it occupies an inferior status and its aesthetic appeal cannot be equated to foreign art. The monological word gravitates towards itself and its referential object. Consumed by this Oriental fallacy, émigrés exist solely to transmit the host's ideology. Monologism is similar to the 'master-signifier' in Lacanian thought, and 'arborescence' in Deleuze.

Racial stereotyping dominates the desultory talk among the white businessmen. One of the white businessmen says this: '[Nigerians] are bloody beggars, be prepared for their body odours and the way they will stand and stare at you on the roads, never believe a hard-luck story, never show weakness to domestic staff' (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 53-54). The image of non-productivity, infertility and lethargy pervade the discussions. This description paints a visual image of a continent that is inhabited by economically underprivileged persons who have resigned to their fate. The image of Africa as a continent that comprises of dishonest citizens is also an ingrained stereotype in this remark. In this context, one is persuaded to think of monologism as stereotyping and subsequently as capitalism: only what is profitable is deemed significant. As Guattari observes, if we laugh or cry, if we fear old age or death, if we are

‘mad,’ does not matter to capitalism – it is ‘noise,’ in the information-theory sense. Even at a limit-case such as starvation, human need is irrelevant – a poor person may have a vital need for food, but they do not have effective market demand. This perhaps explains why the white businessman believes that Nigerian beggars should be treated indifferently. The idea that blacks are untidy as brought in the aforementioned excerpt finds near accurate resonance with Honwana’s ‘The Hands of the Blacks,’ where the palms of the hands of the blacks are considered to be lighter than the rest of their body because it is the only part that presumably had contact with water when Africans were ordered to go and take a bath. In more or less what seems to echo Chiaku’s recollection of her life in London, the ‘uppity African stood out in Richard’s mind: An African was walking a dog and an Englishman asked, ‘What are doing with that monkey?’ and the African answered, ‘It’s a dog, not a monkey’ – as if the Englishman had been talking to him’ (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 54). The African citizen is still regarded as primitive or apelike, a picture that the image of a monkey conjures up in this flashback. Césaire, in a similar breath, opines that the ‘colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal’ (20). It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonialism that Adichie points out in the development of Susan’s character. The result of dehumanisation is two-fold: it serves to demean the very existence of black population and excludes them from mainstream cultural discourse, yet it also dehumanises the perpetrators of dehumanisation (the whites themselves) because they exile themselves from the rest of humanity and lose sight of their isolation. Sublimating their impunity into a tradition and a way of life blinds them to the cultural realities of the day. Susan, unlike Richard, is living in denial yet she is a victim of this cultural isolation. At the end of the day, the pretty boy (Richard) rejects her and communes with dehumanised blacks. Initially, she resorts to violent acts, such as breaking of glasses, when Richard seems to be getting closer to other women. She employs this archaic mode of defense against her ‘imaginary competitors.’ When she comes face to face with the real competitor from the population she had disregarded, she becomes isolated. Unlike Susan who retains her emotional stoicism, Richard’s dalliance with Kainene offers him an opportunity to escape this isolation.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, just like *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, Adichie demonstrates that people constantly struggle against external definitions of their thoughts and actions, which have deadening effect on them. The dominant class does not recognise that there is something within each concrete person which can only be actualised through a free discursive act, and not in a pre-determined or stereotyping context. This portrait of cultural difference and stereotyping demonstrates that her literary works, novels to be specific, cannot be divorced from the totality of culture. For Ngugi, ‘[literature] is functional’ and cannot be ‘severed from the physical, social and religious needs of the community.’ Art is, in Ngugi’s proposition, ‘an integral part of a community’s wrestling with its environment; part and parcel of the needs and aspirations of the ordinary man’ (*Homecoming* 6-7). From the standpoint of literary scholarship, the idea of cultural identity is conceived of primarily with reference to literary identity in the community we are living in. Bakhtin’s argumentation corroborates this viewpoint and is, therefore, most relevant for this kind of discussion:

Literature is an inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be studied outside the total cultural context. It cannot be severed from the rest of culture and related directly (by-passing culture) to socio-economic or other factors. These factors influence culture as a whole and only through it and in conjunction with it do they affect literature. The literary process is a part of the cultural process and cannot be torn away from it. (*Speech Genres* 140)

It is important to note, however, that if the very existence of literature can be defined in terms of structuralism (and, in another context, by Heidegger) as a re-examination of the possibilities of language itself (and through its refracted historical consciousness), then the problem of literary identity would logically be reduced to the natural environment of native language, that is, to one's national culture. Such a view cannot, of course, be a relevant interpretation of literary identity in a rapidly denationalising world, where even national literatures are under immense pressure to transcend the national cultural boundaries. To read contemporary literature in that manner is to suggest the existence of a concept of identity that implies that characteristics of modern cultures are finite and self-referential, which is unacceptably misleading. The identification of literary identity with national culture is regression to the idea of identity conceived of in the twenty-first century. The literature that acknowledges the dynamism of cultural identity is the acceptable way of confirming national entities and the genuine representation of the cultural self in contemporary literary discourse. This understanding of identity was a result of the romantic interpretation of the self as the inner reality of a given subject. It revealed in itself the concept of the subject as an absolute and autonomous being and denied any decisive or obligatory references outside itself. It denied transcendence outside oneself and identified itself only with its immanent reality or with its own immanent validity. The subject of cultural identity defined itself by its own subjectivity, interpreted as being self-aware, self-sufficient, and self-referential. In the contemporary discourse, being is recognised to be authentic while comprehensible only as interior consciousness.

Overall, Adichie's novels give a damning picture of cross-cultural experiences. The relationship between the émigré and the host is lacking in the symbiosis of a dialogue. Racial stereotyping has helped the whites, who are the occupants of the culturally superior status, believe in their own superiority. This includes the belief in a hierarchy with the whites at the top and the émigrés, who are from Africa, in various degrees of inferiority. The picture painted in these novels is that of, in Marshall's robust words, 'ideas of natural racial superiority of an undeniable, scientifically established racial superiority.' This establishment 'provides a seemingly irrefutable defense of Britain's imperial position' (*The Cambridge Illustrated history of the British Empire* 221). Marshall foregrounds this scenario when he revisits J. E. Wellden's statement to his pupils in 1899. Wellden, a public school headmaster, had told his pupils that they were 'destined to be citizens of the greatest empire under heaven,' and moreover, that they had to be inspired with 'faith in divinely ordered mission of their country and their race' (qtd in Marshall 63). These racial attitudes have been ingrained for centuries and are not easy to shed off.

### **3. DEPICTION OF CULTURAL MIMICRY AND DECULTURATION IN ADICHIE'S NOVELS**

This section focuses on how émigrés chart their paths in new cultural environments. Mimicry is one of the options that are highlighted in Adichie's novels. Mimicry is found in various forms in Adichie's novels. Émigrés' actions

and behaviour are refashioned to enable suit the new cultural environment. The characters developed in Adichie's novels strive to fit into the new cultural environment. The aftermath of cultural mimicry is also depicted in these novels. The émigré does not derive comfort in imitation. A resolution is, therefore, invited. This resolution has so much ambivalence that it resists clear-cut categorisations. Deculturation arises from recollection of forgotten or submerged or repressed realities. Bakhtin, whose ideas are employed in the analysis of the data in this section, observes that 'at any moment in the development of the dialogue, there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way, they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form in a new context' (*Speech Genres* 170). The portrait anticipated in this section is that of characters that are unable to reconcile 'immense, boundless masses of recalled contextual meanings' and subsequently find themselves occupying culturally ambivalent spaces because 'nothing conclusive has taken place' in this new phase of cultural consciousness (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 166). In Bakhtin's other words, the émigré's 'thought is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought' (*Speech Genres* 92). A mirror of how émigrés navigate their way through cross-cultural complexities is painted variously in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*.

In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the concept of cultural mimicry is seen through the eyes of the character Richard, a white émigré who has evidently resolved to start a new life in Nigeria. One would argue that the cold reception he receives in Nigeria stems from Sartre's theory of 'anti-racist racism.' In this sense, he is a victim of Negritude thinking, a dialectical progression that Sartre regarded as a temporal and counterproductive response (antithesis) to the thesis of white supremacy. For Punter, however, we are globally living in 'the post-colonial' and, as a consequence, the process of 'mutual postcolonial objection is,' he maintains, 'one that confronts us every day in the ambiguous form of a series of uncanny returns' (Punter vi). In Punter's view, postcolonialism is not restricted to ex-colonies. Richard is therefore no exception to this postcolonial influence. His attempts at acculturation, overt and deliberate efforts to identify with dominant Igbo culture, set him further apart from the mainstream Igbo society. He, like Ifemelu and Obinze (African émigrés in Europe and America), finds his real self lying buried beneath the alien personality imposed on him by cultural dominion.

Richard discards his native Igbo language and dedicates his time to master English in a bid to find temporal acknowledgement by the predominant Igbo language. In essence, he, a subjugated white class, is driven to reproduce the characteristics of the dominant Igbo culture in a way that closely resembles the true dominant culture. At first, he does this to facilitate his research on Igbo; however, later he finds himself deeply consumed by Igbo culture that he literally defends it with the ethno-subjectivity of the local population. He is, for instance, ethnically affected by the injustices meted out on the Igbo population by the Northerners. His preoccupation with acculturation is not any different from Nicholas' in *Americanah*. Nicholas regards the acquisition of the English language a significant demonstration of his children's academic success in England. He feels duty-bound to speak to them in English and religiously guards against the use of Igbo. He regards the use of his native language as a deterrent to his children's progress in the mastery of English. The narrator says: 'He spoke to them only in English, as though he thought that the Igbo he shared with their mother would infect them, perhaps make them lose their

precious British accents' (*Americanah* 296). He does not realise he is culturally estranging his children from his native Nigerian culture. Instead he gives the impression that linguistic infection would alienate his children from the mainstream English culture. He, it seems, has resolved to allow himself to be consumed by the alien identity of the dominant British lifestyle and he does not want to consider the danger of subjecting his children to the quandary of cultural rootlessness which plagues the generation of African émigrés in the West. His idea of civilisation is 'a mimicry of the centre proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed. It [causes] those from the periphery [like émigrés] to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become 'more English than the English' (Ashcroft *et al.* 4). He derives joy in this cultural estrangement and congratulates his children on their impressive efforts in the mastery of the foreign language. He fails to acknowledge that there is danger in embracing a narrow, monolithic and authoritarian form of education which, instead of teaching, largely conditions one to behave in a particular manner. Here, Adichie introduces a cultural dialogue about the foundation of culture and the myopic thoughts that inform changes in cultural allegiances. Okot's definition of culture articulately speaks of this fallacy:

Culture is philosophy as lived and celebrated in a society. Human beings do not behave like dry leaves, smoke or clouds which are blown here and there by the wind. Men live in ... institutions. And all these are informed by and in fact built around the central ideas people have developed, ideas about what life is all about, that is, their social philosophy, their 'world view.' (13)

Nicholas, it would appear, considers the denouncement of Igbo culture as a parental obligation. The use of Igbo in his house is abominable. As such, Igbo is 'systematically destroyed by enslavement, and ... rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power' (Ashcroft *et al.* 9). Nicholas' wife, Ojiugo is compelled to adopt what Obinze regards as 'the gaudy theatrics of Nollywood films' and argues that that the education of her children 'is much better [in England].' She feels that her freedom of expression is deeply curtailed in this new environment, one that she crudely admits does not allow her 'to fuck in public,' yet she gives that false impression that English lifestyle thrills her. She theatrically and hyperbolically reveals some of the challenges that émigrés encounter in foreign environments. She, like Chiaku, suggests that the discriminative nature of European societies makes it difficult for African émigrés to compete fairly. The English employers do not recognise the education system in Africa. Those who have gone through African schools must upgrade their knowledge by enrolling for courses in England in order to be absorbed in the discriminative job market. This is the predicament of Ojiugo and her husband. In Ashcroft's words, 'a privileging norm [has been] enthroned at the heart of the formation of English [language] as a template for the denial of the value of the 'peripheral,' the 'marginal,' and the 'uncanonised' (3). In Ojiugo's own confession, the contradiction embedded in mimicry is highlighted:

But this country is not easy. I got my papers because I did postgraduate school here, but you know he only got his papers two years ago and so for so long he was living in fear, working under other people's names. That thing can do wonders to your head, *eziokwu*. It has not been easy at all for him. The job he has now is very good but he's on contract. He never knows if they will renew. (*Americanah* 297)

Life in a foreign environment, as shown in the above illustration, is challenging. Fanon says, ‘To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles who wants to be white [i.e. treated as human and adult] will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is... Historically, it must be understood that the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors...[W]e find a quest for subtleties, for refinements of language—so many further means of proving to himself that he has measured up to the culture (38). The job market does not recognise academic papers that are drawn from the émigrés’ home countries and the émigrés are forced to embark on a new academic journey in their bid to secure job opportunities. They constantly live in fear of repatriation as their temporal strategy is an illegal one; they take fake identities to secure jobs as they pursue their studies to gain acceptance into the foreign economy.

The émigrés’ lives are characterised by uncertainty; one might secure a good job but the terms are mainly contractual and the chances of having such contracts renewed are slim. One would argue that it is the very notion of European Enlightenment and cultural superiority that Adichie subjects to scrutiny. This notion evidently produces subordination and oppression of a variety of people and their knowledge. ‘Otherness’ is, irrevocably, a cultural reality. The Other does not necessarily endanger its selfness or its principles of identity: ‘The reality principle coincides with the principle of otherness’ (De Man 103). According to this notion, the validity of cultural identity cannot be an equivalent to the measure of originality of an inherent national subjectivity in it. Formations of cultural identity pass through their own ‘deconstruction’ and permanent multiplication of cultural relations. Consequently, the interweaving of cultural and literary influences does not result in loss of identity. Rather, it constructs a multiple plane where yet inactivated possibilities interact and merge. In Europe, the convergence of different cultures has been a permanent factor of their existence. On the other hand, the role of marginal phenomena and traces of contacts with minor cultures were not insignificant in European cultural and literary history. Concepts of identity cannot mean simply ‘to be something’ or to be ‘identical with oneself,’ or, in other words, identity should not be seen as ‘the first way of being’ (Descombes 35, 37). Rather, the principle of identity coincides with the principle of otherness or -- to use Bakhtin’s terminology with the principle of dialogism: ‘The self is the gift of the other’ (qtd. in Kershner x).

Obinze comes face to face with socio-economic challenges of his new environment. Despite his rosy educational background, he finds it difficult to get a decent job. When his visa expires, he becomes frustrated. Nicholas’s family offers him temporary shelter but turns him into a house keeper. He spends most of his time in the house engaged in domestic drudgery – cooking, baby-sitting and cleaning the house. The arranged marriage between him and Cleotilde does not see the light of day. It is the ridiculous outfits that he puts on on the wedding day – the big trousers that bunched up when Obinze tightened his belt and the big jacket that ‘shielded this unsightly pleat of cloth at his wait’ – that worried him but the guilt of living a lie. When what Obinze had feared so many times in the past, ‘so many moments that had become one single blur of panic,’ really happens, ‘it felt like the dull echo of an aftermath’ (*Americanah* 344). He is arrested on his wedding day and whisked away like a common criminal. Cleotilde’s drama, flinging ‘herself on the ground with that perfect dramatic flourish’ in what seemed like a rare moment of her Africanness and crying, does not make things any better for Obinze. The policemen barely glance at

her and it is Obinze who bears the heavy brunt of the police force. He feels ‘the heaviness of the handcuffs during the drive to the police station’ as Nicholas’s trousers slip ‘down his hips.’ The police cell conjures the image of ‘chimpanzee’s cage at Nsukka’s dismal, forgotten zoo.’ The immigration officer is kind enough to allow him access legal counseling yet he makes it clear to him that such efforts would be fruitless. His case is seemingly cast on stone; it is obvious that he has to be deported on account of his illegal stay in England and his unsuccessful attempt at participating in a ‘sham marriage.’ Ironically, the arrival of the puffy-faced lawyer, who is expected to give a sense of relief, dampens his spirit further. The lawyer does offer even a flicker of hope to him. Aside from his pleasant and sympathetic demeanor, his verdict on Obinze’s case is unpleasant and callous; an appeal to the case will only delay it but eventually he will be ‘removed’ from the United Kingdom. He says these words ‘with the air of a man who had said those same words, in that same tone, more times than he wished to, or could, remember.’ He comes with a bag but does not bother to open it as he sits ‘across from Obinze, holding nothing, no file, no paper, no pen.’

The lawyer’s demeanor suggests pointlessness, bleakness and hopelessness. The lawyer gives the impression that any intellectual investment in a case like his would be futile. It is the use of the derogative word ‘removed’ that Obinze finds not only irksome but also demeaning. It is a dehumanising expression; it suggests very little regard for humanity. It objectifies émigrés and pushes them to the periphery. The lawyer deliberately avoids the formality of the immigration officer. Instead he presents a crude picture of the verdict that awaits him. The narrator says, ‘That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing’ (*Americanah* 345). The indignity of this sarcastic remark borders on the absurd yet it reveals the stark reality of racial superiority in segregating societies like the United Kingdom. The indifference of the lawyer is even more dehumanising than the conditions of the police cell. To retain his last shred of dignity, Obinze offers to return to Nigeria. He feels, the narrator says, ‘the last shard of his dignity was like a wrapper slipping off that he was desperate to retie.’

While Obinze decides to leave the United Kingdom in his attempt to recover his last shard of dignity, other Nigerian émigrés consider deceit as an act of social prowess. At the holding facility in Manchester Airport, Obinze meets two Nigerian nationals who speak so unashamedly about the devious tactics they employ to evade the British authorities. Vincent, for instance, asks Obinze how they had caught him ‘with an instant familiarity’ that speaks of notoriety. While others are slumped in their sorrows, the two ‘Nigerians trade their stories, sometimes laughing, sometimes self-pitying.’ One of them announces that he has been caught before on account of corruption. He speaks of detention so proudly that one would imagine that chicanery is a form of social success: ‘Ah this *na* my second time. The first time I come with different passport’ (*Americanah* 346). This transformation, an obvious preoccupation with a culture of licentiousness, marvels Obinze. This is the substance of what the narrator says of him:

Obinze envied them for what they were, men who casually changed names and passports, who would plan and come back and do it over again because they had nothing to lose. He didn’t have their *savoir faire*; he was soft, a boy who had grown up eating corn flakes and reading books, raised by a mother during a time

when truth telling was not yet a luxury. He was ashamed to be with them, among them. They did not have his shame and even this, too, he envied. (Adichie, *Americanah* 347)

Like Ojiugo, the two Nigerians are so obsessed with the United Kingdom that they are ready to do anything to stay put. The two do not seem to worry about the moral consequences of their actions. What worries the conscientious characters like Obinze does not bother them at all. They have sold their body and soul to the foreign bidder. Unlike Ifemelu who sees an augury of her return home every time she meets a fellow Nigerian, they are not excited about visiting home, neither are they thrilled by thoughts about their families. Those who have acquired cultural navigation skills do not believe their native culture can offer any social fulfillment. Ojiugo, for instance, is desperately struggling to ensure that her children exclusively learn the foreign British culture. In fact, she feels her children should be 'more British than the British.' She is so excited about her daughter's new circle of foreign friends that she cannot hide her joy over Nne's new-found companion, a Russian girl. It corresponds to Ugwu's excitement about his master's foreignness at the beginning of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*; Odenigbo spoke a 'feathery' Igbo, 'Igbo coloured by sliding sounds of English, the Igbo of one who spoke English often' (4). Ojiugo's excitement over an alien culture goes overboard; she mimics her daughter's foreign accent hyperbolically. And she is convinced that her daughter's foreign speech mannerisms will propel her socially and she 'will go places.' She is, one might be tempted to argue, the character in whom Adichie's heavily invests hard-hitting sarcasm. Even when Ojiugo visits Obinze at the holding facility in Manchester Airport, she insensitively rants about her children's success at acclimatising with the British lifestyle instead of showing empathy to Obinze. She is a typical representative of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as she seems convinced that anything that is clothed in white is perfect and worthy of emulating. West assumes dominance over everything she and her husband once valued. She, Ojiugo, is obsessively indoctrinated with Oriental fallacies. She is literally consumed with these fallacies and she does not recognise who she truly is. She does not realise that her obsession with western civilisation further serves to reify the superiority dogma that has been imposed on the 'Orient.' She cuts the perfect figure of Okot's metaphoric 'dry leaves,' 'smoke,' or 'clouds' that are easily blown or swept away (*Africa's Cultural Revolution*13).

The British culture gives the child a lot of freedom so that the parent cannot exercise control over the child's conduct yet Ojiugo and her husband are blinded to this reality: Chika and Bose, like the other Nigerian parents in the United Kingdom, 'really forgive so much from their children because they have foreign accents. The rules are different' (300). Ojiugo does not acknowledge the sarcasm underneath Obinze's euphemistic remarks. She feels that her native culture is puritanical if not primitive as metonymically represented in Chika's claims of a 'bush accent' (302). As a metonym, the employment of the word 'bush' resonates very well with the typical Oriental fallacies about non-West territories, specifically the lopsided argument that Africans are apes and thus lacking in Western civilisation. She and her ilk believe that Nigeria, and macrocosmically Africa, does not teach children respect but fear. She does not realise that pushing her children to the outer fringes of nativity would alienate them from their own people. Obinze invites her to, in Kral's words, 'envisage the long-term consequences of [cultural alienation] which may result in a tragic *nowhereness*' (75). Again when Obinze raises concerns about the future of

these children, her remarks are repulsively defensive. It puzzles Obinze that she does not ‘mourn all the things she could have been’:

‘One day they will be grown and leave home and you will just be a source of embarrassment or exasperation for them and they won’t take your phone calls or won’t call you for weeks,’ Obinze said, and as soon as he said it, he wished he had not. It was petty, it had not come out as he intended. But Ojiugo was not offended. (*Americanah* 301)

Adichie’s strategy is to contrast the natural grace and dignity of traditional African ways with the bizarre artificiality of modern habits and practices that educated Africans have copied from the America. The primary target is Ojiugo’s, and macrocosmically the émigré’s, apemanship. Adichie widens her scope of Ojiugo’s blind worship to include much larger social, political and economic issues arising from fanatical, unthinking westernization. Ojiugo sharply contrasts Obinze, who has discovered himself in a strange new world and reacts strongly to anything that deviates from his own cultural expectations and prejudices.

Aisha, Ifemelu’s salonist, goes through similar challenges in America. This is revealed when she asks Ifemelu the sacrilegious question about ‘papers.’ It is worth noting that émigrés ‘did not ask other immigrants how they got their papers, did not burrow into those layered, private places, it was sufficient simply to admire that the papers had been got, a legal status acquired.’ This statement foregrounds the banality of cultural mimicry. The stigmatizing status of the other seems so alienating that any documentation that would guarantee some semblance of acceptance is admirable. Aisha’s story reads like a retelling of Obinze’s frustrating experiences as an émigré in the United Kingdom. She, like Obinze, had been advised to marry an American man in order to acquire American citizenship. Unfortunately for her, ‘he bring many problems, no job, and every day he say give me money, money, money’ (*Americanah* 450). Chances of obtaining a green card are so slim that émigrés imagine that one needs some supernatural attachment to acquire one.

The hyperbolic expression captured above is significant in the sense that it gives prominence to the portrait of cultural mimicry as a consequence of resignation. Aisha believes that ‘Ifemelu belonged to a group of people whose green cards simply fell from the sky’ (451). For émigrés like Aisha who cannot get their green cards from an employer, living in a foreign world becomes even more frustrating. The acquisition of legal documents that would secure one’s stay in America is pipedream for the socially underprivileged. They cannot raise enough money to bribe their way through the system unless a rare opportunity like a lottery presents itself as suggested in the case of Chijioke. The protagonist of *Americanah*, Ifemelu, learns that Aisha is not able to visit her ailing father because she does not have legitimate travel documents that would guarantee her safe return to America. She hopes that the lottery winner, Chijioke would honour his marriage proposal and enable her facilitate the acquisition of legitimate ‘papers.’ Her father is unwell and though she is able to send him some money, she is worried that she would fail to attend his burial ceremony in the event that he passes away before the anticipated marriage. Aisha’s wan tone and expressionless face magnify her tragedy so that Ifemelu’s irritation over her inquiry about ‘papers’ dissolves ‘and in its place, a gossamer sense of kinship grows.’ Aisha’s tragedy literally torments Ifemelu and the narrator’s description of her reaction to Aisha’s haplessness says it all:

What was she doing? She should get up and leave, and not be dragged further into Aisha's morass, but she could not get up and leave. She was about to go back home to Nigeria, and she would see her parents, and she could come back to America if she wished, and here was Aisha, hoping but not really believing that she would ever see her mother again. She would talk to Chijioke. It was the least she could do. (*Americanah* 452)

The rhetorical question presented at the beginning of the above quotation speaks of ambivalence. The protagonist is unable to define exactly where she belongs. She does not know whether to be contented with her seemingly privileged position, which is 'not quite' privileged or to empathise with Aisha. She, in this sense, fails to display her true cultural allegiance. As a historical concept, cultural identity implies an introduction of difference into itself, in other words, an element of reciprocity into its own being (Descombes 38). Cultural identity – as an element of the historical process cannot remain of the same nature and is never a perpetuation of itself; it cannot be preserved in a fixed, unchanged form; it inherits the 'divine privilege' to introduce its authentic construct of alterity and innovative nature into itself through its continuous contact with the Other and Otherness. Using her blog posts as primary platform for cultural dialogue, Ifemelu offers many African Americans and other émigrés an opportunity to re-evaluate their views about life. Paula, for instance, is using these blog posts to 'push' her students 'out of their comfort zones' or what she calls 'safe thinking' (*Americanah* 403). Paula disabuses the notion of the so-called 'safe thinking,' the idea that Americans, particularly African Americans, should not talk about discrimination 'because in America everything is fine and everyone is the same' (398). According to Bill, American journalists are no exception to this 'silent' rule of safety. The difference lies in wordplay; editors argue for the use of 'subtle' or 'nuanced' expressions. Ironically, 'nuance means keep people comfortable so everyone is free to think of themselves as *individuals* and everyone got where they are because of their *achievement*' (*Americanah* 416). The émigré is pigeonholed in this narrow, rather myopic definition. There is very little room for adopting or advocating for a more dynamic and democratic notion of the new cultural world. Determination of what is supposedly socially acceptable is the exclusive preserve, or so it would seem, of the dominating class. The émigré is unable to release their intellectual potential; consequently, consciousness and pride of their rich cultural heritage is diffused. In the process of these interactions, cultural identity is re-established through constant dialogue with other cultures. This dialogic nature pre-determines the study of cultural identity and the cultural intricacies in new environments. Bakhtin's theory, thus, undoubtedly offers one of the most appropriate methodologies for the study of cultural identities in multicultural environments.

Bakhtin, more particularly, stretches beyond the metaphysical orientation of the earlier formalists and where he developed his ideas under the specific circumstances of prescribed ideological monism and totalitarianism. Both contexts, the formalist and the totalitarian, evoked specific philosophical and theoretical responses by Bakhtin and his followers and served the unmasking of fundamental flaws in the organisation of Western rationality. Bakhtin's views of dialogism, in fact, extricate European rationality from its predicaments in that they mediate toward an ideology of otherness. The event of Bakhtinian ideology of

Otherness as overcoming ideological monologism was due to the historical changes in the self-consciousness of European thought after the initial manifestations of Modernism.

The position advanced by the character Paula can be understood through a critical reading of Bakhtin's work and the background of contemporary poststructuralist premises may prove influential in this regard. But even more important considerations can be drawn from Bakhtin's specific terminological solutions that have brought some ethical and ideological dimensions of art to light. In the eighties, after a decade of an exceptionally warm reception of Bakhtin's ideas in theoretical debates, De Man intervened with skepticism: 'why the notion [could] be so enthusiastically received by theoreticians of very diverse persuasion and made to appear as a valid way out of many of the quandaries that have plagued us for so long' (100). However, De Man misread in Bakhtin the inherent quality of dialogism, namely conflict and contradiction, to wit, the quality implying the inscribed space for Otherness as something different and opposing. In *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin presented an ontological frame to his ideas and dialogism is disclosed as a notion indicating awareness of competing views on the same thing. It implies the presence of relativised, deprived truth of something or, in other words, it implies the de(con)struction of the authoritative or absolute word about it. This argument repudiates the notion of 'safe thinking.' This concept, established in the philosophy of concreteness, poses anew the problem of truth and its certainty. It presupposes a non-finite character of truth, a multiplicity of focuses on it, a notion of its inexhaustiveness, that is, an immense, boundless 'wealth of its being.'

If a dialogic word is an antonym to authoritative discourse, and dialogism means decentralising or a centrifugal force in the conception of the subject or of truth (as evident in marginal comic genres), then these two Bakhtinian concepts have similar value as Heideggerian philosophy in that it has brought elaborated concepts for the de(con)struction of the history of ontology. This Heideggerian call for de-(con)struction which later echoed in American poststructuralist deconstructive hermeneutics, means that the 'task of destroying is an effort at a creative preserving of history' (Leitch 66). Further, there are corresponding implications in the notion of dialogue and in the Heideggerian thought on 'defamiliarization and unconcealment of truth' (Leitch 70). Also, 'a word, discourse, language or culture undergoes dialogisation' (Holquist 427). Holquist's comments on Bakhtin give a most accurate translation to the North American reading public as well as an extensive survey on the problems of Bakhtin's dialogism. The concealed idea in Holquist's *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* is that behind 'safety' is fear. Notions of cultural superiority have given rise to linguistic disguises. The opportunity for cultural dialogue that Adichie offers in her novel affords the reader a chance to unravel the underlying cultural intent of the American citizens.

Some other notions from Bakhtin's taxonomy are important for the discussion of cultural identity: 'alien' or 'other' as in someone else's word, 'otherness' 're-accentuation,' a quality of incompleteness or absence of capability of definitive finalisation or in the appropriate English translation (as used by Holquist) 'inconclusiveness' or 'open-endedness.' There are also some seminal attributes like 're-accentuated,' 'dialogised,' 'refracted,' all of them assuring the presence of at least two different words or views on the given object. This implies Bakhtin's fundamental assertion that 'truth cannot triumph or conquer' (*Speech Genres* 141).

In his view, the basis for the one and only truth concerning cultural identity is ‘thwarted,’ if not eliminated, while the problem of cultural identity is to be viewed through the principle of Otherness as exemplified in Ifemelu’s character. She says this of the pretense that defines Americanism: ‘Nothing is just what it is. Everything has to mean something else. It’s ridiculous’ (*Americanah* 385). The principle of otherness makes almost impossible for individuals to look at things objectively; Ifemelu notes that Marcia, one of the minor characters in novel, ‘was talking about how black women are fat because their bodies are sites of anti-slavery resistance’ (385). The fact that Nigerians consider those who study overseas as more socially privileged than the locals is a lopsided cultural view that thrives on Otherness. The old woman who speaks highly of her son at Enugu Airport presents a damning picture of how ridiculous cultural mimicry is, and thus: ‘He is the first in our village to go overseas, and our people have prepared a dance for him. The dance troupe will meet us in Ikeduru. My fellow women are jealous, but is it my fault that their sons have empty brains and my own son won the white people’s scholarship?’ (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 27-28). The white man’s education, more like what Chiaku says in *Purple Hibiscus*, is regarded highly. The local education system, it seems, is considered substandard. As such, products of this education system do not exude the intellectual merit that overseas trainees exhibit. Fallacious as it seems, those who study abroad have very high approval ratings. The old woman believes that the training that Nigerians acquire locally does not equip them adequately with technical skills. The excitement of the villagers demonstrates the Oriental fallacy’s pervasion of the African intellectual psyche. The identity of culture is multiform in its being and its actual individuality functions as cultural dialogism. Thus, through dialogism the heterological nature of literary or cultural phenomena in the tradition of a given national history can be explored with fairly consequent argumentation. Cultural identity is complexly structured and it represents a non-finite wholeness. The identity of any national literature is undoubtedly multiform through its historical stages.

In Bakhtinian thought, motivated by the search for a concrete philosophy, the quest for the real self shows a reverted Cartesian position. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin argues that the self is a stream of statements and that so long as man lives; he is ‘never coincident with himself’ (48). The self cannot serve as the subject to all existing things any longer, or in other words, it has lost its own Cartesian substantiality: ‘I realise myself initially through others,’ Bakhtin argues, continuing, ‘From them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself’ (*Speech Genres* 138). Ifemelu’s relationship with Blaine heavily influences her decisions to rephrase her blog posts, so that her independence – the independence of the self – ceases to exist momentarily. The narrator observes: ‘At first, thrilled by his interest, graced by his intelligence, she let him read her blog posts before she put them up. She did not ask for his edits, but slowly she began to make changes, to add and remove, because of what he said’ (386). The inability of the self to serve as the subject to all existing things prompts her to reshape the texture of her ‘initial ideas.’ In effect, her blog posts ‘sounded too academic, too much like [Blaine].’ This ideally points to the insufficiency of the Cartesian subject being defined in cogito.

Bakhtin describes mimicry as a ‘false tendency toward reducing everything to a single consciousness, toward dissolving in it the other’s consciousness’ (*Speech Genres* 141) and he argues that ‘quests for my own word are

in fact quests for a word that is not my own, a word that is more than myself; this is a striving to depart from one's own words, with which nothing essential can be said' (*Speech Genres* 149). In Ifemelu's effort to cut her own cultural niche, she develops a perspective about life that significantly departs from her original thoughts. She begins by resenting Blaine's unsolicited edits, but later accommodates certain components of his thoughts. In the end, her ideas become a product of both her initial thoughts as well as Blaine's. The narrator observes that she felt 'irritated' at Blaine's rather academic persuasions, 'but with the niggling thought that he was right' so that she thought of his 'positions [as] firm, so thought-through and fully realised' (*Americanah* 386-7). These mixed feelings define a decultured state. Cogito, ergo sum or, as it goes in a later dictum, ego cogito, ergo sum, is for him an inadequate answer about the self. Instead, truth is not defined as what Thomas Aquinas calls 'adequatio' any longer or, in the sense of identity, as being the same. Ifemelu's reunion with Obinze and the 'awakening' that comes with it nudges her to tell Obinze that she had always thought of him, but the distinction between what is 'true' and what one 'feels to be true' raises her doubts about what she had actually felt. 'She wanted to tell him, 'There is no week that passed that I did not think of you.' But was that true? Of course there were weeks during which he was folded under the layers of her life, but it *felt* true' (*Americanah* 551). There is truth that is wished for, felt and then there is the real truth and Ifemelu's sounds like one that had been felt because, in her own admission, '[she] always saw the ceiling with other men' like Blaine and Curt. Yet again she does not know whether she had been 'having sex,' 'fucking,' or 'making love' and whether there was a significant difference between the three. 'The real face of truth is agonistic, defined as a field of contradictions. Truth could be defined as undecidability: the realm of the Cartesian certitude is annihilated. Truth is acknowledged not to be univocal and the concept of identity is to be redefined. The truth of the real self of culture is defined as not remaining the same; it is defined in an inscribed will to difference (Descombes 35). Modern philosophy, as well as Bakhtin in his philosophical anthropology, introduces difference into the very definition of identity. This difference is equally figuratively illustrated by the reunion of the two major characters in *Americanah*; Ifemelu 'remembered clearly the firmness of his embrace, and yet there was, also, a newness to their union; their bodies remembered and did not remember,' a paradox, a contradiction as it were, occasioned by the clash between their past and present identities. In a deliberate attempt to reconcile these seemingly disparate identities, she 'touched the scar on his chest, remembering it again' (551).

Cultural identity as revealed through history of literature and other forms of art is an entity, which is very concrete in its being. Culture should not be understood as a sum of phenomena, but as a concrete totality, where the notion of totality should be understood pragmatically (not metaphysically), to wit, as something open, non-finite, as something inconclusive in its character. Bakhtin's explanation of the study of literature and cultural identity paints a clearer picture of the non-finite nature of culture. He avers:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. ... In the realm of culture, outsidership is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and

profoundly. ... A meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and oneness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, the ones that it did not raise itself ... Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched. (*Speech Genres* 6-7)

That even 'consciousness' is a real fact for Bakhtin is an argument that is explored in Adichie's novels. In *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin asserts that consciousness is materialised in the material of signs. The sign or, to follow strictly his views on language, the word (Russian slovo, Greek logos) or utterance (as the smallest unit of language), refracts the social and historical entities in itself. He also reminds us of the constant interplay between the sign and its related historical being. At this point, again, Bakhtin's views are very close to Heidegger's: When Heidegger elaborates his ideas of the existential meaning and the role of art and explains why man is 'located in the world and situated historically' only 'through poetry' (qtd. in Leitch 65), he also points out that the historical being itself is emerging into the unconcealedness only through the language of poetry: 'Thus art is: the creative preserving of truth in the work of art. Art then is the becoming and happening of truth. ... All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what it is, is, as such, essentially poetry. The nature of art ... is the setting-itself into-work of truth' (The Origin of the Work of Art 274). Nothing captures this than Adichie's *Americanah*, particularly the debate on the difference between professed tragedy and actual tragedy: 'the actual tragedy of Emmett Till ... was not the murder of a black child for whistling at a white woman but that some black people thought: But why did you have to whistle?' (425). Adichie seems to be suggesting that the desire for the supposed 'safety' in cross-racial interactions compels émigrés to ignore the tragic plight of the black population. Instead of agitating for social justice, they feel compelled to find fault with the actions of their black counterparts. In a new cultural environment, the émigré, or so it appears, is unable to think independently; consequently, they act in fear. The experience that Adichie presents in this novel is akin to the experiences captured in Baraka Amiri's *Dutchman*, where Clay, an African American is butchered in the presence of his colleagues who simply turn a blind eye to the tragedy on account of fear. The domain of poetic composition in the wider sense, that is, of the arts and of culture, has a privileged position in that it is 'a mode of the lighting projection of truth' (The Origin of the Work of Art 275). Thus, according to both Bakhtin and Heidegger, language and thinking imply the presence of the historical consciousness or of the historical being.

The identity of a culture is established through a complex reality of historical processes. The question of cultural identity should then be legitimately posed on a very concrete level. Bakhtin's gnoseological point of departure is based in his philosophy of concreteness. My methodological expectation that the implications of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue epitomises in itself the complexity of reality should then prove relevant in the discussion of cultural identity as well. When posing the question of cultural identity methodologically on the ground of the reality principle, a move into the field of comparative literature is inevitable. However, not only the reception of one culture by another is meant here by comparative literature. Much more than in cultural influences through direct or indirect contacts, comparative literature is interested today in a re-examination of

the historicity of being entrapped in the languages of different literatures and arts. The question of analyses of literary texts (or other works of art) refers us to the historical being concealed in them, and how it participates in the truth of a global self-understanding of man or woman and, consequently, in the truth of historical subjectivity of different cultures. On the other hand, the question of mutual relations between world literatures only on the basis of empirically realised contacts and influences is insufficient in modern comparative literature. Today literatures cannot be studied ignoring the questions of history itself; neither can they evade matters of their national being - both of which provide answers concerning the situation of individual literatures in a given historical segment of global thought. The study of cultural identity also gives answers connected to the very 'facticity' of the historical being which defines the situation of a literature. The problem of American, English or African cultural identity, for instance, has to be understood in the context of its juxtaposition with other cultural identities.

Cultural identity of a given national history is its 'primordial founding' (Leitch 69) and it brings forth its existence while its mode of existing is in a multitude of its own faces through history. It is a complex image of the many-sided interests of its own self. The identity of culture, if we follow Bakhtin and his notion of dialogue, is not univocal and it is neither a sum of different qualities nor of characteristics that clearly set the given culture apart from others. As any individuality, cultural identity is a meeting point of several cross-cultural influences. It is of a complex plurivocal character, open to its own changes in order to preserve its own being in a new context of interests. Our cultural identity is our intertext. The immense and boundless world of Otherness constitutes a primary fact of existence of our cultural identity. In his later notes Bakhtin states the following: 'The study of culture (or some area of it) at the level of system and at the higher level of organic unity [implies the following notions]: open, becoming, unresolved and unpredetermined, capable of death and renewal, transcending itself, that is, exceeding its own boundaries' (*Speech Genres* 135). The presence of interests in Bakhtin's definition of cultural identity reveals that the question of politics is indispensably inherent in the event of culture through history. Forming itself and existing through cross-cultural interactions, cultural identity exposes its inevitable intertextual character. This intertextual character of cultural identity suggests infinite diversity of its being: 'The world of culture and literature is essentially as boundless as the universe,' argues Bakhtin (*Speech Genres* 140).

Openness and un-predeterminedness are the most evident characteristics of culture and its identity. The formation of the self of a given culture through encountering with Otherness cannot, as Bakhtin reminds us, change the existence of it, but only the sense of its existence. Here Bakhtin put in another crucial remark that sounds very much in accord with Post-structuralism: 'Authenticity and truth inhere not in existence itself, but only in the existence that is acknowledged and uttered' (*Speech Genres* 138). The interacting of cultural identities, as follows, results in a change of the sense of their existence. As a reflection of the self in the empirical, the Other should always lead to the self-affirmation of one's existence. Thus, self confidence of a culture – or self-consciousness, can only be activated and creatively flourish through the principle of Otherness. Cultural dialogism does not mean obliteration of individual cultural identities. To retain these

individual identities, the dialogue has to be sustained: ‘The thing about cross-cultural relationships is that you spend so much time explaining’ (*Americanah* 563). Cultural dialogue, as history witnesses, reassures the pertaining of a gap between existing cultural identities and their evolutionary possibilities. Against this background, it is necessary to determine the possibility of reconciling cultural identities. Besides, it is important to demonstrate whether the perceived unity of divergent cultural positions is the solution to an Othering society. This will form the thrust of the arguments in the next chapter of this thesis.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Displaced persons face a number of hurdles in the new environments where they seek refuge. Kambili and her brother, who are temporarily compelled to leave their parents’ home for a temporary accommodation at their aunt’s awaiting the resolution of the conflict between their parents, provide the initial indication that émigrés face cross-cultural challenges in their new environments. They do not move out of Nigeria yet the challenges they encounter in their aunt’s and grandfather’s homes are reflective of other émigrés in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*.

Although being constantly re-established through Otherness, cultural identity cannot be deprived of its own evolution and of its own evolutionary interests. Through creative contacts it participates in its own change of sense. Cultural consciousness today, in an awareness of the infinite diversity of cross-cultural influences on its own being, is not endangered of being dissolved in another cultural identity. Uniqueness of identity of a culture lies in its very features of differences and its Otherness throughout history. Identity features of a given national literature cannot be exhausted. This inexhaustiveness, inscribed in cultural identity through its dialogism, is a guarantee, which enables its persistent existence. In this regard, the perceived fear of European cultures – especially now with the on-going plans of an extension of the European Union – that they will lose their distinct cultural identities is predicated on groundless cultural misgivings. More than two thousand years after the birthing of literary genres and literary ‘languages,’ literary history bears witness to the differentiation of distinct European literatures and cultures. In their mutual interactions of cultural identities and literatures, the existing differences of individual national literatures still largely persists. Nonetheless, the condition of a permanent flux of contacts and influences, the cultural identity of a national literature is continuously undergoing the impacts of new qualities and peculiarities. Traditional identities are gradually shedding off, but the contemporary literary cultures can still be linked to specific national identities on account of their uniqueness. Linked to features of another cultural identity, one cultural identity re-accentuates its own inexhaustible characteristics. It can be changed radically or be enriched, but its transformation cannot discredit its very existence (*Speech Genres* 137).

And as to the practicality and application of the arguments in this chapter, the future of cultural integration processes, as is evident in the perspective of the proposed reflection on the identity principle as dialogism, is not likely to endanger the existence of several cultures and their individual identities in Africa and the West. Based on Bakhtin’s dialogism, one might only say that a cultural identity awakens in another’s consciousness and lives on its own unrepeatable existence.

In conclusion, Adichie seems to suggest in her novels, in resonance with Bakhtin, that cultural identity represents non-finite wholeness. Openness and un-predeterminedness are its most evident characteristics. Through its complexity of influences, cultural identity defies predictability. The picture captured in Adichie's is one that demonstrates that in the absence of the exploration the possibility of creating a unique émigré identity from the fusion of multiple cultures in their new environments, the émigré acquires a decultured state. In *Americanah*, Aisha, Ifemelu, Ginika and Ojiugo feel that they need to become white, even if they are not 'quite white,' to get something out of life in a new and strange cultural world. Their struggle to be part of the new cultural environments they occupy get them to positions which make their efforts ridiculous in the eyes of the people close to them. Ifemelu's finds Ginika's obsession with cultural mimicry ludicrous. In the same way, Ojiugo's preoccupation with British lifestyle appalls Obinze. The exaggerated effort to become someone else is something that Ginika and Ojiugo experience. Ojiugo, Ginika and their ilk do not transform to a different cultural state; they derive comfort in their new statuses as cultural apes. They develop a false sense of belonging which then invites a false sense of security. For Obinze and Ifemelu, mimicry or acculturation is not a secure state; they discover that copying or imitating the culture of the host or the supposedly superior class does not make one equal to the host. It, instead, puts one in a more compromised position. The copycat becomes the subject of the host's ridicule. It validates the claims of superiority that are raised by the host. To this end, the host is vindicated.

The elusive reformatory zeal among the émigrés referred, in Bhabha's 'On Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,' as 'mimic men.' Ifemelu and Obinze are able to discern the misleading, deceptive and fatal nature of this zeal. Ginika and Ojiugo, the postcolonial mimic men become authorized versions of otherness, and thus part-objects of a metonymic colonial desire emerging as inappropriate colonial subjects. Through a cultural dialogue, dynamic characters like Ifemelu and Obinze reject this superficial comfort in mimicry and adopt ambivalent cultural perspectives, the feeling of cultural nowhere-ness or decultured state. They face the trauma of colonial ambivalence resulting from 'mimicry' marked by 'a difference that is almost nothing, but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite' (Bhabha 131). The nexus of 'self' versus 'Other' culminates in uncertainty, fluidity and disillusionment of the émigrés. Their situation becomes all the more wobbly, pendulum-like and wavering. This ambivalent or love-hate relationship with the 'Other' ultimately, eventually as it were, makes the émigrés' lives meaningless, lending credence to the use of the phrase 'cultural nowhere-ness' in the description of this new cultural state. 'The mimicry of the postcolonial subject is therefore always potentially destabilizing to colonial discourse, and locates an area of considerable political and cultural uncertainty in the structure of imperial dominance' (Ashcroft et al. *Postcolonial Studies* 151).

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