

AFRICAN WOMANHOOD AND THE TRAUMA OF SELF-ASSERTION**Daniela-Irina Darie, PhD Student, “Al. Ioan Cuza” University of Iași**

Abstract: To understand woman’s position in Nigeria means to solve a philosophical conundrum. The consequences of the societal incongruities and the traditional hierarchy in an African family - as a part of this conundrum - are to be identified in the writings of modern African women writers, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – Purple Hibiscus (2003), Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), and Americanah (2013). The fragments of native and Western philosophy rarely combine in a coherent expression, and this lack of meaning is pursued in the development of the African woman’s identity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the pathfinder of the new generation of African writers, approaches the concept of womanhood with caution, acknowledging the elusive outline of the African female character and of the circumstances within which it evolves. Adichie’s novels highlight the biases of the Nigerian society, even if we are referring to the modern one, a society that continues to dignify manhood by reducing the woman to the archetype of the child-bearer, by regressing to primordial chants when its structure threatens to become obsolete. Adichie’s women possess the strength of their truthfulness, each of them is in her right to voice her fragment of philosophy. The village woman, rooted in tradition and conjuring the supernatural forces of ancient witchcrafts, the modern woman, independent and educated at Western schools, the mistress as intellectual equal, or as a means of translating the race, the psychological disruption of the twin liaison, which in African tradition, constitutes a highly culturally invested relation, all these pieces of the ambiguous African womanhood receive dignity and reconnaissance in Adichie’s novels. The “conceptualization” of African womanhood overtly denounces the alien dimension of the Western influence upon the African diaspora. Adichie adds to the already conflictive literary identity of Africa an incipient acceptance of the postmodern condition. For the African woman of letters, the African canon must open itself to the Anglo-American creative prospects, including the presence of the feminine voice, and acknowledging that diversity is not necessarily a wrongful deed of the malevolent Western worldview.

Keywords: African feminism, cultural puzzle, Igbo woman, African diaspora, identity trauma.

Akachi Ezeigbo’s *Vision and Revision*, written in 1998, was challenging the literature written by female authors for “been largely focused on family issues and on the survival of their husbands and children [...] that they have kept to their roles as nurturers.”¹ But in order to construct an integrating, whole, female subject of African literature, one must de-construct the “threefold oppression” of the Black woman of Africa: “by virtue of her sex, she is dominated by man in a patriarchal society; by virtue of her class she is at the mercy of capitalist exploitation; by virtue of her race she suffers from the appropriation of her country by colonial or neo-colonial powers. Sexism, racism, class division; three plagues...”²

¹ Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, *Vision and Revision: Flora Nwapa and the Fiction of War*, apud Marion Pape, *Nigerian War Literature by Women. From Civil War to Gender War*, in Flora Veit-Wild, Dirk Naguschewski (eds.), *Versions and Subversions in African Literatures 1*, Amsterdam & Union NJ: Editions Rodopi, 2005, p. 233.

² Awa Thiam, *Black Sisters Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*, Pluto Press, 1986, p. 118, cited in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *African Feminist Discourse: A Review Essay*, source: *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, No. 58, *African Feminism Three* (2003), pp. 31-36, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4548092>>.

In 2003, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie published *Purple Hibiscus*, and Akachi Ezeigbo's assertion becomes a "defunct signifier," maybe more so because the godly manly character of the novel ends by being killed by the same nurturer of the family. Is Adichie the voice of the woman's counter-discourse in literature? Or only one episode in Africa's struggle for an identity in which the echoes of the Western ideology must be accepted?

On 17 October 2014, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was declaring for *The Guardian*: „In 2003, I wrote a novel called «Purple Hibiscus», about a man who [...] beats his wife [...]. A journalist, a nice, well-meaning man, told me [...] that people were saying my novel was feminist, and his advice to me [...] was that I should never call myself a feminist, since feminists are women who are unhappy because they cannot find husbands. So I decided to call myself a Happy Feminist.”³

The research in areas such as feminism has embedded the concept of social death⁴ as the foundation for the remaking of the African woman. By social death, the researchers understood the erasure of the basic social roles of the African woman, being banned from activities which in the past had have defined her significance: marketplace and family. She is apparently elevated in social status, but this seems to be an illusion, like many surrounding woman's self-assertion, more notable, African woman's self-assertion. The "liberated" African woman is pushed aside from her place within the community, with the "reward" of a multiplied ego.

Purple Hibiscus advances the contradictory personality of Papa, seen through the eyes of his teenage daughter. He is a highly appreciated member of the community, a fighter for freedom, and an abuser in his home. Nobody knows about his crises of fury, nobody knows that, beyond his incessant appeals to religion and the goodness of God, the eruptions of darkness border with insanity.

The children witness the effects of the beatings their mother endures, without rebellion, because a woman is just matter in man's hand, a mould which must be repeatedly and fiercely reshaped according to its master's desire. Sometimes the abuse is rationalized, reasons are promoted for the prosecution, but sometimes, nothing happens until the abuse happens.

We stood at the landing and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border. He opened the dining room door. Then we heard the front door open, heard him say something to the gate man, Adamu.

“There's blood on the floor,” Jaja said. “I'll get the brush from the bathroom.”

We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolor all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped.⁵

The abuse is a reality so intimate with the African home, that even the blood, a powerfully invested social image, does not trigger affects, the actions of the witnesses being voided of significance, like in a role play without any affective charge.

³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *I decided to call myself a Happy Feminist*, interview with *The Guardian*, 17 October 2014, <www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/17/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-extract-we-should-all-be-feminists>.

⁴ Anthonia C. Kalu, *Those Left Out in the Rain: African Literary Theory and the Re-invention of the African Woman*, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (September 1994), pp. 77-95, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/524767>>.

⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, London: Harper Collins Books, 2012, p. 19.

The incident describes a matter of fact in African society, in which “marriages are characterized by fighting, physical violence, and rape.”⁶ The domestic violence reaches such levels and frequency that tends to be perceived as a way of normality.

When Papa’s craziness achieves inhuman levels, when he breaks Jaja’s arm, but not the right one, “because it is the hand he writes with,”⁷ and could bring fame and pride to his father, Mama does nothing, except caring Jaja’s wound. Through her lack of reaction, Adichie suggests a kind of fatality hovering over the African marriage.

The conflict evolves with subtlety, with small, almost trivial gestures, timid voicing of a timid conscience coming into being, in its attempts to disrupt the historically established fabric of patriarchy. This male gendered ideology is marked, among other features, “by the exclusion of women from male power constructs, and the controlling of women in order to appropriate from them.”⁸

But this control loses part of its effectiveness in its clash with another powerfully motivated and anchored construct of female individuation: motherhood. And motherhood, balanced or imbalanced by the ideological and traditional systems, tends to “trespass” the territories primordially deemed to be appropriated by males.

Predictably, at some point, Papa lashes at his daughter, Kambili, with the gestures of a psychotic break, almost killing his child on a painting crying “freedom,” upon which he comments “nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire.”⁹ Mama decides to act, not by trying to push her husband aside, or invoke a law to protect her and her children, because she knows very well that in Africa, a woman is yet her husband’s shadow, but by eliminating him forever from her family. Adichie makes recourse to the idea of justified killing, a homicidal case, ironically, representative for the American justice.¹⁰

Another figure, which is marked by firm and enduring brushes by Adichie’s pen, is Auntie Ifeoma’s. Ifeoma is an intellectual, a professor at a college in Nsukka, and Adichie creates her in contrast with Mama, her sister-in-law. Mama feels that “a husband crowns a woman’s life. It is what they want.” And Ifeoma, a feminist trope-herald and unmarried, replies: “sometimes life begins when marriage ends.”¹¹ The death of Papa by the hands of Mama will prove that this feminist trope could create alternative realities.

In Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we see so many types of women, in a generous spectrum, from traditional to postmodernist and feminist, and these fragments, somehow shattered pieces of the same puzzle, define, but only together, the future African woman, who isn’t a feminist, isn’t a wife, isn’t a provider of goods, isn’t the subservient shadow of the African male, but all of this.

How does a girl gain power in the traditional African family? By the disappearance of the oldest boy. We see, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the character of Anulika coming into power in place of her older brother.

Perhaps Anulika would be watching them. She was the oldest child in the household now, and as they all sat around the fire to eat, she would break up the fights when the younger ones struggled over the strips of dried fish in the soup. She would wait until all the *akpu* was

⁶ Marion Pape, *op. cit.*, in Flora Veit-Wild, Dirk Naguschewski (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 239.

⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 73.

⁸ Ifi Amadiume, *Re-Inventing Africa. Matriarchy, religion and culture*, London & New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1997, p. 22 .

⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 103.

¹⁰ In approaching Adichie’s works, we must remember that she studied in USA and at the moment, she is “migrating” between Nigeria and America.

¹¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 39-40.

eaten and then divide the fish so that each child had a piece, and she would keep the biggest for herself, as he had always done.¹²

The dismissal of the uniqueness of a woman's personality by subsuming her to a sometimes long series of wives, as in the case of Ugwu's grandmother, who "was the second of three wives and did not have the special position that came with being the first or the last, so before she asked her husband for anything, she cooked him spicy yam porridge with *arigbe*."¹³ She is refused the right to stand in front of her "master"-husband and speak, of course about homely issues, because an African wife is not endowed with the intellectual capacities which endow only the men.

A special accent in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is reserved to academic women, women who had abandoned their bushy villages to study at the university from Ibadan or outside Nigeria, and returned to belong, or to change.

One of them is Miss Adebayo, educated university woman, who "drank brandy like Master and was not an Igbo." Her voice rose above Master's voice, "challenging and arguing." She calls Master a sophist. Ugwu, listening from behind the door, does not understand what a sophist is, "but he did not like she called Master that."¹⁴ The perception of the fragment is ironic, because Ugwu's lack of education, his inferiority in comparison with Miss Adebayo's credentials, are in stark contrast with the superiority he seems he is entitled to only because he is a man.

An African woman possesses few landmarks against which to measure her capacity of self-assertion, and one of them is through her sons. During her waiting in the lobby of the airport, Olanna encounters a grandmother, who asserts, in thick, brown-teethed accent, that "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?"¹⁵

Olanna is treated by her parents and the proximal society like an object of trade. Her father expects her to accept a relation with the powerful and wealthy Chief Okonji, because he needs a contract to be signed. And, after all, Olanna "was used to this, being grabbed by men who walked around in a cloud of cologne-drenched entitlement, with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together."¹⁶

But Olanna refuses to be "the mythic silent Black woman," as Kalenda Eaton presents her, which "has often been misread and idealized" during the revolutionary periods of Black history. "A quiet and willing supporter, working for the cause but [...] not in the forefront of activism."¹⁷ The only similitude Olanna shares with the ancient silent woman is her courage, her heroic voice embodied by the presence in the background of "the activism," teaching, surviving, struggling with her nightmares, but refusing to be the subject, only the agent of the post-war identity.

Olanna is the representative of the new wave of African "womanism," she has the courage of major decisions, all of them disapproved by her mother, a prototype for the pretty useful accessory of which a man could be proud.

¹² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, New York: Anchor Books, 2006, p. 18.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 25.

¹⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 31.

¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 34.

¹⁷ Kalenda Eaton, *Womanism, Literature, and the Transformation of the Black Community, 1965-1980*, New York & London: Routledge, 2008, p. 2.

Olanna “was used to her mother's disapproval; it had colored most of her major decisions, after all: when she chose two weeks' suspension rather than apologize to her Heathgrove form mistress for insisting that the lessons on Pax Britannica were contradictory; when she joined the Students' Movement for Independence at Ibadan; when she refused to marry Igwe Okagbue's son, and later, Chief Okaro's son. Still, each time, the disapproval made her want to apologize, to make up for it in some way.”¹⁸

Self-assertion is associated with one's self, but maybe in the same qualifying range, with the recognition from the other inhabitants of the range. This is part of the tragic destiny, at least until now, of the African woman, this lack of acknowledgement from the African Womanhood. Adichie highlights this element of distortion in defining a new identity for the African woman by contrasting Miss Adebayo and Olanna. Both are educated, both are eager to assert themselves, and both are ancestral enemies in winning a man. Miss Adebayo strives to be identified with the postcolonial Africanism, and considers Olanna

“unworthy of the competition, with her *unintellectual* ways and her too-pretty face and her mimicking-the-oppressor English accent. [...] Perhaps Miss Adebayo could tell, from her face, that she was afraid of things, that she was unsure, that she was not one of those people with no patience for self-doubt. People like Odenigbo. People like Miss Adebayo herself, who could look a person in the eye and calmly tell her that she was illogically pretty, who could even use that phrase, *illogically pretty*.”¹⁹

Olanna's sister, Kainene, is also an educated woman. A strong-willed and bright businesswoman, she seems determined to prove that she is as good as the son her father regrets he doesn't have. In contrast with Olanna, who, during crises, strongly asserts her womanhood, Kainene strongly asserts her freely-assumed manhood.

Richard was bewildered by Kainene's busy life. Seeing her in Lagos, in brief meetings at the hotel, he had not realized that hers was a life that ran fully and would run fully even if he was not in it. It was strangely disturbing to think that he was not the only occupant of her world [...]. Her work came first; she was determined to make her father's factories grow, to do better than he had done. In the evenings, visitors—company people negotiating deals, government people negotiating bribes, factory people negotiating jobs—dropped by, parking their cars near the entrance to the orchard.²⁰

Master's mother represents the past, the tradition, the witchcraft which always has been woman's reign, of the mythical, once again, nurturer of the hearth, the inflexible, rightful, simple and essential archetypal mother. Anchored in her ancient ways, unwilling to accept that world moves on, and maybe forward, Master's mother perceives present states as threatening and abnormal.

“I hear you did not suck your mother's breasts,” Master's mother said.

Olanna stopped. “What?”

¹⁸ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 35.

¹⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 46.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 62.

“They say you did not suck your mother's breasts.” Master's mother turned to look at Olanna.

“Please go back and tell those who sent you that you did not find my son. Tell your fellow witches that you did not see him.”

Olanna stared at her. Master's mother's voice rose, as if Olanna's continued silence had driven her to shouting. “Did you hear me? Tell them that nobody's medicine will work on my son. He will not marry an abnormal woman, unless you kill me first. Only over my dead body!”²¹

Not a typical African ancient mother, because she is a bearer of the godly wisdom; she is a witch, she is a healer, she possesses the power of plants and prayers, of rituals and masks. She is the symbol of the lost Africa. Her utmost fear is that her son would marry with a witch who “is controlling” him, and the fact that he is still unmarried, while “his mates are counting how many children they have”²² is a proof of a witchcraft as powerful as hers. But Olanna's greatest flaw seems to be her education. This liberated, cultivated, immorally beautiful woman is ruined. Because too much schooling ruins a woman; everyone knows that. It gives a woman a big head and she will start to insult her husband. What kind of wife will that be?²³ And it's only normal that, in fighting with her alien enemy, mother should appeal to the “*dibia* Nwafor Agbada,” because any strange appearance is an illness, and an illness must be treated with “the man's medicine [which] is famous in our parts.”²⁴ The struggle for self-assertion of the two women is theorized by their agent, the son/lover Odenigbo, albeit represented by Adichie as a useless radical philosopher, defines the very dilemma in which postcolonial Africa questions itself:

“*Nkem*, my mother's entire life is in Abba. Do you know what a small bush village that is? Of course she will feel threatened by an educated woman living with her son. Of course you have to be a witch. That is the only way she can understand it. The real tragedy of our postcolonial world is not that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to *negotiate* this new world.”²⁵

Americanha is a *Bildungsroman*. A traumatic, alert and deep series of falls and ascents between the worlds, the coalescence of puzzling fragments into personalities, each of them asserting the right to a voice, the right to a unique individuality. *Americanha* creates migrating women, the women of African Diaspora, challenging them with ancient patterns of their source world, and alien frames in which they must adjust. Adichie challenges us with her hybridization, her characters designed to transgress boundaries and to reshape social and political prejudices.

Balancing between Africa, United States and England, Adichie's women regain not a “*gra-gra*”²⁶ voice, as the intrepid African hustler from Lagos would have wished, but a language without accent, transparent and fluid, as open to its reshaping. The language *Americanah*'s women speak is a language without roots, because the Diaspora woman claims

²¹ *Idem*, p. 75.

²² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 76.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 79.

²⁶ Nigerian slang, meaning hustling, violent, aggressive.

the liberty to migrate between her worlds, as the Nigerian intrepid travels from Dubai “to buy gold, to China to buy women’s clothing.”²⁷

In *Americanah*, Adichie returns to an image meant to haunt most of the African modern writings: rape. But the raped of *Americanah*’s buys condoms, because she is sure she would be raped wherever she will serve. This act is symptomatic for the colonially-mediated abused woman. A strange lack of understanding is contorting her face when her repeated sacrifice is refused. Rape altered into a normality, suggests Adichie, is a consequence of the patriarchal philosophy, and women exhibit all the symptoms of a Stockholm syndrome, not very dissimilar with what Kambili, in *Purple Hibiscus*, feels for her abusive father, and with what Joseph M. Carver termed “the mystery of loving an abuser.”²⁸

The religious woman, enthralled in her exclusivist relation with God, asserts her individuality as a conjuncture in these unending negotiations: “She bartered with Him, offering starvation in exchange for prosperity, for a job promotion, for good health. She fasted herself bone-thin: dry fasts on weekends, and on weekdays, only water until evening. [...] Everyone tiptoed around her mother, who had become a stranger, thin and knuckly and severe.”²⁹

This image is Adichie’s critique to the trauma impelled by the colonial period upon the traditional mystical approach of the African world, but also defines one “speck” of the spectrum of the African womanhood self-assertion, in which the powerful religious woman, sister Ibinado (*Americanah*) claims her development. Sister Ibinado refuses to negotiate with God, and her pastor, because she occupies a position of power in her social group.

She pretended to wear her power lightly. The pastor, it was said, did whatever she asked him. It was not clear why; some said she had started the church with him, others that she knew a terrible secret from his past, still others that she simply had more spiritual power than he did but could not be pastor because she was a woman. [...] She never laughed but often smiled the thin smile of the pious. [...] Sister Ibinabo, the savior of young females. [...] But Ifemelu had always sensed, in Sister Ibinabo, a deep-sown, simmering hostility to young girls. Sister Ibinabo did not like them, she merely watched them and warned them, as though offended by what in them was still fresh and in her was long dried up.³⁰

Bitter and hateful, sister Ibinado asserts herself only through the empowerment she imposes on her male master, revenging her exclusion from the higher ranks of the group in which she functions. Being refused the beauty and the sexual power of a woman, she tries to formulate a philosophy of life in which this “grey eminence” politics would give her identity substance.

Obinze’s mother “was a woman who kept to herself and asked no favors, who would not lie, who would not accept even a Christmas card from her students because it might compromise her.”³¹ And still, this determined, honest, bright African educated woman would cheat for her son, because “truth had indeed, in their circumstances, become a luxury,” and her son needed the six-month visa to the United Kingdom which had been repeatedly denied to him.

²⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013, p. 22.

²⁸ Joseph M. Carver, *Love and Stockholm Syndrome: The Mystery of Loving an Abuser*, <drjoecarver.makeswebsites.com/clients/49355>.

²⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 35.

³⁰ *Idem*, pp. 40-41.

³¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 172.

Aunty Uju represents the hybrid woman, more intelligent and sensible than her husband, and yet a voluntary subject to his agency. Ifemelu's reaction to Aunty Uju's dependency on The General, "slaving and shaving for him, always eager to fade his flaws,"³² is the urge to "shake her into a clear-eyed self,"³³ a self which would confer her existence more than the shadowy bi-dimensionality dutifully glimmering along The General's contours. The same lack of substance, as in an unfinished psychological profile, haunts Ifemelu's friend, Jane, whose only landmarks in the development of an identity are the husband, an unaccomplished Casanova, and her children. Jane inhabits an empty stage on which she is just a propel.

The same concept of assertive propel is embodied by the dependence of the Black womanhood on performing for a female public. Such a uniqueness can be achieved only through the elimination/abstraction of another Black woman. "She is one of those black people who want to be the only black person in the room, so any other black person is an immediate threat to her."³⁴

Piece by piece, Adichie re-constructs the puzzle of African womanhood, in her attempt to contradict Kristeva's assertion that "woman can never be defined," because her representation "goes beyond nomenclatures and ideologies."³⁵ Adichie adds: "But not beyond herself (A/N)."

Ifemelu rejects her being known by a man. His "complete assuredness" triggers her defeating. "How sordid it all was, hat she was here with a stranger who already knew she would stay. [...] She was already here, already tainted."³⁶ She hates that women "all laughed at the same things and said «Gross!» about the same things," because it's like their roles were being "well choreographed."³⁷ She hates being perceived like an "exotic species,"³⁸ a like the tongue-speaking, strangely colored specimen brought back home by an adventurer.

Ifemelu is in herself an assertion in development. A complex of identities, a puzzle of memories and assumptions, right or wrong, Adichie's female protagonist in *Americanah* collects, overtly or in disguise, the characteristics of all *Americanah*'s women. The process by which her self-assertion comes to fruition is alike some existential equation, hypotheses tested and rejected, paths challenged, honored or dishonored, and this process of evolving and devolving

"is fundamental to migration [to African Diaspora's identity, A/N] as it is fundamental to Black women's writing in cross-cultural contexts. It is the convergence of multiple places and cultures that re-negotiates the terms of Black women's experience that, in turn, negotiates and re-negotiates their identities."³⁹

Ojiugo, the free spirit of the postcolonial African woman, who "wore orange lipstick and ripped jeans, spoke bluntly, and smoked in public, provoking vicious gossip and dislike from other girls, not because she did these things but because she dared to without having lived abroad, or having a foreign parent, those qualities that would have made them forgive

³² *Idem*, p. 64.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 179.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Woman Can Never Be Defined*, in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminism*, New York: Schocken Books, 1981, p. 137, cited in Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity. Migrations of the Subject*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 52.

³⁶ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 116.

³⁷ *Idem*, p. 93.

³⁸ *Idem*, p. 145.

³⁹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women. Writing and Identity. Migrations of the Subject*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 2.

her lack of conformity. [...] They smoked and drank publicly together. They created glamorous myths.”⁴⁰ Has lost her identity in her husband’s. She became the subject whose referentiality resides in the approval of her husband.

“She would serve his food, a plate on a tray taken to him in his study or in front of the TV in the kitchen. Obinze sometimes wondered if she bowed while putting it down or whether the bowing was merely in her demeanor, in the slump of her shoulders and curve of her neck. Nicholas spoke to her in the same tone as he spoke to his children.”⁴¹ Her sometimes ironic demeanor “reminded Obinze of the gaudy theatrics of Nollywood films.”⁴²

Adichie’s intertextuality in *Americanah* migrates from mythical Africanism to American woman-ism, and in between Ifemelu assimilates, interiorizes, transfers and modifies patterns of thinking about her and her Otherness, functioning as a “figure of resistance to specific societal prescriptions and patriarchal assumptions about woman’s place.”⁴³ She could constitute a matrix for the expression of African feminism, but also a matrix for a comprehensive worldview, for a perception so translucent that every concept would be able to find its meaning in it.

In the final invitation of the novel, the African space encounters and gently invades the personal space of the African woman. Their coalescence signifies the reaching of a continuous identity, one which assimilates fragments of assertions, including male self-assertion, on the bases of their common Africanism. The postcolonial alienation is finally shared, and “the burden of memory”, in Wole Soyinka’s words, equals “the muse of forgiveness.” And by forgiveness Adichie understands not only the acceptance of Other’s self-assertion, but also the shared effort towards a common value system within which each expression of the Self must proceed and return to the expression of the Other.

Migration becomes, in Adichie’s acceptance, a trope for denying petrified social fixities, psychologically inert frames of mind, still views upon a world in a continuous absorption. We read not the denial of the roots, but the openness of the trope to “non-fixity, anti-essentialism and mobility as resistance”⁴⁴ to bondages of womahood’s slavery. The de-fragmentation of African woman’s potentiality calls for a re-construction under new laws, laws based on a multitude of self-assertions.

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⁴⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 174.

⁴¹ *Idem.*, p. 175.

⁴² *Ibidem.*

⁴³ Carole Boyce Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴⁴ David Atkinson, *Nomadic Strategies and Colonial Governance: Domination and Resistance in Cyrenaica, 1923-1932*, in Joanne P. Sharp, Paul Routledge, Chris Philo, Ronan Paddison, *Entanglements of Power. Geographies of domination/resistance*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 97.

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