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The Negotiation of Bicultural Identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

This article uses Adichie's *Americanah* as the backdrop for an exploration of the hectic life of African immigrants in Western countries. It examines the Nigerian writer's treatment of intersubjective relationships between the immigrant and communities in the receiving society. It discusses the intricacies and tribulations of the "self" meeting and living with the "other", in the diaspora and back into Africa.

The study first discloses, through the postulates of Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, and Paul Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*, the quest for a better future, disenchantment and disillusionment of immigrant characters, in the new space. Then it probes the heartwrenching efforts to put in dialogue their heritage culture and the one in the new social context. In a final analysis, the study discusses the strategies invented by the latter, to translate culture differences, transcend xenophobic attitudes, synthetize heritage and receiving cultures, and assume their "bi-identity".

Keywords: immigrant, identity, alterity, biculturalism, adichie.

Résumé

A travers *Americanah* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, cette étude analyse les attentes et déboires des immigrés africains en occident, pour mieux appréhender les rapports de sujectivité entre ces derniers et les communautés dans les pays d'accueil. Elle explore les viscissitudes auxquelles les immigrés doivent faire face, et qui sont nées de la rencontre entre le « moi » et « l'autre », dans la diapora, mais aussi une fois de retour au pays natal.

A partir des postulats de Julia Kristeva (dans *Etrangers à nous-mêmes)*, et de Paul Ricoeur (dans *Soi-même comme une autre*), l'étude explique, dans un premier temps, le désenchantement et les désillusions des immigrés, dans leur quête d'une vie meilleure. Elle examine, dans un deuxième niveau, les efforts surhumains consentis par ces derniers, pour créer un dialogue entre leur culture originelle et celle du nouveau contexte social. L'analyse évoque, en dernière analyse, les stratégies pensées pour mieux intégrer l'espace d'accueil, transcender les actes xénophobiques, synthètiser cultures originelle et d'adoption, pour enfin assumer pleinement leur « bi-identité ».

Mots-clés : immigré, identité, altérité, biculturalisme, adichie.

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Americanah*, is part of migrant literature, the main focus of which is the production of narratives unfolding the tribulations that punctuate the quest for self-fulfillment and social development of African immigrants, particularly in America and Europe. Through the stories of the female protagonist, Ifemelu, and that of other characters,

the novel sheds light on adversities upon the immigrant in the receiving country, where he is much maligned due to his status as foreigner and where he is called inferior citizen. Like the other character-immigrants of the story, Ifemelu is constantly subjected to socio-cultural realities that seem to be constructed to offer no other alternative but scorn, rejection and negation of the new idea of happiness called forth by the foreigner (Kristeva, 1994, p. 4). The latter becomes isolated, melancholic, in such an unwelcoming environment. This automatic rejection of the other by the self, this binary opposition of "us" and "them", that is still the determining factor of interpersonal relationships, has long been the concern of writers, theorists, and activists. The latter who strive to make humans understand that seeing the other as another expression of the self, considering the foreigner as an image of ourselves should be the ultimate expression of social cohesion, in postmodern societies. Indeed, "by recognizing [the foreigner] within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (Kristeva, 1994, p. 2).

Americanah is Adichie's fictional representation of the hectic life of African immirants in America and Europe and their endeavors to have a better living. The story is about a young Nigerian woman, Ifemelu, who immigrates to the United States, where she has to face with racism, stereotypes and negociate identity. *Americanah* is part of intercultural novels because of the myriads of cultures and stories coalescing in the narrative. The story has as a main focus the representation of stereotypes-laden interrelationships between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Adichie writes because she is convinced that her stories can be an important part of migrant literature, narratives which call for more tolerance and objectivity in the interaction between the self and the other.

Americanah is like a borderless territory, with scenes happening both in Nigeria, Great Britain and America. Puzzled and fragmented, the story unfolds the distressful life of the immigrant in the receiving society. It is also an allusive expression of the author's tacit hope to see a global free movement of people. The ruptures and breaks in the story symbolize the cleavages of the life of immigrants. In the novel, the foreigner has pains to deal with social exclusion, as he is driven by a keen desire to successfully blend heritage and receiving culture streams . Like other new voices from the third or fourth generation, Adichie is "part of a global canon of novelists whose works feature characters with hyphenated identities oscillating between the global and the local. The characters depicted in these novels are not so much preoccupied with national belonging than with ethnic and cultural belonging." (Berning, 2015, p. 3)

According to Paul Ricoeur, the narrative identity of characters is constructed from the identity of the story told in the novel. It can be easily understood, then, that characters, in *Americanah,* be "hyphenated-citizens", because of their effort to translate heritage culture in the new one. Adichie infers that this is made possible only because the immigrant and the people with whom he shares the same social environment, realize that they are the subjects in others' stories, other are subjects in their stories. In other words, individuals have or share the same experiences, to such a point that it is almost impossible to dissociate one's identity, one's selfhood or ipse-identity from the *otherness of the other*. All this "to say that our identity is never simply our own: it is embedded with relations with others and we do not have ultimate control over the nature of these relationships much less the nature of our identity." (Vessey, n.d.)

Conscious of the intercultural aspect of human relationships and convinced of the fact that cultural translation in the global and local spaces is "a matter of living with the other in order to take the other to one's home as a guest…" (Vessey, n.d;), Adichie's constant move in her stories is the celebration of tolerance and the acceptation of the foreigner as an image reflecting the self. In an analysis of the novel through the lens of a narrative ethics of alterity, Nora Berning asserts that "concepts as identity and alterity and individual and collective perception of self and other form an integral part of the (im)migrant, that is Ifemelu's (and by extension Adichie's) search for ethnic, cultural and national belonging…" (2015, p. 2). Though "the hybridization of being at borderlands poses serious challenges to the existing hegemonic culture of society" (Koziel, 2015, p.100), Yogita Colgal posits that Adichie echoes in her narrative Black Atlantic concerns and US American conceptions of race, which are reshaped and transformed in relation to the history of the post-colonial state and its own itinaries of hope and despair, migration and return" (2014, p. xvi). The parallels between the postcolonial African State and the the trajectory of the immigrants is illuminated in the dramatic case of charcaters as Obinze who, though resolute to face up with hate rhetoric in their quest for the Eldorado, ends up in disillusionment. That is why, Chinenye Amonyese in an exquisite work on biculcturality in *Americanah*, rightly posits that "Adichie tells the story of Nigerian immigrants with idealized notions of America and the United Kingdom, who struggle diligently to realize their dreams but return to their home largerly disillusioned." (2017, p. 2)

This study, then, is a discussion of Adichie's acute representation of the pitfalls and disorientation of the immigrant in an alien socio-cultural context. In doing so, it explains the

strategies implemented to translate culture differences, overcome hate rhetoric and exclusion. It analyses, in a last level, how character-immigrant like Ifemelu, finally assume what can be called a reasoned biculturalism, or "bi-identity" (Nwakanma, as cited in Berning, 2015, p. 7), and straddle their two identities to the new space.

1. Theoretical Framework: Strangers to Ourselves or the Self is the Other

Like many other theorists, Paul Ricoeur and Julia Kristeva have largely discussed the question of identity and alterity, the difference or complementarity between the self and the other or our attitude towards the unknown. As path-breaking works, *Oneself as Another* (1994), and *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), bring the reader to reflect upon the intricate and mostly subjective relationships between we and those we take as foreigners, with the view to reconsidering the intersubjective links that bind us to them. Indeed, "othering is expressed through codes of belonging as well as difference. Most commonly, pronouns convey the boundaries between "we" and "them" through the use of first and third-person plurals. "We" belong; "they" are other and cannot belong. Those who are "them" can be described in the negative language of disgusts…" (Painter, 2017).

For Ricoeur, alterity is not a matter of making a straight distinction between one's identity – the "idem-identity" (sameness) or "the ipse-identity" (selfhood) – and that of others. He argues that who we are or what we represent in terms of culture or national belonging is all relative because that identity we so proudly take as our own is actually in interrelation with what the "other" stands for. In other words, if, as he claims, we are subjects in others' stories, others are subjects in our stories (…) our narrative is interwoven with other narratives, then "otherness is at the heart of selfhood". The other exists, is identifiable and recognizable only because we attest it from the recognition of the self. Therefore, alterity, defined as an intrinsic dimension of the identity of the self (Abel & Porée, 2007, p. 9), is all but unilateral, univocal: it is polysemic, Ricoeur argues. Alterity is polysemic because it no longer designates that unidirectional conception of opposing selfhood and otherness, but it rather means oneself in/as otherness, an entanglement of identities. In this way, the attestation or recognition of oneself is almost impossible, unless done in relation with the singularity, and specificities of the one taken as a foreigner.

About the foreigner, Kristeva relevantly analyzes his situation, condition and relations with others in the receiving country. The French philosopher expands on the scorched happiness of

the foreigner, the feeling of rejection and even disgust he raises among the other, but also his melancholy and disorientation, due to a social environment warped by stereotypes and stigmatization from "those who belong". This is how Kristeva describes the condition of the foreigner:

> While in the most savage human groups the foreigner was an enemy to be destroyed, he has become, within the scope of religious and ethical constructs, a different human being who, provided he espouses them, may be assimilated into the fraternities of the "wise," the "just," or the "native."" (1991, p. 2)

He is different because the body of the foreigner, Ricoeur writes, is the locus of alterity. Kristeva goes further to say that the

> … foreigner's face burns with happiness. At first, one is struck by his peculiarity-those eyes, those lips, those cheek bones, that skin unlike others, all that distinguishes him and reminds one that there is someone there. The difference in that face reveals in paroxystic fashion what any face should reveal to a careful glance: the nonexistence of banality in human beings. (1991, p. 3)

This particularity of the face of the other exists only because we appreciate it from our own: if my face didn't exist I wouldn't be able to identify the peculiarities of the other's; it's because of the alterity of the body that the alterity of the other emerges (Ricoeur, 1992). To this, Emmanuel Levinas adds that "in its appearing, the face presents itself to me naked; it is, as it were, handed over defenseless before the "shames gaze" that observes ans exploresit" (Levinas as cited in Burggraeve, 1999, p. 30).

In this way, the recognition of the other as an (unconscious) image of the self, the ability to attest selfhood in adequation with otherness, reveals that we are strangers to ourselves, as Kristeva sustains, we are only because others are: "the confidence that I can always reveals the other in the self" is a basic principle of attestation, a central principle in Ricoeur's theory; attestation eventually "becomes the central ontological category of Ricoeur's theory of the self as (an) other" (Vessel, n.d.). If attestation, as defined by Ricoeur, is self-assurance or self-certainty, then attestation defines the self in its relationship with the other; it reveals the other which is in the self. In the end, according to Kristeva and Ricoeur, not only are we strangers to ourselves (because of the inherent presence of the other in us) but also our face, in its mostly symbolic aspect, is a crude reflection of the other, " who is "always remaing "enigmatic", intruding on me, as the "irreducible, separate and distinct", "strange", in short as the other" (Levinas, 1988, p. 81). Indeed, the " foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities." (Kristeva, 1991, p. 1)

Such intricacies between the foreigner and the national, are at the heart of the intersubjective relationships in *Americanah*. As an intercultural novel, staging characters at the crossroads of the local and the global, *Americanah* is "part of a growing canon of migration literature dealing with and responding to the social changes of the 21st century and to the possibilities and challenges linked to the age of migration" (Weingarten, 2015, p. 2). Adichie represents, in her migrant postcolonial opus, characters who are decided to translate culture differences and become bicultural, no longer sololy nation-bound, but who live by heritage cultural values in a dialogic relationships with global realities in the postmodern era. At this level of the analysis, the prejudice-laden life of the African immigtrant in the US and in Europe, needs to be further explored. This allows a more accurate explication of the existential drama but also the possibilities for self-fulfillment through the blend of heritage and receiving cultures, which goes necessary by the immigtrant's recognition of his/her biculturalism.

2. Tossed between two Cultures: he Expectations and Disillusionnements of the Immigrant

"Can one be a foreigner and happy?", is the question serving as prelude to Julia Kristeva's insightful analysis of the condition of the foreigner in the receiving society. The French theorist highlights the quest for happiness of the immigrant who, while leaving behind a heritage culture, is all determined to keep his/her head above the multiple obstacles characterizing his/her meeting with the others. Indeed, "no obstacle stops him, and all suffering, all insults, all rejections are indifferent to him as he seeks that insvisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist, but he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond." (Kristeva, 1991, p. 5)

Like many young Africans, the migration to America of Adichie's protagonist is essentially motivated by a quest for a more clement social order. Stressful political and social circumstances triggered her decision to go beyond the national self and experience another cultural context. Ifemelu finds it hard to cope with the new space that is fraught with subjectivities about Africa. The young woman can hardly intergrate the new and hostile environement, where the suscipicious look of nationals upon her makes her realize, for the first time, her condition of black. In this passage, the narrator unveils her feeling of unrest, fear, as she is neither with resources nor attachments:

> The world was wrapped in gauze; she could see the shapes of things but not clearly enough, never enough. She told Obinze that there were things she should know how

> to do, but didn't details she sould have corralled into her space but hadn't. (…) She applied to be a waitress, hostess, bartender, cashier, and then waited for job offers that never came, and for this she blamed herself. It has to be that she was doing something right; and yet she did not know what it might be. (Adichie, 2014, p. 161)

Ifemelu blames herself not only for her inability to meet up with the social and cultural requirements of the American society, but she also cannot comprehend why her multiple attempts to have a dignified life through work are not successful. This stuation of the character is understandable because of the doubts and difficulties which make her "hypersensitive beneath his armor as activist or tireless "immigrant worker", Kristeva argues. To this, the French Philosopher adds:

> the foreigner is the one who works. While natives of the civilized world, of developed countries, think that work is vulgar (…) you will recognize the foreigner in that he still considers work as a value. A vital necessity, to be sure, his sole means of survival, on which he does not necessarily place a halo of glory but simply claims as a primary right, the zero degree of dignity. (1991, p. 18-19)

Ifemelu cannot understand and accept her joblessness as this is the sole way she has for survival and social recognition. The example of the female immigrants from western African countries in the hair salon, working their heads off to survive and to contribute to life back home is an expressive of the acute need that drive immigrants to have to assert themselves in American society.

Furthermore, as Berning rightly puts it, *Americanah* "is part of a corpus of intercultural novels characterized by a global, bordeless topography typical of the so-called "transitional book" (Berning, 2015, p. 3). The narrative floats from the US, the host country of the female protagonist to Great Britain, with the narration of the tribulations undergone by Obinze, another immigrant and childhood lover of Ifemelu, back to Nigeria, the original cultural locus of the latter. Through the esthetic fabric, Adichie provides the reader with a comprehensive image of the hectic moments the foreigner has to put up with, in order to be accepted by scornful hosts, in different cultural locations. Moving between regions and territories, *Americanah*, as the characters and the author herself, refuses any hierarchy of values, what is discrepancy with postmodern realities. (Berning, 2015, p. 3)

Like Ifemelu, Obinze lands in London, burning with hope, and driven by dreams of social and economic fulfilment. But, he is soon torn between his aborted attempt to be accepted by the british other as a co-citizen and his disillusionment stirred by exploitation from other well-settled African immigrants. The deprivation and nakedness of the immigrant in those

social contexts is openly shown because of the difficulty they feel to cope with new realities, of the strong desire to fully intergrate the host country and assume a hybrid identity. Truly, more than a romantic story about the protagonist and Obinze, Adichie's novel is, in fact, a social novel about race, which intanstiates social identity through its very form" (Berning, 2015, p. 3) and content. The painstaking efforts of Obinze and Ifemelu to build a social identity, are explained by the fact that as "intruders" into those spaces, they are entrapped by the initial need for more clement locations, and the subsequent disenchantment, once in the receiving society. "Not belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping." (Kristeva, 1991, p. 5)

The disenchantment of Ifemelu and Obinze is made unbearable by the stereotypical and prejudicial acts, but also a sentiment of extreme solitude, and hopelessness. The narrator makes a poignant representation of the dramatic condition of Ifemelu, a young female immigrant, in the midst of the American society,with neither resources nor energy to stand up to pitfalls and obstacles:

> She wolke up torpid every morning., slowe by sadness, frightened by the endless stetch of the day that lay ahead. Everything had thickened. She was swallowed, lost in a vicious haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness. Between her and what she should feel, there was a gap. She cared about nothing. (…) Often, in the middle of eating or reading, she would feel a crushing urge to cry and the tears would come, the sobs hurting her throat. (…) Her days were stilled by silence and snow. (Adichie, 2014, p.192)

Sadness and loneliness constitutes one of the most traumatic moments experienced by the immigrant, prior to her immersion into the host country. Ifemelu's solitude and despair, then, is a consequence of the adversity which punctuates the foreigner's quest for social development. The case of Obinze in London is all the more illustrative as it does not only allow an extended representation of the condition of the immigrant but, it is also a sound means for the author to bring to the forefront the slight differences in the treatment of the foreigner in western societies. Like Ifemelu, the only relation with his heritage background is her mother, and abroad he can hardly relied on the help and solidarity of other African immigrants, in his hankering for british citizenship and economic stability. This is how his solitude is relayed to the reader:

> Later on a train to Essex, he noticed that all the people around him were Nigerians, lound conversations in Yorunba and Pidgin filled the carriage, and for a moment he

> saw the unfettered non-white foreignness of this scene through the suspicious eye of the white woman on the tube. (…) and he thought of his mother and of Ifemelu, and the lifehe had imagined for himself, and the life he now had, lacquered as it was by work and reading, by panic and hope. He had never felt so lonely. (Adichie, 2014, p. 320)

What is obvious from the angst and feeling of solitude lacerating Ifemelu and Obinze, but also the many other foreign figures in the narrative, is that a nostalgia of the (certainly more caring) social context left behind. A nostalgia that they no longer can satiate because of their presence in an environment they are at pains to appropriate. This is the quintessence of Kristeva's relevant discussion of the isolation and rejection of the foreigner:

> Free of ties with his own people, the foreigner feels "completely free"? Nevertheless, the consummate name of such a freedom is solitude. Useless and limitless, it amounts to boredom or supreme availability. Deprived of others, free solitude, (…) dilapidates muscles, bones, and blood. Available, freed of everything, the foreigner has nothing, he is nothing. (…) The paradox is that the foreigner wishes to be alone but with partners, and yet none is willing to join him in the torrid space of his uniqueness. (1991, p. 13)

It is no surprise, then, alone, deprived of everything and of himself, the immigrant be psychologically affected and afflicted. However dauntless their endeavor to work out the realities in the new society and get their head above asphyxiating conditions is, Ifemelu and Obinze are on the brink of depression. Afflicted by being constantly reminded of their status of foreigner, through the suspicious eye of nationals upon the naked faces, they are brought to moral collapse by an acute sentiment of melancholy, detestation and self-loathing. Truly, when the immigrant experiences isolation from his orginal culture, when he is unaccepted by the mainstream culture, he has no other alternative than get on with individualism. Thus, he is crushed by a feeling of low self-esteem. This is echoed in the words of Ginika, an old friend of Ifemelu and early immigrant to the US when she bluntly tells the latter that she is about to be depressed:

> Ginika said, "I think you'er suffering from depression."
> Ifemelu shook her head and turned to the window. Depression was what happened to Americans, with their self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness. She was suffering from depression, she was merely a little tired and a little slow. (…)
> "Ifem, this is something a lot of people go through, and I know it's not been easy for you adjusting to a new place and still not having a job. We don't talk about things like depression in Nigeria but it's real…"
> Ifemelu kept her face to the window. She felt, again, that crushing desire to cry, (…) but now it was too late, her self-loathing had hardened inside her... (Adichie, 2014, p. 195)

Try as she may, Ifemelu can hardly hide the lacerating nostalgia of home, due to her apparent difficulty in adapting to the new space. As Kristeva argues, the foreigner mostly survives with a tearful face turned toward the lost homeland. The difficulty of Ifemelu stems from the new space's "resistance to cultural pluralism; [which] is evident in the "us" and "them" binary social relationship which is the tap root of western metaphysics." (Kofas as cited in Berning, 2015,p. 2)

Less lucky than his cousin Nicholas, or Ojugo, and Emenike, Obinze's accepting to be deported is a mostly poignant expression of his disillusionment and melancholy In Europe, Adichie's infers through the humiliating and back-breaking moment undergone by Obinze, that the exclusion of the other by the sectarian self is much more pronounced in Europe than in America. In both locations, local minority groups and foreigners are the periphery of social oragnizations, in the sense that "countries in Europe were based on exclusion and not, as in America, on inclusion…" (Adichie, 2014, p. 339). After his arrestation, on the day of his marriage with a british girl Clotilde – a union through which he hoped to get citizenship – Obinze, holding proudly to his flouted dignity, says to his lawyer:

> I'm willing to go back to Nigeria (…) The last chard ofhis digity was like a wrapper slipping off that he was desperate to retie. [The lawyer] was going to tick on a form that his client was willing to be removed. "Removed". That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing" (Adichie, 2014, p. 345)

The acceptation of deportation is Obinze's act of resistance against the hatred his presence stirs in the british society.

Therefore, harsh socio-economic conditions bring immigrants, like Obinze, to leave home for other areas, and to call for a new idea of happiness (Kristeva, 1991, p. 4). The expectations which urge them to break ties with the loved ones back home is soon superseded by a general feeling of disillusion and melancholy, made more pronounced by racist and debasing attitudes of "those who belong" towards the outcast, the intruder.

While Obinze has to deal with dejection and rejection by scornful hosts and, thus pains to integrate the british society, Ifemelu takes it as a survival to try to cope with the incoherences and the animosity of the American society, where the pecking order of racer "defines what it means to be an American, for belonging adheres to whiteness" (Morrison as cited in Painter, 2017). She has understood that survival lies in adaptation to the new space, understanding of the American mindset and culture, transcendence of preconceived judgements upon the foreigner.

Ifemelu's melancholy is mitigated by her efforts to go toward the other, to let her frightened self wander and meet the cultural other. Not only does she involve herself into love relationships, but she also accepts invitations to parties and other get-togethers. In the America postmodern world, "meeting balances wandering. A crossroads of two othernesses, it welcomes the foreigner without tying home down, opening the host to his visitor without committing him" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 10). At the party organized by her white employer, Kimberly, Ifemelu, the immigrant is at the center of attention from everybody. During this "nutritive communion" (Kristeva, 1991, p, 12), where she has a sensation (albeit frail) of belonging to the American society. However, she is constantly reminded of the precarious condition of her orginal space (Africa), with charitable and somehow complacent words, a situation that deeply shatters her self confidence. The narrator syas: "[A] couple spoke of their safari in Tanzania (…) Two women talked about their donations to a wonderful charity in Malawi that builds wells, a wonderful orphanage in Botswana, a wonderful microfinance copperative in Kenya…" (Adichie, 2014, p. 209). The guests feel all the "need" to make at ease the foreigner through "the hospitality ritual" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 12). Actually, the female immigrant, faced to all those testimonies about caritative actions for the continent, suddenly realizes her aloofness from the homogenous group, and therefore, she would have wanted to be "from the country of people who gave and not those who received, to be one of those who had and who could therefore bask in the grace of having given, to be among those who could afford copious pity and empathy" (Adichie, 2014, p. 209). The feast, which can be likened to the image of the banquet of hospitality, is the foreigner's utopia (Kristeva, 1991, p. 12). The cosmopolitanism of a moment, the brotherhood of guests who soother and forget their differences, the banquet is outside of time." (Kristeva, 1991, p. 12)

In this way, the female character is determined to know more about American culture, so as to translate culture differences and transcends existential angst, and the hatred of the other. Deeply seated in her original culture, Ifemelu is conscious that survival, in a world of detestation and rejection, lies in adaptation and hybridity. At this level of the analysis, the point is to demonstrate that Ifemelu and Obinze represent the new character archetypes, mostly favoured by self-confident young voices as Adichie, who have comprehended that the survival of the postmodern subject resides in the synthesis of local and global identities

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3. "Loca-globalized": An Assumed Biculturalism

In her exploration of post-colonial female identity, Jeannine Ortega argues that "*Americanah* divides into segments of identity formation that reflect on the process of the postcolonial migrant identity. Ifemelu's stages of identity include her time as a native Nigerian, her experience as an immigrant in America, her Ameriacanization, and her return to Nigeria" (Ortega, 2015). The formation of the identity of the foreigner in Adichie's novel is the prolongement of a chain of experiences defined by intersubjective relationships mostly fraught with pre/misconceptions, pre-established verities and a total rejection of the foreigner-intruder. Characters of the novel find themselves in a nest of kaleidoscopic identities, a bicultural context where it becomes a challenge to impose one's *ipse identity* or selfhood upon the other. In his opus, *Oneself as Another*, French philosopher Paul Riceour accurately analyses the inevitable interrelationships between the self and the other, natives and foreigners. As a major postulate, Ricoeur argues that our identity is never simply our own. It is embedded with relations with others and we do not have a total control over the nature of these relationships much less the nature of our identity. In other words, identity itself is a multidimensional notion, an arbitrary reality, so much that celebrating one's culture or taking one"s identity as the most valuable, as Edouard Glissant holds, breeds a world of intolerance, and violence. Ifemelu has understood, at the crossroads of isolation, she needs to step out of her selfhood, to meet the American other.

The character, therefore, sets to translating the American culture into her own terms. Through her multiple contacts and interactions with people in the receiving country, she casts an objective look at the other, taking their differences not as stumbling blocks on the path to mutual understanding but, rather, as the basis for mutual acceptance and enrichment. Her first attempt to place "otherness at the heart of her selfhood" is her blogging. This is a unique opportunity to not only reassert the value of her original identity but more; it is an affirmative action to celebrate her biculturalism. Thus, biculturalism involves synthetizing the heritage and receiving cultures, into a unique and personalized blend (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). Ifemelu's personalized affirmation of her two-fold identity is done through a caustic analysis of the subjective contradictions and intolerance of American society upon immigrants, but also through a recognition of the lack of solidarity inside the group of the excluded.

In this way, she discusses the in-root and history-based racism, and discrimination heaped both on minority groups and on foreigners. She castigates American tribalism (Adichie, 2014, p. 227), she denounces hatred between Non-American Blacks, (Adichie, 2014, p. 273),

she, as well, illuminates the mechinisms and bone-deep impacts of racism (Adichie, 2014, p. 403). Thus, the prolific blogger she is, "discloses the ideological discourses surrounding migration from the point of view of a "Non-American Black" as she likes to call herself." (Berning, 2015, p. 3)

Thus, by looking into the structural organization of the American society, by diagnosing the traumatic experiences lived by the Non-American Black, Ifemelu identifies her *self* with the others. What is more, she takes the *self* of the other as an integral part of her selfhood. This is Ifemelu's conception of alterity, that is "polysemic – (…) alterity is irreducible to the alterity of other persons" (Vessel). Indeed selfhood, far from referring to something concrete, discrete and fully understood, implies otherness to an unacknowledged degree. Ifemelu's untangling her self in realtions to the other, actually allows to see "how conception of selfhood materially impacts how we treat others".

Like the author, Ifemelu understands that the difficult social condition in the racist and sexist America are another image of the tribulations undergone by black Amricans and non-Americans, in their quest for social recognition. Admittedly,

> Understanding oneself as another involves treating the Other when encountered in the world with empathy and respect – a new "solicitude" rather than anykind of moral solipsism whereby not only can we see ourselves as another, but we can also see the other as ourselves. (Ricoeur, 1992)

Through her hair she lets grow naturally, Ifemelu is attesting herself, and her truth, in a social context where conventions and races barriers are ingrained, where a multitude of truths, collude and coaslesce. Such an attestation of her identity, of her belief as a "bi-cultural", does not mean a lack of consideration of other knowledge and vision. It is rather an expression of a different type of certainty" (Ricoeur, 1992). Her option to grow natural hair is an image of her Americanization, which means being at the crossroads of many cultures and yet resolutely seated into her original African identity. Such a new positioning of the female immigrant is consciously articulated because her journey from maginalization to a progressive immersion into American cultural locus, explains her conception of identity as a dialogic relationship between the other, in interpersonal relationships, and selfhood. Chimamanda Adichie's representation of the hybrid identity of Ifemelu is reminiscent of Edouard Glissant's Identity-Relation (1990).[1] Through this expression, Glissant hints at our openness to the other, the

[1] For Glissant, Identity-Relation calls for opening the self to the other. The relationship with the other is defined as a necessary subjective link to the other.

unknown. For him, the relationship with the other goes necessarily with meeting him, with opening the the subjectivity in relation with the author. For Glissant, our differences should be what binds us, links us and also the basis of interaction between us.

Efemelu and other immigrant somehow successfully negotiate what Homi Bhabha terms 'in-between spaces': these "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1994. p. 1-2). Among the new signs of identity is the requirement from the immigrant to step outside of himself/herself to actually see what he/she is doing", and become thus a bicultural citizen. Ifemelu and members of the Nigerpolitan club she joins on her return to Nigeria have gone beyong themselves, so as to be able to put up with possible differences in biculturalism. Such a psychological and cultural duplication was what made possible the home return project of Ifemelu and the others. Emboldened by "a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political condition of the present" (Glissant, 1990), they undertook the way back travel, moving from what was then unknown, and which is fully assumed (the receiving society), to the original cultural space.

The Nigerpolitan Club illuminates the immigrant's move from (translation), transition to transcendence, in their determination to inscribe into the Nigerian society, the new image they have of the world, as a beyond, a borderless territory, at the heart of which are cosmopolitan – Niger (Nigeria), politan (cosmopolitanism) – citizens. Though having experienced the trauma of displacement and rejection, the latter are now questioning modernist definition of such notions as nation and national culture. This is how Doris, a childhood friend of Ifemulu, introduces the Club to the fresh returnee: "It's called the Nigerpolitan Club and it's just a bunch of people who have recently moved back, some from England, but mostly from the US. (…) The Nigerpolitan meeting: a small cluster of people…" (Adichie, 2014, p. 499-501). The club is a space of interculturality, composed of young men and women belonging both to the local and the global, and who are particularly interested in Nigeria political and social issues. The club is as well the space for the returnees to critically discuss international issues. Therefore, the meeting in the club is another expression of alterity as a redescription of cultural and social traits, as a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel…" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9). Ranyinudo, another friend, entreats Ifemelu to come home, saying that "Lagos is now full of American returnees, so you better

come back and join them. Everyday you see them carrying a bottle of water as if they will die of heat if they are not drinking water every minute." (Adichie, 2014, p. 16)

In her representation of the returnees' dogged ambition to reconsider and redefine the meaning and implications of identity, Adichie further, as Arthur Rimbaud, acknowledges that "Je est un autre" (The I is another). The meaning of the words of the french poet is this: to have a consciousness of selfhood, the I needs to interact and collaborate with the other. Julia Kristeva refreshes the position of the French poet, with this comment:

> Rimbaud's Je est un autre (…) was not only the acknowledgement of the psychotic ghost that haunts poetry. The word foreshadowed the exile, the possibility or necessity to be foreign and to live in a foreign country, thus heralding the art of living in amodern are, the cosmopolitanism of those have been flayed. Being alieneated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that exquisite distance within which perverse pleasure begins, as well as the possibility of my imaginig and thinking, the impetus of my culture. (Kristeva, 1991, p. 13-4

Truly, then, characters with "hyphenated identities oscillating between the global and the local"[2] learnt much from their traumatic meeting with the other, a (difficult) intercultural dialogue which brought them to recognize that there is a convergence between their ipse-identity (selfhood) and the alterity of others. Thus, the initial shattered existence of Ifemelu and other foreigners in hostile cultural contexts has stimulated in them a sentiment of motivation; from self-loathing to self/communal realization, the immigrants have become postcolonial/postmodern subjects resolutely turned to the local and global, in their efforts to "imagine and think "the impetus of national culture." They manage to successfully select aspects from the heritage and receiving cultures, and intergrate them into an individualized 'culture' that is not directly reducible to either the heritage or the receiving culture streams. (Schwartz & Unger, 2010).

Such a tumultuous life of Ifemelu, Obinze, Emenike and other migrant figures roaming the narrative territory of *Americanah*, is ciphered in the seemingly de-articulated sequencing. The reader is lost in the puzzled and tormented lifestories of characters, so much that it requires many efforts to roll back the line of the story. However, as Berning correctly analyses, "despite the presentation of primary disrupted lives, the novel, through its form, manages to preserve a sense of wholeness and continuity; fiction, in other works has the power to not only represent and reflect on life plans: it can actively construct and shape life plans and endow them with

[2] Nora Berning, op.cit, p, 3.

coherence and meaning" (Berning, 2015, p. 3). The belief of a universal identity (deeply seated in specificies) is the crux of the idea of alterity in Adichie. The Nigerian writer is the incarnation of what Amonyese calls "adaptative biculturalism" (Chinenye, 2017, p. 3): it is "a radical response to discrimination through taking pride in one's heritage and firmly holding onto that legacy through retention of prominent cultural attributes" ((Berning, 2015, p. 3). Like Adichie, Ifemelu is part of the Nigerpolitan community, who fully assumes hybridity, because convinced that the self is located at the center of the other and that the other is, therefore, a reflection of the self. Ifemelu is conscious of the positive impact her migration to America has bred to her, but also to Nigerian society. Her migratory movement sets the basis of a dialogic interrelationship with other peoples, and has, thus, remodeled her cramped vision of the world. Like members of the Nigerpolitan club, Ifemelu is a "postcolonial subject [who] becomes the post-modern immigrant, who is no longer tied to a single physical location to navigate national identity. The tewenty-first-century post-colonial condition now includes multicultural identities that embrace the hybridity that stems from the intersection of culture." (Ortega, 2015, p. 47).

Conclusion

The study of *Americanah* has allowed to demonstrate that the novel is part of the literature of migration and as such, it unfolds the stories of immigrants to Europe and American who suffer to integrate the new spaces. Through an insightful exploration of the predicaments of Ifemelu in America, Obinze and the others African foreigners in the british society, the analysis foregrounds the idea that receiving cultures, fraught with stereotypes and prejudices, constitute real obstacles for the social development of immigrants.

The use of Julia Kristeva's and Paul Ricoeur's groundbreaking postulates on the intersubjective relationships between the self and the other was an opportunity to demonstrate that identity and belonging are arbitrary constructions. It was also a way to look into Adichie's treatment of the immigrant's social exclusion, his attempts to make a synthesis of his self with the other, but also to demonstrate that there should be no way for marginalization and violence, as the other is *another self.*

Ifemelu's leap from despair, rejection and dejection to self-affirmation through an acceptance of her bicultural identity is the ultimate expression of Adichie's vision of human relationships in the postmodern world. Humans are strangers to themselves, as each has in them part of the unknown, of the otherness of the other, and as such, Adichie suggests, meeting,

convergence and mutual respect should take over pre-established ideas, intolerance and hatred towards the foreigner. The gutzy contemporaneity of Americanah makes it a mostly resounding expresstion of Adichie's humanism, her well-synthesized bicuturalism, which are for her and immigrants characters, the only accurate means to eradicate postmodern violence and establish more objective interpersonal relationships.

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