

Ghettoization of 'Other': Tinkering Transculturalism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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Introduction

The need for harmonious inter-cultural relations among racial and ethnic groups across the globe has significantly extended the essential thrust of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. It is usually assumed that ethnic chauvinism brought multiculturalism into limelight, delineating ethnic identity into clearly identifiable compartments illustrated by the thematic of racialism. Cultural differences have often agitated the minds of scholars, pacifists and other peace-loving individuals over the years. Their opinion is premised on the expediency of cultural harmony and inevitability of peace in the world. Their concerns are fuelled by the persuasion that, for the world to witness peace, factors ranging from ingrained cultural intolerance, "persistent barriers of racism, fear, [and] ignorance" (Cuccioletta, 2002:1) of other people's cultures to stereotypes must end (Dobson, 1991:110).

Suffice to say that series of endemic reactions against multiculturalism that followed are discernible from America to the United Kingdom, even though their manifestations vary from country to country. These factors have left the world a fragmented global village, and highly polarized between the binary opposites of "us" and "them", white-black dichotomy, margin-centre and master-servant relations, though this is against the spirit of transculturalism which fosters in people the understanding of cultures across the globe. Similarly, ethnocentrism, tribalism, ethnicity and racism are still prevalent globally, while various catastrophic happenings in the world attest to this view. To

validate the foregoing, Huntington (1993: 22-49), in his seminal paper, "The Clash of Civilizations?", predicts a future clash and flowering of conflicts among global civilizations, including the Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African. This clash, according to him, will manifest along cultural lines, other than the traditional economic or political struggles among global civilizations. To him, civilization is "a cultural entity" (Huntington, 1993: 23) or "the broadest level of cultural identity" (Huntington, 1993: 24) which distinguishes humans through the instrumentalities of language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and that "the most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another" (Huntington, 1993: 25). It bears remarking that Huntington's hypothesis takes into consideration centuries-old differences among all the afore-mentioned civilizations, and it appears to validate the tense inter-cultural relations all over the world.

This paper, therefore, interrogates the dialectics of cultural conflicts among world's different civilizations and calls for a better world order structured by the 'meliorist' mindset. It does this by interrogating the ordering of social, class, gender and race issues in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*. The paper will further demonstrate how human constructs have impeded cultural encounters, nay harmonious human relations, in culturally polyvalent spaces of the world. Furthermore, it seeks to draw attention to the plight of immigrants, migrants, refugees and other people with 'nomadic' condition or consciousness in their host countries. In tandem with Adichie's pursuit of transculturalism in *Americanah*, the paper's major preoccupation lies in calling for the actual creation of Appiah's "oxymoron of global village" in countries of the world with irreversible multicultural status (Appiah 15).

Donald Cuccioletta (2002) avers that the present world order is in the throes of human conflict occasioned by "misrepresentations of cultures... hatred of different cultures, [and] an ignorance of cultures" among the people of the world (Cuccioletta 2). In the same vein, Robert Fraser singles out language as a cultural marker and an objective element which has become "the harbinger of violence" in race or ethnic relations, and that "...the confusion between labeling and describing, between objects and events, sometimes leads to genocide or war"(4). To situate cultural conflicts and their extreme manifestations within the context of Rwandan genocide, Hellen Tadjjo (2002) believes that mutual suspicion, tribalism, culture intolerance, ethnocentrism, stereotyping and scapegoating—the inaccurate generalization on which prejudice is based, and holding other people or a group of people responsible for want of success respectively—actually precipitated the Rwanda war. While recounting the lamentation of an anonymous victim of the genocide, she writes:

I am afraid when, in my country, I hear people talk of who belongs there and who doesn't. Creating division; creating foreigners. Inventing the idea of rejection. How is ethnic identity learned? Where does this fear of the other come from, bringing violence in its wake? (Lahey 15; Harriman 37)

Just like Rwanda, many countries of the world exemplify this insidious violence in their reluctance to manage tentative cultural conflicts. Worse still, the politics of division and exclusion among races or ethnic groups has further worsened race relations, as many ethnic chauvinists and racists have latched on this ideology to support their views. David Hume in Morton (2008), Immanuel Kant in Boxil (2008) and Botha in Fagbenle (2007), for instance, hinged the total exclusion of blacks and other races, other than Caucasians, on the perceived superiority of whites over other races, especially blacks, whom they described as a "symbol of poverty, mental inferiority, laziness and emotional incompetence". (Fagbenle 3)

Commenting on Immanuel Kant's Aryan racial supremacist claim in Boxil (2008), Emmanuel (2009) posits that Kant hierarchised the races of the world and attributed unfounded biological characteristics to them. This, according to him, aided the mutual race hate between white-Americans and African-Americans in the United States. The resultant effects of the foregoing racist perceptions on cultural studies and race relations are, nonetheless, human conflicts which manifest in form of race hate, violence and war. Obviously as witnessed in Adichie's *Americanah*, these perceptions and acrimonious race relations have always become "raw materials" for artistic (re)creation in literature. Many writers have ostensibly portrayed strained race relationship in their works with a view to sensitizing readers to cultural acrimony pervading the world, and calling for solutions to it. Some of these writers include: Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Tony Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, Gibson Kente, Alex La Guma, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and a host of other Euro-American, African-American, African and Asian writers who have explored the themes of inter-cultural relations and cultural conflict in their works.

Resolving Intercultural Conflict through Cultural Ideologies

In order to resolve human conflicts and engendered inter-racial, inter-cultural harmony, scholars have come up with various ideological postulations that can address, or better still, dislodge those human negative constructs. Practices which have served as barriers to cultural understanding or appreciation among the people of the world include ethnicity and tribalism. However, various cultural ideologies have, however, sprung up in the last few years to correct this anomaly. Some of the postulations include multiculturalism, cultural assimilation or cultural integration, pluriculturalism, biculturalism, transculturalism

or cosmopolitanism and interculturality. Prior to now, multiculturalism was seen as the solution to ethnic or racial tensions and cultural misunderstandings, but its drawbacks appear to have robbed it of its lofty ideals.

Being a governmental policy popularized in North America, multiculturalism was introduced by the then Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau in 1970 (Grosu 103). Its major aim is to accommodate all shades of cultural diversities in the country, while, at the same time, enable each of the cultures to maintain its unique identity. To Grosu, multiculturalism is "the management of cultural diversity of minority racial and ethnic groups...with a view to making the cultural groups maintain and foster their identity" (103). Hinnerova describes it as a "coexistence of a spectrum of various cultures within a group or a society..."(7). While the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLAI) also describes it as "the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative style"¹. Multiculturalism in essence, attempts to create a "salad bowl" of cultural traditions or a convergence of cultures for greater understanding within a state or unified society, but without cultural inclusion. It emphasized that each culture is to retain and maintain its cultural uniqueness or distinction. In a sense, it encourages cultural division—a major factor responsible for the polarization of global cultures and the enthronement of rivalry, hatred and the extreme cases of violence and conflict among cultures.

Some of the drawbacks of multiculturalism could be said to have mutated into transculturalism. Scholars nowadays prefer to use transculturalism in place of multiculturalism, because of the inherent positivism of the former. According to Hinnerova:

Where the policy of multiculturalism does not seem to be an ideal solution to the situation of mingling cultures, the concept of transculturalism is a better suited answer. As a matter of fact, the more precise terms of transculturalism or interculturalism are slowly replacing the concept of multiculturalism. (17)

One of the drawbacks of multiculturalism is that it encourages cultural division, stereotyping, feelings of estrangement and rivalry or competition among the "salad bowl" of cultures in a given multi-ethnic society. People in such a society relate with their distinct identities as well as their social, religious and cultural backgrounds, rather than see themselves as a product of a mainstream or national culture. Hinnerova has also observed that ideology, which is a socio-cultural manifestation of multi-ethnicity, is "harmful to multicultural ideal and produce a ghettoization of cultures instead of toler-

ance and interaction between them” (14). Unfortunately, various cultural ideologies identified above save transculturalism, do not seem to have any solutions to the drawbacks of multiculturalism. They could not map out sensible strategies to tackle widespread cultural conflicts around the globe. Each of them, for instance, comes up with their own unique postulations on how to acculturate other people by subsuming them under a hegemonic culture. This is noted in the *Frenchification* of Africans or cultural assimilation policy of France in its colonies during colonialism in Africa. The ideologies, rather than offer solutions, end up creating issues that leave behind a trail of cultural conflicts. With transculturalism, hope of robust global racial relations is rekindled. With it, world citizens emerge, ethnic affiliations minimize and people traverse the globe unhindered, as cultures, worldviews and belief systems conflate to evolve one indivisible cultural orientation through which individuals identify and describe themselves.

To localize this hypothesis in Nigerian cultural milieu, transculturalism tends to degrade cultural diversity conundrum in postcolonial Nigeria. Hence, rather than seeing themselves as Yoruba, Ibo or Hausa, Izon, Tiv, Igala, a conflated and monolithic *Wazobia* culture has been invented and used as a means of cultural identification among Nigerians. The same applies to Italian, English, German and Jewish separate identities which could fuse into one and produce a hybrid or hybrids of the identities, within which people of the nation-states could identify themselves. This hypothesis, therefore, engenders one culture amidst a confluence of cultures, and nothing more.

Transculturalism, Nomadic Sensibility and Ghettoization: An Exegesis of Terms

What is transculturalism? How can it be differentiated from multiculturalism and other socio-cultural ideological postulations? What is the preoccupation of transcultural literary works, and how can it be identified in texts? An attempt is made to answer these questions, so as to lay a background for the explication of issues raised in Adichie’s *Americanah* analyzed in this paper. Transculturalism, to start with, is a socio-cultural ideology that seeks the conflation of culture with a view to smoothening relations and engendering what Hinnerova refers to as “the process of dialogue” and creating a “cosmopolitan citizenship” (18). Explaining the meaning of cosmopolitan citizenship, Appiah (2005) notes that s/he is any one or a person who is better addressed as a cosmopolitan that often thinks that the world is a shared hometown, capable of creating the self-consciousness oxymoron of the global village. Cuccioletta similarly deconstructs the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship within the context of transculturalism. According to him, it is a:

process of recognizing oneself in the other...and the citizenship [is] independent of political structures and institutions, [it] develops each individual in the understanding that one’s culture is multiple, *metis* and that each human experience and existence is due to the contact with other, who in reality is like...oneself. (Cuccioletta 9)

In his view, the power of cultural ideology lies in its ability to situate culture in the right perspective as a unifying phenomenon, which also “places the concept of culture at the center of a redefinition of the nation-state or even the disappearance of the nation-state” (Cuccioletta 10). Lewis, similarly, states that the focus of the concept is to:

illuminate the various gradients of culture and the ways in which social groups ‘create’ and ‘distribute’ their meanings... seeks to illuminate the ways in which social groups interact and experience tension. It is interested in the destabilizing effects of non-meaning or meaning atrophy. It is interested in the disintegration of groups, cultures, and power...[it]emphasizes the transitory nature of culture as well as its power to transform (24).

The concept was coined by Fernando Ortiz (Dagnino 5) in 1940s as “a synthesis of two phases occurring simultaneously, one being a deculturation of the past with *metissage* with the present”.² He notes further that:

This reinventing of new common culture is therefore based on the meeting and the intermingling of the different peoples and cultures. In other words one’s identity is not strictly one dimensional [the self] but is now defined and more importantly recognized in rapport with the other. In other words one’s identity is not singular but multiple. (Ibid.)

Coleman in his 1994 interview with VenBegamurde—who is believed to have coined the term, “transculturalism” in Canada—notes that Begamurde enthuses that “transculturalism assumes that there is a process of change and of evolution which is necessary among...different cultures, and that eventually we stop being Indo-Canadian or Ukrainian-Canadian; we simply become human” (Coleman 36-37). Begamurde is more at home with the notion that rather than an individual getting attached to a specific culture, it is better to entrench humanity by all since multiculturalism can foster divisions among cultures.

Dagnino has described transcultural writers as “imaginative writers, who by choice or by life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, live transnational experiences in multiple cultures/geographies/territories, expose themselves to diversity and nurture plural, flexible identities”(1). To put it succinctly, transcultural writers, just like “mobile writers” (exile, expatriate, migrant writers), are transnational writers. Their writing is dialogic; it is better read as a dialogue beyond the borders of a nation-state and across cultures to engage them in communication process, so as to engender peace and harmony.

Furthering the avowed promotion of gains of transculturalism, Dagnino also sees transcultural works, nay writers, as works or writers who often record and express the *confluent* nature of cultures, where the traditional dichotomies – North and South, the West and the Rest, colonizer and colonized, dominator and dominated, native and migrant, national and ethnic—that have thus far characterized multicultural and postcolonial discourses are superseded.

However, the major difference between transcultural writers and writers of “literature of mobility” is that their works replicate the nuances of cultural transactions and transformations. Put differently, they are “mobile writers [who] distance themselves and go beyond the politically and culturally constructed categories of the ‘migrant writer’, ‘ethnic writer’, ‘multicultural writer’, ‘Commonwealth writer’, ‘Writer of New literatures in English’ or ‘francophone writer’...” (Dagnino 11).

Nomadic Sensibility

Nomadism is as old as the world itself. From time immemorial, individuals, tribes and people have always traversed different parts of the world, braving the elements, conquering nature, traversing borders in search of wealth, pleasure, and other essentials of life. Nomads often move from one place to another in search of pastures. Various historical texts, like the Scriptures, provide account of how historical personages wander from their places of birth to different countries in search of life’s essentials. While describing the lifestyle of nomads, Sailus writes that nomads are people and tribes who “do not consider themselves attached to a specific plot of land... Nomadic civilizations move from place to place and region to region depending on variables such as climate, season, availability of water, and the movement of animal herds” (Sailus: 2015).³ Nomadic people are defined by peregrination; they are people who live by travelling from place to place. Nomadism then means anything that involves moving around a lot. To further provide more thoughts on the defining features of nomadic lifestyle, *become nomad*, a website designed for would-be nomads, lists the following as the defining characteristics of nomads:

A nomad constantly changes location, switching from one place to another. Most nomads have some kind of place that they can call home, which is usually where family or childhood friends are located, but they wouldn’t spend more than a few months a year there. Nor would they settle down in a new home, they just keep on changing a place, never feeling really at home, change is home...

Being a nomad, you never really have a feeling of areal home – something you’ve been upgrading, decorating, and designing. It always belongs to someone else (i.e. a hostel, short rental, a friend’s place) and is always temporary.

...A nomad breaks away from her/his attachments before taking the journey, and stays away from attachments while realizing this unique lifestyle... They are exposed to many lifestyles, cultures and situations. This constant process of change is a great learning experience, and when you learn, you become smarter.⁴

Nomadic philosophy encompasses the (re)definition of one’s existence, peregrination, self-denial or sacrifice, abstention, reflective lifestyle, reconstruction of the notion of home (as constant change of location is “home” to nomads), self-independence and self-sufficiency. The concept of nomadism, as used in this paper, does not rely on the pedestrian definition of a people who own livestock and wander from one place to another with their animals in search of water and pasture. The concept is used as metaphor of journey or peregrination of people or individuals who possess powers to conquer geographical spaces and defy odds for the sake of cultural negotiation and rediscovery of selfhood. To them, life is expansive to be fully captured or negotiated within a culture, which is responsible for their shifting mentality. They believe that the expansiveness of life makes its definition and essence culturally polytheistic, hence the concept of “nomadic sensibility” referring to the need for self-discovery and/or (re)definition beyond or outside one’s culture(s). Transcultural writers often project this sensibility in their works to describe the discovery of life’s essence, not only within one’s indigenous culture, but beyond, so as to have a glimpse of other cultures and what they say about circumstantial details of living.

In reinforcing the potency of “nomadic sensibility”, there is an identification of parallel markers which run through cultures. These elements or markers are useful in self-definition that help in [re]shaping man’s understanding of life’s essence. Shutting oneself inside a cultural cocoon would definitely deprive one the invaluable insights that other cultures offer on life and existence. Invariably, this constitutes one of the major thrusts of transculturalism, as it basically seeks the annexation of cultures with a view to producing a monolithic and hybridized culture out of them.

Ghettoization of “Other”

An attempt is further made to deconstruct the term “ghetto” or “ghettoization” and extend its meaning beyond the semantics of communities or state of existence of the neglected, the poor, or the dregs in the society, and, to align it with the thrust of this paper—the culturally ostracized Other in the United States and England. Wacquant describes “ghetto” as a social-organizational device that “denotes a bounded urban ward, a web of group-specific institutions, and a cultural and cognitive constellation (values, mind-set,

or mentality) entailing the socio-moral isolation of a stigmatized category as well as the “systematic truncation of the life space and life chances of its members”. To him, stigma, constraint, spatial confinement, and institutional encasement are four elements that shape the destiny of a ghetto, noting that it is a Janus-faced term that justifies the “confine and control” authority of the dominant category, as well as the “integrative and protective device” of the dominated category. Most importantly, Wacquant contends that multicultural and transcultural functionality of ghetto is nuanced by its “potent collective identity machine” and a “cultural combustion engine”, because it “...sharpens the boundary between the outcast category and the surrounding population by deepening the socio-cultural chasm between them” – (multiculturalism), and because it “...melts divisions amongst the confined group and fuels its collective pride even as it entrenches the stigma that hovers over it... [in such a way that] spatial and institutional entrapment deflect class differences and corrode cultural distinctions within the relegated ethno-racial category,” – (transculturalism)”. Furthermore, Wacquant quoting Wirth (1928); Drake and Cayton posit that transcultural proof of ghettoization is reflected in the welding together of Christian and Sephardic Jews under:

an overarching Jewish identity such that they evolved a common ‘social type’ and ‘state of mind’ across the ghettos of Europe...and America’s dark ghetto...accelerated (by)the socio-symbolic amalgamation of mulattos and Negroes into a single ‘race’ and turned racial consciousness into a mass phenomenon fuelling community mobilization against caste exclusion. (Drake and Cayton 8)

Crane, in his description of ghetto in his study of the epidemic theory of ghettos, submits that “ghettos are neighbourhoods that have experienced epidemics of social problems”. Also, Whitehead situates ghettoization within racialised urban demography, and describes the term as referring “...not only urban areas wherein the majority of the residents are African Americans who are poor, in poverty, or in extreme poverty”. The residents of these inhabited enclosures are not only marginalized but are physically isolated and consigned to poor residential areas. Whitehead has also observed that such identifiable physical isolation is essentially characterized by the distancing of Racialized Urban Ghetto (RUG) residents. Residents are quarantined from the suburban locations where jobs are being created, and the racial isolation imposed by segregated housing patterns. He simplifies the complexity of ghetto nomenclature by highlighting its features to include: high rate of poverty, unemployment, educational mismatches, social disorganization and ecological deterioration, social and cultural isolation, among others. Accordingly, in ghetto enclaves: social exclusion and isolation impede racial interaction, in as much as

“contact or sustained interaction with ... individuals or institutions that represent mainstream society is hindered” (Whitehead 19).

Apprehending Failed Transculturalism in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah*

It will not be out of place to infer that *Americanahs*, a *magnum opus* of Adichie’s overall works, in the sense that the overarching racial issues raised in the plot of the novel is in conformity with its narrative dexterity which places it within the transcultural exegesis espoused by Dagnino (2012, 2013). Grounded in the thematic of the novel is transcultural concern that strikingly utilizes the appurtenances of transculturality for the interrogation of racism and ethnocentrism in America and England, a feat which succinctly stands the novel out among its peers.

Americanah is preoccupied with conflation or confluence of races, cultures and people with a view to welding them together, for the purpose of evolving a common identity without compromising their socio-cultural peculiarities. However, as good intentioned as Adichie’s attempt at initiating a cultural dialogue in America’s racialized society, its untrammelled practicability is up against a brick wall. Invariably, factors such as stereotyping, racism and racial stratification ingrained in American society continually prevent the realization of her transcultural objective in the novel. American racial dilemma is succinctly reflected in the words of Dominique D. Fisher “nationalisms, racisms, religious fanaticisms, and fascisms are newly revived on all sides. At the same time, the right to difference, far from recovering a differential conception of sociocultural phenomena, has been hijacked and now seems to provoke only suspicion...” (Fisher 91). Exploring transcultural tropes in the novel, Adichie, through one of her characters, Blaine, sums up the essence of the ideology. To Blaine, a political character, Barack Obama, who is contesting the presidential election in America, epitomizes the ideal of transculturalism in view of his ancestry and exposure to different cultures:

If Obama didn’t have a white mother and wasn’t raised by white grandparents and didn’t have Kenya and Indonesia and Hawaii and all of the stories that make him somehow a bit like everyone, if he was just a plain black guy from Georgia, it would be different. (*Americanah* 407).

The ideal of transculturalism finds expression in Obama being “a bit like everyone”, considering his physical and psychological accessibility to varied cultures and his willingness to imbibe certain gradients garnered from these cultures. By undergoing this transcultural gambit, he belongs to all cultures: Caucasian, African, African American and Asian. He defines himself by these cultures, successfully collates their nuances and subjects these nuances to re-

definition within African American cultural matrix. To Obama in the text, being a metisor a hybrid of cultures gives a fillip to the quest for an amalgam of cultures and the evolvement of a new cultural outlook that unites all. To further establish the transcultural import of the novel, Obama's acceptance speech after his eventual emergence as the winner of the presidential election in Americalias in the heart of transcultural consciousness:

Young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled, Americans have sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of red states and blue states. We have been and always will be the United States of America. (*Americanab* 412).

Considering Obama's speech, oneness, unity, love, togetherness and the spirit of communal consciousness ought to define inter-racial relationship in America as transculturalism seeks; however, many happenings in the novel indicate the contrary. Ifemelu, through her blog, similarly notes that the simplest solution to the problem of race in America is romantic love, "...but because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will not be solved" (*Americanab* 341). Introspectively, the blogging in Adichie's *Americanab* is ostensibly utilized for the shaping of public opinion. Invariably, critical racial opinion and issues are analyzed via internet by using a blog as a metanarrative device (Guarracino 3).

As a new immigrant/migrant in the States, Ifemelu expresses a stereotypical view about American men and their manner of eating in the public. The man from Ohio, who boards the same plane with Ifemelu, also says black children are rarely adopted in America, because "Nobody wants black babies in this country..." (*Americanab* 15). The same sentiment is expressed by Emenike when he and his English wife, Georgina, host their friends at their terraced home in Islington: "It seemed to me that in America blacks and whites work together, but don't play together and here blacks and whites play together but don't work together" (*Americanab* 316). Outside America, Ojiugo, Obinze's cousin's wife, comments on the snobbery and superciliousness of Britons who appear to hate racial contact: "English people will live next to you for years but they will never greet you. It is as if they have buttoned themselves up" (*Americanab* 274). Similarly, an anonymous American, possibly a white American, posts this comment on Ifemelu's blog prior to the election of Obama:

How can a monkey be president? Somebody do us a favour and put a bullet in this guy. Send him back to the African jungle. A black man will never be in the white house, dude, it's called the white house for a reason. (*Americanab* 404)

The fear of being dominated by immigrants in Britain forces English people

to talk about the influx of immigrants and migrants into Britain from countries created by it. Suffice to say that in the view of Anthony Clayton, the modernist racial prejudice currently witnessed in the United Kingdom derived from the British colonial pattern of stratification. A pattern that "prefers to see people in compartments". Asians were to be traders, Arabs junior officials and Africans, indigenous or mainland, were to be labourers" (Clayton 24). This Western-racial pattern without doubt, is a major factor that impugn the essence of transculturalism in *Americanab*:

The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain. (*Americanab* 299)

Boubacar, the sable-skinned Senegalese Yale professor, makes a comment that shows that he, too, resents Americans, their cuisine, just as Americans resent Africans and their culture. In a way, mutual resentment subsists between the two races or continents. According to him, "I came to America because I want to choose my own master... If I must have a master, then better America than France. But I will never eat a cookie or go to McDonald's. How barbaric!" (*Americanab* 388).

Aunty Uju also complains about the dose of racism meted out to her son, Dike, in his school by the school principal. He is accused of hacking into his school's computer network – an offence he never commits. Dike's response to the accusation underscores the depth of race hate and resentment borne against blacks in American schools: "You have to blame the black kid first" (*Americanab* 400). To further emphasize the tense race relations in America, Ifemelu writes in her blog, under the topic, "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: A Few Explanations of What Things Really Mean":

1...Racism is complex...Many abolitionists wanted to free the slaves but didn't want black people living nearby. Lots of folk today don't mind a black nanny or black limo driver. But they sure as hell mind a black boss. What is simplistic is saying "It's so complex."...

2. Diversity means different things to different folks. If a white person is saying a neighborhood is diverse, they mean nine percent black people. (The minutiae gets to ten percent black people, the white folks move out.) If a black person says diverse neighborhood, they are thinking forty percent black. (*Americanab* 402)

As stated earlier, in real life, stereotyping, race hate, ignorance of other

people's cultures and fear of domination work against the realization of transculturalism in America, hence the failure of transcultural ideals in the States. The portrayal of these evils in *Americanah* lends credence to its verisimilitude in the novel's spatial setting.

Nomadic Trajectory: Living in Snatches Outside Home

Many of the characters in *Americanah* display nomadic sensibility – they peregrinate from one place to another and from one job or mode of existence to another. They break away from attachments and switch lifestyles or locations at will in search of peace, fulfillment, greener pastures and happiness. Adichie expresses this sensibility in the novel through her authorial intrusion to capture the mood of Obinze who abandons his widow, professor-mother and his country to live a life of an immigrant ready to commit an illegality in order to secure a National Insurance number in England:

They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (*Americanah* 317-318)

Almost all of Obinze's friends, just like many other nationalities (the Senegalese hairdressers, the Ethiopian and Caribbean cab drivers in the States) in the novel, exude nomadism. Emenike moves to England from Nigeria and ends up marrying Georgina, a white attorney. KayodeDaSilva, Ginnika, Ifemelu and Auntie Uju move to US, Iloba to UK, and many other characters who swell the population of African, Hispanic, Asian immigrants in America and England. Though the movement of some of these characters from their original home countries to their host countries may be "permanent"; however, they still have spiritual or psychological attachment to their home countries. This is because their minds sometimes wander away from their host countries and become overwhelmed with the nostalgic memories of their places of birth. ToyinFalola calls this category of people "... transnationalists who talk about their ... homeland and their new adopted homeland. ... [and] carry multiple personalities of transnationalism in one body" (61). Quoting W.E. B. Du Bois, Falola notes that the people are individuals with, "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (61).

Many of these characters take time off to comment on social media about happenings at home. They monitor closely the social and political events back home, and always add their own voices to discourses on issues affecting their

countries, though not physically present or travel home physically. Even if they travel physically, it is for a short time. However, their minds always engage in psychological journeys and trips to the nooks and crannies of their home countries in search of solutions to the myriad of problems confronting these countries. To this category of immigrants, their nomadism is psychological or spiritual. Ifemelu's comment about Bartholomew as a representative of this category of people is instructive:

He had not been back to Nigeria in years and perhaps he needed the consolation of those online groups, where small observations flared and blazed into attacks, personal insults flung back and forth. Ifemelu imagined the writers, Nigerians in bleak houses in America, their lives deadened by work, nursing their careful savings throughout the year so that they could visit home in December for a week, when they would arrive bearing suitcases of shoes and clothes and cheap watches, and see, in the eyes of their relatives, brightly burnished images of themselves. Afterwards they would return to America to fight on the Internet over their mythologies of home, because home was now a blurred place between here and there, and at least online they could ignore the awareness of how inconsequential they had become. (*Americanah* 139)

Obinze's mother, too, expresses nomadic sensibility when she says that, "One day, I will look up and all the people I know will be dead or abroad" (*Americanah* 269). The power or fear of temporality that runs through her statement further underpins the nomadic lifestyle of some characters in *Americanah*. Her statement creates an impression that life is ephemeral, only death makes it definite. Besides, it journeys between the trajectories of temporality and eternity. It switches location, and is in constant search of purpose and meaning. Apart from their peregrination from Nigeria to the West, Auntie Uju, Ifemelu and other characters switch from one American or English city to another, as well as from one job to another in search of better living conditions. They similarly switch from one marital/love relationship to another. Ifemelu resigns from the American company where she works as a public relations officer to start a blog, and eventually returns to Nigeria to work as a magazine columnist. Her physical nomadism may have come to an end upon her relocation. However, her nomadic love relationship and switch of job do not terminate with her relocation from America to Nigeria, as she switches from one love relationship to another, just as she quits one job for another.

Ifemelu maintains a cyclic nomadic love relationship as reflected in the way she detaches herself from her first love, Obinze; dates a rich white man, Curt; cheats on Curt and flirts with another white American living in her hostel; has an almost-enduring relationship with Blaine; leaves him eventually and moves to Lagos, Nigeria. Only to meet Obinze again; sleeps with him, has a misun-

derstanding with him; meets another Nigerian-America returnee; till Obinze finally abandons his wife, possibly to live with her. Transculturalism can be said to have been enhanced through Ifemelu's legendary sexual nomadism as her relationship with them gives her an opportunity to "experiment" with love and sex with people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds. She possibly engages in sexual switch with a view to negotiating purpose of love and seeking originality in sex and love relationship, though this nomadic experience has its inherent dangers. At the commencement of her blog, which she tags, "Raceteenth or Curious observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America", Ifemelu uses the trope of sex and romantic love as a possible solution to race issue in America. She writes:

The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? Romantic love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved. And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved. (*Americanah* 341)

It is pertinent to note that Ifemelu posts this on her blog after severing relationship with Curt. She actually refers to him in the post as "The Hot White Ex". This suggests that her romantic escapade or "sexual experimentation" with Curt enables her to taste the beauty of other culture, albeit sexual, hence her recommendation of this nomadism as a panacea to racism in America. Auntie Uju's nomadic love relationship begins in Nigeria. She jilts her boyfriend, has an affair with an army general, the father of Dike, her son, marries Bartholomew, a Nigerian accountant in America, out of frustration. She leaves him, and eventually marries Kweku, a Ghanaian medical doctor. Curtis, Blaine and other characters have their own share of nomadic sensibility, too. Perhaps Blaine's younger sister, Shan, best sums up the trajectory of nomadic love relationship:

What doesn't Shan do? She used to work at a hedge fund. Then she left and travelled all over the world and did a bit of journalism. She met this Haitian guy and moved to Paris to live with him. Then he got sick and died. It happened very quickly. She stayed for a while, and even after she decided to move back to the States, she kept the flat in Paris. She's been with this new guy, Ovidio, for about a year now. He's the first real relationship she's had since Jerry died ... She's really a special person. (*Americanah* 362)

Nomads often seek new beginnings, they are an embodiment of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, happiness and sadness, peace and war. Their lives are a bunch of irony, they seek, yet they don't find. However, they are always on the

move, thinking and charting a new course for their lives. That is why Ifemelu is lost in thought about a new beginning elsewhere without her boyfriend, though she has just secured a new opportunity elsewhere. After she secures the University of Princeton research fellowship, and goes there alongside Blaine to inspect her new apartment, Adichie writes:

She felt admiration and disorientation. She liked her apartment, off Nassau Street; the bed-room window looked out to a grove of trees, and she walked the empty room thinking of a new beginning for herself, without Blaine, and yet unsure if this was truly the new beginning she wanted. (*Americanah* 406)

All these characters maintain a cycle of peregrination punctuated by switches in location, love relationship, job and lifestyle. The overarching effect of their peregrination is that it affords them the privilege of becoming better persons equipped with cultural knowledge and ability to appreciate the uniqueness of every culture to which they are exposed. If they are cocooned in their own culture without having access to other cultures, "culture ignorance" will subsist in them; this will equally hinder harmonious race relations, culture contacts or trans-cultural relations. In essence, the peregrination enables them to see and define themselves in the light of other cultures, rather than maintaining a monocultural identity.

Uncertainty, persecution, loss, discrimination are some of the problems faced by nomadic people while wandering about looking for pasture for their cattle. Similar problems shape Adichie's characters, as many of them have a running battle with racism, stereotyping, hate, oppression and deportation. Snippets of the racial upheaval experienced by these characters has significantly dramatizes "a disjuncture between the possibilities of global culture and the transnational fantasies and failures ..." (Wilson-Tagoe 98). Obinze is deported before his sham marriage with Cleotilde is conducted. At Heathrow Airport, he meets other Nigerians ready to be deported, while some still insist on returning to England. In her blog entitled, "Travelling While Black", Ifemelu writes that:

Let traveling black folk know what the deal is. It's not like anybody is going to shoot you but it's great to know where to expect that people will stare at you. In the German Black Forest, it's pretty hostile staring. In Tokyo and Istanbul, everyone was cool and indifferent. In Shanghai the staring was intense, in Delhi it was nasty. I thought, "hey, aren't we kind of in this together? ... And then another friend says, 'Native blacks are always treated worse than non-native blacks everywhere in the world...'" (*Americanah* 379-380)

Ifemelu's travelling tales present the upheavals that often greet migrants/immigrants, especially blacks due to the colour of their skin. Another issue

that faces Adichie's characters is immigration issue and their efforts to circumvent it. Immigration law, in Adichie's view, is a human construct which poses a great danger to transcultural ideal. Apart from preventing unhindered movement of persons, it also prevents or limits racial contact and possibly heightens ignorance of cultural practices of other people. Aisha, one of the Senegalese hairdressers, laments her inability to attend her father's funeral or see him before his death, because of her immigration papers: "Last year. My father died and I didn't go. Because of papers. But maybe, if Chijioke marry me, when my mother die, I can go. She is sick now. But I send her money" (*Americanah* 415). She has flirted with an African American so as to use him as a decoy to regularize her immigration papers, but it doesn't work out, hence her intense effort to marry Chijioke, an Igbo casual worker in America, who probably has a permanent resident status in the country. Many of the characters decide to compromise and sacrifice many things in order to remain in their adopted homes. Just like nomads, they endure the hardship that comes with nomadism, while those who cannot cope with the stifling situations return to their real homes – that in itself is a further proof of nomadic sensibility.

Towards the Ghettoization of "Other" in *Americanah*

The ghettoization of "Other" in *Americanah* is in two forms: the geographical ostracism of blacks or the poor from white Americans, and the resentment of Other by another Other. A funny scenario of Otherised Other is presented, indicating a victim victimizing another victim. Ghettoization is given a new semantics beyond the geographical separation and grouping of people together in a place. As used here, it also implies using utterances, taking actions that pigeonhole the deprived, the less privileged into a category rooted in helplessness. When stereotypical views or utterances are made about people, a ghettoization of such people has occurred, because the action may remind them of their vulnerability and place them psychologically within the walls of helplessness, hopelessness, poverty, crime, grime and social vices that shape their ghettoized existence.

In one of the posts on her blog, Ifemelu interrogates the American demography, as well as social cum geographical stratification that shapes life in the US. According to her, "Why Are the Darkest Drabbest Parts of American Cities Full of American Blacks?" (*Americanah* 358). The implication of this poser is that the vulnerable, mostly blacks, and a few Hispanics, are (deliberately?) ghettoized in America with a view to preventing racial contact, especially with white Americans. The location of Mariama African Hair Braiding is also indicative of deliberate ghettoization policy in the US. Adichie writes:

but it would look, she was sure, like all the other African hair braiding salons she had known: they were in the part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people, they displayed bright signboards with names like Aisha and Fatima African Hair Braiding, they had radiations that were too hot in the winter and air conditioners that did not cool in the summer, and they were full of Francophone West African braiders, one of whom would be the owner and speak the best English and answer the phone and be deferred by others. Often, there was a baby tied to someone's back with a piece of cloth. Or a toddler asleep on a wrapper spread over a battered sofa. Sometimes, older children stopped by. The conversations were loud and swift, in French or Wolof or Malinke... (*Americanah* 19-20)

Beyond geographical ghettoization of African-Americans (African immigrants or migrants in America, as different from African Americans), this sentiment is further heightened in Ifemelu's post, entitled, "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism". She believes that those categories of class, ideology, region and race subsist in America, and that each of the categories "ghettoizes" another:

In America, tribalism is alive and well. There are four kinds – class, ideology, region, and race. First, class. Pretty easy. Rich folk and poor folk. Second, ideology. Liberals and conservatives. They don't merely disagree on political issues, each side believes the other is evil. Inter-marriage is discouraged and on the rare occasion that it happens, is considered remarkable. Third, region. The North and the South. The two sides fought a civil war and tough stains from that war remain. The North looks down on the South while the South resents the North. Finally, race. There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvelous rhyme goes: if you're white, you're all right; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back)... (*Americanah* 218)

Ghettoization as a byproduct of migration has been carefully examined by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza "as for the factors and forces that perpetuate migration, emphasis is often placed on the role of social networks... The interplay between these factors obviously varies in specific contexts... International migration has come to be seen as an integral part of globalization... or "transnationalism" (Zeleza 12). Ghettoization is a major consequence of migration as it often triggers uneven development between countries and the "unequalizing inscriptions of class, race, gender, and nationality among the migrant themselves" (Zeleza 12). Ghettoization in America unobtrusively manifests itself when the white Americans/Britons give poor jobs to blacks/denying them access to good jobs. Though there are exceptions to this rule. Nevertheless ghettoization operates in different layers in *Americanah*, especially when

one considers cases of African Americans (Other) looking down on Africans (another Other) or “inter-Other hatred”, African immigrants or migrants making racist remarks about other Africans, “intra-Other rivalry”. The South African woman, who comes to Mariama’s salon to braid her hair, for instance, typifies intra-Other rivalry. Entrenched in her comments on Nigeria, its people and film indicate the inculcation of her deep-seated hatred for Nigeria. The pile of films she sees in the salon only serves as an outlet for the release of her vituperation and repressed anger against her or her country’s perceived enemies. The conversation between her and Mariama reveals this bottled-up hatred, which essentially constitutes a hindrance to the spirit of transculturalism:

You sell Nigerian films? she asked Mariama. “I used to but my supplier went out of business. You want to buy?” “No. You just seem to have a lot of them.” “I can’t watch that stuff. I guess I’m biased. In my country, South Africa, Nigerians are known for stealing credit cards and doing drugs and all kinds of crazy stuff. I guess the films are kind of that too.” ... “Yes, Nigeria very corrupt. Worst corrupt country in Africa. Me, I watch the film but no, I don’t go to Nigeria!” ... “I cannot marry a Nigerian and I won’t let anybody in my family marry a Nigerian, Mariama said, and darted Ifemelu an apologetic glance. “Not all but many of them do bad things. Even killing for money”. (*Americanah* 219)

The foregoing scenario is about African *Other* (the poor Senegalese braiders, the South African woman whose son is beaten in school because of his African accent) resenting fellow Africans and attributing negative stereotypes to them. This is also reminiscent of embedded attitude of African-Americans towards African immigrants. They unconsciously look down on Africans as Other, and not “Us”, despite their pitiable occupation of the lower rung of the American race ladder. Ifemelu’s African American room-mates often maltreat her. For instance, when Ifemelu complains about Elena’s dog eating up her slice of bacon, Elena, tells her: “You better not kill my dog with voodoo” (*Americanah* 179). Perhaps, to achieve transcultural ideal under the current situation, both African-Americans and American-Africans should have evolved a black identity capable of ending their misery, but this fails due to persistent inter and intra-Other hatred or rivalry. Essentially, to create an awareness of transculturalism among African, Caribbean, Indian or Pacific blacks, Ifemelu sounds a note of warning to non-American blacks in her post, entitled, “To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby”. “Dear non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care” (*Americanah* 255). Most poor or odd jobs in both America and England are reserved for the vulnerable African-American, Africans or non-American black population. This, in a way, shows the ghettoization of this

category of people towards picking up poor jobs, irrespective of their educational qualifications. They are at the same time denied opportunity of getting good jobs. Obinze, for instance, has a stint with a company in England where he is:

covered in white chemical dust. Gritty things lodged in his ears. He tried not to breathe too deeply as he cleaned, wary of dangers floating in the air, until his manager told him he was being fired because of a down sizing. The next job was a temporary replacement with a company that delivered kitchens, week after week of sitting beside white drivers who called him “labourer”. (*Americanah* 290)

Ifemelu, too, has an encounter with a white coach, who wants her employed as a hireling for an odd job of, “keep[ing] [him] warm”, because he needs “some human contact to relax” (*Americanah* 181). White Americans, who are mostly responsible for the ghettoization of other races, demonstrate the denigration of African-Americans and Africans sufficiently in the novel. White American’s reluctance to embrace mutual relationship towards non-white people of other races sufficiently recalls Arjun Apparadurai’s mockery of global culture as fluid and unfortunately compromised by “the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different actors: nation states, multinationals and diasporic communities” (Apparadurai 295-310). The whites make stereotype racist remarks, segregate and discriminate against people of other races in the novel. However, it will not be reasonable to heap the entire failure of transculturalism on whites alone, since the blacks (African-Americans, Africans), Hispanics, Asians, as well as other races in the text exhibit different levels of racial stereotyping. For example, white Americans look surprised each time they see Ifemelu and Curtis holding each other wondering why the rich white American should descend so low going out with a black woman. Curtis’ mother seems not to like the relationship between her son and the African woman, but has no choice because she has been mounting pressure on her son to get married. Laura’s racist remarks about Ifemelu, her country and Africa, and odd jobs given to Africans, like the one given to a beautiful Ghanaian woman “...with the shiniest dark skin,” “...who cleaned the ladies’ toilet...” justify racial practices in the novel (*Americanah* 273). Nevertheless, examples of racial stereotyping in the unconscious of white Americans about Africans abound in the novel. For instance, the comments credited to the Senegalese Yale-professor, or Ifemelu, or the Senegalese hair braiders, and many other non-white Americans and non-African American characters in the novel showcase mutual hatred that shapes cultural relations in America.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that transculturalism could be achieved if all the factors hindering its realization are addressed. Transculturalism is, by nature, only one option among alternatives that include pluriculturalism, biculturalism and multiculturalism. But of the lot mentioned transculturalism stands out exceptionally, especially in its advocacy of cross cultural relations and the fostering of harmonious relationship among cultures in a polyvalent society. The paper has further illustrated Adichie's attempt at creating a mesh of cultures exemplified in her adoption of a broad based characterization across spectra of cultures involving nationalities of differing countries of the world. Interestingly, her characters come from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the rest of the world, and they partake of cultural negotiations and contacts. But failure of these cultural trade-offs is a corollary of Huntington's (1993) prediction premised on cultural conflicts. Cultures do clash, and the end results are what pervade the entire gamut of Adichie's *Americanah*. Arguably, Adichie has significantly idealized transculturalism as the ne plus ultra of human wisdom and solution to cultural conflicts. Even though transculturalism in *Americanah* offers absolute respite from tensions created by cultural conflicts, if one considers its lofty objectives which unquestionably dwell on idealism, most of the ideals entrenched in its locus may be difficult to achieve in most human societies. Much as *Americanah* calls for cultural contacts and inclusion among nationalities and nations of the world, its acceptability and operations could drag for years. Nevertheless, Adichie undauntedly preaches meliorism and seeks an end to racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism and ethnicity in the novel. The paper concludes that if doggedly pursued, *Americanah*'s thematic of global cultural trade-off via transculturalism may be the model for the turbulent contemporary world crowded with cultural conflicts, rather than the prevailing cultural seclusion or ostracism that clearly negates the intent and spirit of transculturalism.

Notes

¹ www.ifla.org/publications/defining-multiculturalism

² <http://culturemaking.typepad.com/main/2007/03/transculturalism.html>

³ <http://study.com/academy/lesson/nomadic-lifestyle-definition-lesson-quiz.html>

⁴ www.becomenomad.com/tips-on-how-not-to-lose-your-sanity-on-the-move

1. Ghetto: This term literally means a slum or settlement occupied by the poor in any society or a minority ethnic group with terrible living conditions. Members of such a ghettoized ethnic or social group, like African Americans in the US, black majority during the inglorious Apartheid regime in South Africa, suffer unimagineable

level of economic deprivation and social restrictions. The meaning of the term is further extended in this paper to accommodate the condition of the poor, the deprived and immigrants/migrants in a foreign land who are daily subjected to inferiorisation, stigmatization, racism and untold hardship that limits their potentials and actualization of their dreams.

2. Transculturalism: While multiculturalism favours cultural pluralism, though each culture is expected to maintain its distinct identity and uniqueness, transculturalism advocates a fusion or conflation of cultures to produce a common cultural outlook with which individuals in a culturally polyvalent society can define themselves. The term is credited to VenBegamudre, an Indian-Canadian, who coined the term to describe Canada of his dream populated by people of different racial and cultural backgrounds, who, rather than define themselves as Indo-Canadian or African-Canadian, see and define themselves as simply Canadians having synthesized all cultures in the country to produce a more encompassing national culture than a narrowed cultural perspective. Cosmopolitanism is nearly similar to the idea of transculturalism because it emphasizes the coming together of different cultures, opinions and ideas to produce a synthesized one. The aim of transculturalism is to produce cosmopolitan citizens – persons who are civilized enough not to define and impose their cultural beliefs on other people or mistreat other people for not being members of their cultural or social group. Pluriculturalism, biculturalism and interculturalism are other cultural ideologies advanced by scholars to solve cultural conflicts, though none of them can match the ideals of transculturalism. While pluriculturalism takes into consideration the complexities of a plural society, it essentially engenders identification or definition of self from the multiplicity of cultures that shape the society. Biculturalism is another cultural ideology with a hypothesis of two differing cultures coexisting side-by-side. Interculturalism, too, emphasizes culture contacts. It is a condition that underlies all cultural ideologies; however, it tilts towards multiculturalism in its conception.

3. Nomadism: Nomadic concept underlies peregrination and shifting practices commonly noticeable among pastoralists. It is given extended metaphor in the paper to imply persons (cosmopolitans) who defy all odds to negotiate cultural contacts as a way of discovering the true meaning of life and selfhood.

4. Other: A postcolonial term referring to the stereotyped, stigmatized persons or groups of people or individuals occupying the fringe, the margin of the society, and who are not regarded as part of the dominant group.

5. Meliorism: This is a concept held by some people that the world can actually become a better place for all through human efforts. Transculturalism is related to this concept in view of its advocacy towards negotiating peace and understanding among cultures all over the world.

6. Cultural Assimilation and Cultural Integration: Cultural assimilation describes the state of migrants/emigrants in their host nations as they are morphed with the culture of the host country. This further underscores the ideals of transculturalism. Another term for this concept is Cultural Integration.

7. Mobile Literature: This refers to the literature that narrates the conditions of

diasporic or exilic groups, or persons, as well as nomadic experiences of travelers, experiences of migrants/emigrants in their host nations, and many other tropes bordering on “mobile persons” or groups.

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