The Singular Instability: Action, the Ear, and the Eternal Return In Americanah and Wax Bandana

Puckett, William

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN SPLIT

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF STUDENTS OF ENGLISH, CROATIAN AND ITALIAN STUDIES

University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Split, 2019.

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF STUDENTS OF ENGLISH, CROATIAN AND ITALIAN STUDIES

Print
Redak d. o. o.

Edition
100 copies

Editor address
Poljička cesta 35, Split
itheom.split@gmail.com

ISBN 978-953-352-037-7

UDK 82.09(062)

CIP record for printed edition is available in computer catalog of National and University Library in Zagreb under number 171005027.

Journal is published by University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split.

CONTENTS

William Puckett
University of Edinburgh
will@williampuckett.com

Research article

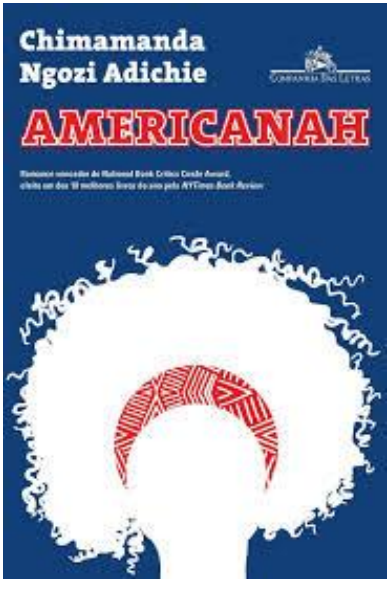
The Singular Instability: Action, the Ear, and the Eternal Return In Americanah *and* Wax Bandana

The purpose for this paper is to re-evaluate migratory, transnational and transcultural experience(s) through comparative analysis, literary and visual, between Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's 'Americanah' and Romuald Hazoumé's 'Wax Bandana', from Nigeria and Benin respectively. The problems associated with such an examination relate to the polemic debate regarding action v. agency, or the individual v. discourse. The text or work, much like the postcolonial subject is caught between worlds as exemplary in both Adichie and Hazoumé's work and their character's transnational, transcultural experience(s). Using an interdisciplinary methodology that combines both literary and visual arts discourses, this paper argues against any notion of a "fixed" or hybrid identity, arguing in its stead for the Derridean notion of the "singular instabililty" that oscillates between spheres of influence, whereby the transnational, transcultural, postcolonial subjectivity of the character(s) present in the respective work will become identified as such.

Key words: Transnationality, "singular instability", cultural overlap, eccentricity, Adichie, Hazoumé

INTRODUCTION

The question of what is "transnational identity", and more specifically, how is it prescribed, diagnosed, and presented in non-Western literature and the visual arts is drawn to the foreground throughout this essay enabling an engagement with the question, or rather, the problematic of transnational representation in literature and the visual arts - arguing against any notion of a "fixed" position, or hybridization of identity – presenting in its stead a space of "eccentricity" and "cultural overlap". This essay presents a specific case study of transnational identity in two works: *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie of Nigeria, and *Wax Bandana* (2009) by Romuald Hazoumé of Benin; literature and sculpture respectively.



Americanah
Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie
2013

Wax Bandana
Romuald Hazoumé
2009

Americanah, on the surface is a love story between Ifemelu (the primary protagonist) and Obinze that crosses continents, years of separation, and the inevitable reunion of lovers. However, beneath the love story is a tale of migration, transformation, transnationality, and transcultural experience. *Wax Bandana* in a similar fashion though perhaps more discretely, too challenges the viewer to consider the transcultural

experience through two very simple yet powerful objects – the jerry-can, and the wax print cloth bandana – each with multiple references and origins. However, prior to that engagement, a critical framework will be established in order to engage with and examine specific presentations of transnational and transcultural experience, and the affect of westernization and the debris of colonization in *Americanah* and *Wax Bandana* – illuminating the conceptual construct, and how it is manifest in the respective works[46].

However, the first question that must be asked is – what is transnationality, or rather what is the transnational experience? Simply enough transnationality is a space of overlap, and a crossing of borders and cultures extending beyond national borders. That being said, both author and artists' work has been received and celebrated in recent years outside of their home countries and cultures and as a result are inevitably a part of a larger world art and literature, and as such can no longer be reduced to a purely "African" literature and art: their characters speak to the world and their relationship within it, rather than the more historically common mode of engagement that would delimit African art and literatures relationship to the rest (or West) of the world, as something exterior to it. Consequently, the purposes of this essay will re-evaluate migratory, transnational, and transcultural identity and experience(s), through the character portraits in Adichie and Hazoumé's respective works, and how the problems associated with such an exploration relate to the polemic debate regarding questions as to the primacy of action versus agency, or rather the individual voice vversus the discourse(s) that might try and define it. However, the larger question behind the question that remains is with regard to transnational identity and how Western audiences can relate to a text or work of art that originates from a different geo-socio-cultural locale, and how can the experience of transnationality be understood and engaged with by such a reader?

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND CRITICAL FRAMEWORK: THE "SINGULAR INSTABILITY"

As a preface to the critical framework that will drive this essay, it must first be understood that contemporary African literature and visual culture is tied directly to Modernism, national independence, and a wantfor

[46] It should be noted that this essay focuses more on the case study than the original presentation so as to try and make more visible, the conceptual constructs being presented.

new modes of self-representation[47]. Consequently, according to Salah M. Hassan, the arts have very much been a part of national identity and decolonisation in non-Western countries – having created opportunities for new movements and the construction of "new tropes of self-representation" that were "internationalist in its orientation" emphasizing "that the African modernist experience is by definition transnational and a product of global experience" (2010 p 460. As such, the rise of "national consciousness" and the "refashioning of the self in modern terms" has prioritized both autobiography and self-representation which have been critical toward the promotion of non-Western identities, and have consequently taken root within institutionalized Post-Colonial studies, whereby, according to Stephen Slemon, there has been a "wholesale refashioning of the Western project of the traditional humanities(…)as an institution for social critique and as an apparatus for producing cultural knowledge" (1994 p 15).

Consequently, as asserted in the preface of David Huddart*'s Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*, the autobiographical space maintains a "continued relevance as a central explanatory category in understanding post-colonial theory and its relation to subjectivity" (2008). Such a prioritization is founded on the want for new perspectives that move beyond a centre-peripheral binary that has continued to plague non-Western identities and their representations of self to a relationship with a European standard under the guise of universal subjectivity. Though Post-colonial studies privilege the autobiographical voice, it is the situated knowledge of the authorial and artistic voices of this case study that will be built upon in order to focus the discussion on their respective character portraits as transnational identity(s) and examples of the transnational experience.

Within Postcolonial studies, and with regard to the autobiographical voice and situated knowledge of the individual, according to Slemon, there has emerged a dialectical debate concerning agency and authorial voice. On the one hand is an identity-based formation that argues for individuality – that it is the individual native voice that is privileged in speaking on the situation of post-colonial experience; and on the other-hand is the proposition that it is discourse that determines the speaking position, that the individual is only permitted to speak in a way that is delimited by their (de)colonized reality (1994). What this means is, humanist anti-colonialists – who put the individual first – criticize any

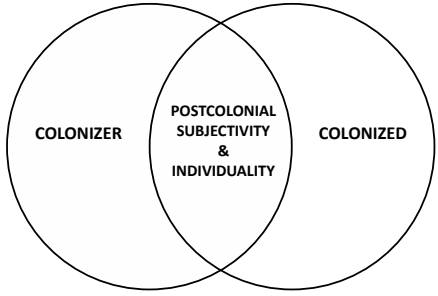
[47] For more on this see: Okwi Enwezor, Chika Okeke-Agulu, and Salah M. Hassan.

discourse arguing that the individual can only speak through positions permitted by the colonizing power; that such a discourse perpetuates a neo-colonialist power dichotomy of the ruling and the ruled, or the centre-peripheral binary; while the anti-humanist anti-colonialist's conversely argue against such an articulation, offering that the conceptual frame-work of the individual reifies the colonial notion of "other", subjecting the so-called "other" through their "other-ness". However, as this essay argues, such a debate can be reconciled through Jacques Derrida's notion of the "singular instability" that accommodates both the autobiographical voice or individual and the *external limiting structure(s)* of the postcolonial subject – that the individual has both a unique voice, and that that voice is affected by multiple spheres of influence.

Consequently, the polemic regarding the autobiographical space, or rather the individual is re-evaluated in Jane Hiddleston's "Derrida, Autobiography and Postcoloniality" (2005), whereby the Derridean concept of the "singular instability" is brought to light with regard to subjectivity, offering post-colonial existence as "an experience of eccentricity" (2005 p 293).[48] Hiddleston's interpretation and re-imagining of Derrida's work on the "singular instability" moves away from a fixed position between two worlds, away from the hyphenated individual; the Nigerian-American, British-Nigerian, or any other combination of more than one cultural background and sphere of influence – toward a space of overlap that exists in a state of "flux", allowing for an "anxiety" and "changeability" of identity. The "singular instability" or "[p]ostcoloniality is a movement away from location, not the claiming of a new, specific location" it is "an experience of eccentricity in relation to any gesture of categorization or imposition" (2005 p 293). No longer is the non-Western individual defined by its unique difference to the (European) universal subject – hyphenated as somehow exterior to, or different from. Their identity is not one of difference but rather, an identity affected by more than one influence, culture, or nationality; nor is this individual delimited by a discourse permitted by the colonizing power – that the individual is not defined by their non-Western geo-socio-cultural location but rather, that the individual both has a unique voice, and that this voice is also affected by Western and non-Western spheres of influence – no longer

[48] Hiddleston is drawing on five texts by Derrida: *On Gramatology* (1971), *Glas* (1974), *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1980), *The Other Cap* (1992), and *Monolinguism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1996).

"other", different, or exterior to. The "singular instability" and "eccentricity" oscillates in this space of overlap.
Much like the Venn diagram and transnationality, the "singular instability" is a crossing of boundaries bringing into the territory of crossing something of itself, while also absorbing a portion of the breached territory as well.



Within this new space the postcolonial, transnational, transcultural individual exists– no longer one or the other, nor a fixed position between the two. Within this space, the individual, the character, the author or other, in contrast to the polemic debate brought to light by Slemon, exists an entity in motion – no longer a point of discursive conflict with regard to their situation toward a European centre – the individual cannot be fixed into a position of a universal subject and a discourse of other-ness, but becomes the "eccentricity" Hiddleston prescribes via Derrida.

AMERICANAH AND *WAX BANDANA*: BEYOND "NATIONAL" IDENTITY(S) – TOWARD "ECCENTRICITY"

Though Hiddleston's text on Derrida and the "singular instability" was published in 2005, and Derrida's work prior to that – Western critics and curators, along with their respective audiences have continued to strive for and attempt to identify an engagement with African authors and artists that offer something singularly "African" in their respective work. Much as with the work by the independence era artists of West Africa, many readings and presentations of Postcolonial art has been and continues to be appropriated toward building new national identity(s), and identity politics, as is seen in the 2012 exhibition *We Face Forward: Art From West Africa Today*, which Hazoumé was a part of. Though curator Maria Balshaw is keen to offer that *We Face*

Forward is "not an exhibition of work that is 'separate' from the global art scene, or defined through ethnographic or geographic containment" (2012), the title alone restricts, or rather, frames the context inevitably through geographic specification. Similarly, in *Americanah*, while Ifemelu is at an African hair-braiding salon in Trenton, NJ, USA, a white customer, Kelsey, talks of her upcoming travels to Africa and her preparations whereby she says:

> "I've been reading books to get ready. Everybody recommended *Things Fall Apart*[49], which I read in high school. It's very good but sort of quaint, right? I mean like it didn't help me understand modern Africa. I've just read this great book, *A Bend in the River*[50]. It made me truly understand how modern Africa works'" (2013 p 189).

Though the Manchester City Galleries and the Whitworth Gallery, along with Kelsey, are well intent on learning about new and unknown place(s) and the people who live and work there, such a geographically fixed identity, and presumed knowledge about a place based on a work of art or piece of literature is at best, wrought with good intentions, but at worst, subsidizes individual experience once again toward a universalizing presentation of individuality in relation to a Western center, as being somehow indicative of Nigeria, Benin, or the greater Africa – as though there were just one identity for Nigerian, Beninese, or African individuation.

However, if it can be understood that the author/artist is acting within, and engaging with regard to Postcolonial and transnational experience(s), and if it can be accepted that according to Derrida, the Postcolonial experience is an experience affected by (at least) two poles (i.e., colonizer and colonized, West and non-West); and that such a position cannot be reduced to a fixed position, hybridized into a new entity, but that such an individual resides within a borderland as an eccentricity – in a constant state of flux – then neither can a reading of such a text fix the position of an entire national group and their respective diaspora into a single narrative. Just as Huddart offers, the advent and institutionalization of Post-structural and Postcolonial Studies, that has called into question and operates as a form of social critique and production of cultural knowledge, helps to (re)prioritize traditionally marginalized voices and subjectivities via a renewed import on lived experience and geo-socio-cultural location – so too does

[49] *Things Fall Apart* is written by Chinua Achebe (1959).

[50] *A Bend in the River* is written by V.S. Naipaul (1979).

Hiddleston, via Derrida reconcile the problematics presented by Slemon with regard to the dialectic debate on subjectivity and discourse within institutionalized post-colonial studies.

ADICHIE AND *AMERICANAH*

How then is transnationality and migration illustrative of the "singular instability" and "eccentricity" evinced in *Americanah*? On the surface, *Americanah* appears to be a love story, spanning three continents, and years of separation, before the lover's reunion. Closer reading however, provides a powerful gaze into the harsh realities of migration, transnationality, and new identity(s). *Americanah* begins in the presumed present, or rather the now of the narrative, in Princeton, NJ, with Ifemelu briefly reflecting on the smells of different cities, her blog, and other Nigerians in America while on a train to the African hair braiding salon in Trenton, NJ. Once in the salon, Ifemelu is recognized as being African:

> "'You from Nigeria?' Mariama asked (…) 'me and my sister Halima are from Mali. Aisha is from Senegal,'…Aisha did not look up, but Halima smiled at Ifemelu, a smile that, in its warm knowingness, said welcome to a fellow African; she would not smile at an American in the same way" (2013 p 10).

Immediately, though subtle, an engagement with and toward the transnational African diaspora, specifically with regard to a West African presence in America is established; an engagement that is later echoed in the first flirtatious encounter between Ifemelu and Blaine (whom would become one of Ifemelu's lovers later on in the novel) on a train to Massachusetts, whereby Blaine asks, "'[w]hat is it, one in every five Africans is Nigerian?'", with Ifemelu responding, "'[y]es, we Nigerians get around. We have to. There are too many of us and not enough space'"[51] (2013 p 177). Aside from the casual banter between shop owner and customer, and a flirtatious encounter on a train, there is

[51] *The Economist* magazine, in collaboration with United Nations population survey, forecast that Nigeria will grow from nearly200 million in 2015 to over 400 million in 2050, over-taking America as the third most populous nation in the world (*The Economist*, 2015), which is especially indicative of the prevalence of migration when considering that America has a land area in sq. km. that is over 100 times larger than Nigeria (data.worldbank.org).

a harsh underpinning of the transnational migratory reality(s) of life for the contemporary Nigerian abroad.

The topic, not of sisterhood, as seemed to be implied in the salon, or a transatlantic understanding between African-Americans and non-American Africans[52], but of difference and of changing identity(s) quickly comes to light. Elena Rodríguez Murphy offers that "for Adichie, there is no single story about what being African is", that the characters, "transatlantic journeys imply a constant movement between linguistic and cultural backgrounds" (2017 p 98). Ifemelu struggles with her transnational experiences not readily accepting the new identity placed upon her as a transnational migrant from Africa as being "black" in America, exemplified in the blog title: "To My Fellow non-American Blacks: in America You Are Black, Baby" whereby she proclaims "[D]ear non-American black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black (…) so what if you weren't black in your country? You're in America now" (2013 p 220).

Ifemelu is in a state of flux, what she thought of herself prior to traveling to America, she is no more; and what she is re-identified as, upon her return to Nigeria, following her experiences in America is no longer the same as what she was prior to going to America. Ifemelu goes from being just a young woman in Nigeria, to being a "black" woman in America, to being an "Americanah" upon her return to Nigeria. Ifemelu, in her transatlantic transformation from "Nigerian", to "black", to "Americanah" falls into such an anxiety, where she no longer feels truly at home in either world, but exists in a space of overlap between worlds, not as a fixed hybridization but as an individual in constant change, in a state of "becoming".[53] Ifemelu, neither fixes herself to her new world in America, nor does she return to her old self upon her return to Nigeria, whereby "she struggled to grasp the unspoken…it was nostalgic and melancholy, a beautiful sadness for things she had missed and the things she would never know" (2013 pp 385, 388). She is affected by transnational, transcultural experience, existing in a state of "flux", between her Nigerian identity, her American identity, and her (post)American-Nigerian identity upon returning home. As Ifemelu's

[52] Adichie uses this differentiation between (non-white) people of African descent born and raised in America, v. migratory (non-white) Africans in America.

[53] I am here referencing Deleuze and Guatarri's "becoming-other" from *A Thousand Plateau's.* I am not using it in the strictest interpretation, but rather as indicative of an existence being under constant change.

friend Ginikia[54] puts it "you're not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!" (2013 p 385). Ifemelu is the *singular instability* operating within a space between, existing in a state of "flux" within a space, or border-land that exists between two poles – as a disruption to the "fixed" position – a search for a new space that challenging a universalizing point between African (Nigeria, Benin, etc..) and European/American identity. Though appropriated as new labels or identity(s), none of them are fixed, they are constantly being challenged by Ifemelu, by her own self-conscious awareness and the problematics of such a "fixed" identity.

HAZOUMÉ AND *WAX BANDANA*

Hazoumé's exhibition *Made in Porto-Novo,* begins within the exhibition catalogue, and as prescribed on the walls of the exhibition itself, deals with the realities and histories of slavery, cheap labor, colonialism, and exploitation. Such topics, though exhibited within the space of contemporary Beninese experience, inevitably cross international borders whereby the reality(s) of transnational and transcultural West African experience engages with the effects of Western consumerism and the debris of colonial subjugation still present in the postcolonial era that followed national independence.
The form itself of *Wax Bandana* harkens to traditional African masks as "magical power objects" which "were amongst the earliest items of value exchanged between Africa and the Western world" and have been argued as having played "a critical catalyst in transforming Western ways of seeing, thus helping to precipitate the birth of modernism" (Houghton, 2009 p 3). In 1984, the MoMA's, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern,* attempted to illustrate the relationship, between the modern and the tribal, despite being famously criticized as casting a subjective light on the so-called "primitive" or "tribal" arts of the Americas, Oceana, and Africa which, according to Jerry Saltz – senior art critic for *New York Magazine* – "was using third world art and artists as footnotes to Western art history without recognizing the primacy of these formal cultures" – presenting Western Modernist art in the "role of masterpiece and genius to tribal art's perpetual role as influence or antecedent" (2013). With regard to this relationship, and the form of the tribal mask, Hazoumé can be seen as acting within the delimitations of both his personal historical lineage, as well as the dichotomy of the modernist, tribal relationship as has been

[54] Ginikia is one of Ifemelu's childhood friends who also immigrated to America from Nigeria for university study.

historically presented in Western art institutions. Hazoumé's masks can be read in a much deeper fashion enabling his "tongue-n-cheek 'African masks'" to "belie their historic and cultural pretensions as traditionally ritual objects whilst roundly mocking Western perceptions of African Art" (2012 p 52).

The relationship between modernism and Africa as presented in the *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* exhibition, privileges the center-peripheral binary relationship whereby a "fixed" center is influenced by an exteriority, with the modernists being influenced by African art, however, Hazoumé does not try and fix such a position, but rather acknowledges the cultural overlap present and exemplified by the two material objects that make up *Wax Bandana* – the plastic jerry-can and a wax print cloth bandana. Just as, according to Derrida, the postcolonial subject exists within an experience of eccentricity, so too does the art object exist within a space of overlap. Illustrated in the previous examination of *Americanah*, though perhaps in a subtler language, *Wax Bandana* addresses transnational and transcultural experiences via the two material objects, which become indicative of both something (re)claimed as essentially African, and yet simultaneously as a by-product of Western consumerism and the remains of Dutch Imperialism.

Though very little formal academic engagements are available on the history of the jerry-can in Africa, their prolific abundance on the African landscape is undeniable. Due to their durability, recyclability, water shortages and an illegal fuel trade, many artists have sought out the jerry-can as being a part of the African landscape that is littered with plastic waste. Artists such as Serge Attukwei Clottey ask people to consider alternative uses for the plastic rather than discarding them, or Jeremiah Quarshie, who sees the jerry-can as a symbol of the strength of Ghanaian women through the jerry-cans specific ties to the water crises (2013).

Serge Attukwei Clottey
Trials and Tribulations
Plastic and Wire
2015
Photo: Jane Lombard Gallery

Jeremiah Quarshie
Auntie Dedei
Acrylic on Canvas
2016
Photo: Zeitz MoCAA

However, Hazoumé takes a rather whimsical yet dark approach, wishing to "send back to the West that which belongs there, that is to say, the refuse of a consumer society that invades us (in Africa) everyday" (2012 p 52). The jerry-can as such becomes more than just a vessel. It is both an important part of African life, as savior during the water crises as Quarshie suggests, and a yet a part of what Hazoumé refers to as the contemporary equivalent of the history of slavery that the nation is steeped in and a by-product of Western consumerism, whereby an "army of Benin's illegal petrol smugglers (…) ferry contraband petrol between Nigerian sources and their local consumers" (2012 p 52). According to Rachel Lowry of *Time Magazine*, this accounts for more than 75% of the gasoline consumed in Benin and comes through illegal trade routes from Nigeria, where transporters, popularly referred to as "human bombs", carry "up to 53 gallons of gasoline" on a single 100cc motorcycle (2016). The jerry-can, just like the transnational citizen occupies a space between, a narrative of overlap – between life-saving, and life-taking.

In similar fashion, the wax print cloth bandana, has become re-identified as a seemingly genuine African artifact, though it is in fact "a part of an amalgam of mainly Javanese, Indian, Chinese, Arab, and European artistic tradition" (…) and is a (…) "wholesale copy of Indonesian *batik* style" imported to Africa by the Dutch in the 19th century (Akinwumi, 2008 pp 179-182). The wax print cloth as such too lives in a space of in between, completely accepted as African, though actually Dutch, by way of Indonesia. The fabric is an overlap between Oceana, and Africa, facilitated by Dutch Imperial trade routes.

However, unlike the Western modernists associated with the *Primitivism* exhibition at the MoMA in 1984, *Wax Bandana* offers an entirely new narrative toward the combination of traditional "tribal" forms and their relationship to modernist and contemporary art practices and individual experience(s). In this way, *Wax Bandana* becomes the whimsical, yet profound transnational – the *singular instability* – occupying a space of overlap between traditional, modernist and contemporary temporality(s), and geo-political positions between Africa and the West, oscillating between the past and present, between the West and Africa.

SEEING THE TEXT, AND READING THE SCULPTURE

How then does the relationship between literature and visual art inform the positioning of the text/work as a *singular instability*? How can the sculpture help us see the characters in the text and how can the text help us to read the narratives of the sculpture? Both *Americanah* and *Wax Bandana* engage with a relationship to the past, transnational and transcultural experience, and the effects of the West on African identity(s). Ifemelu is re-identified as being "black" upon her arrival in America, and then again re-identified as an "Americanah" upon her return to Nigeria, indicating an overlap of identity, that she is somehow between worlds, and between identity(s). Much like the wax print cloth in *Wax Bandana*, the origins of a person or thing are not necessarily a determinate in its identification. Though we are told of Ifemelu's confusion and struggle with her (re)classification and (re)identification, to the reader it's just a name or cultural reference given to a person of colour in America – regardless of its implied prejudices – to the reader Ifemelu is still Nigerian, she just happens to be in America, and as a result the reader is told of the (re)identification and implied conflict but cannot necessarily see it. However, with *Wax Bandana*, the confusion can be seen, though less explicit, in that the audience is not necessarily told of the history of the cloth, but nevertheless the juxtaposition of the past and the present as seen in the contemporary jerry-can, posed within the traditional form of the African tribal mask indicates a temporal overlap – a space of anxiety and eccentricity.

What then can be seen in *Americanah* and *Wax Bandana* is the presence of the past within the present. Though Ifemelu carries her past with her into every present she encounters, and the reader is told of the effects on her identity, it is not seen – it is an internal struggle whereas *Wax Bandana* is a visualization of the internal struggle. The presence of the past (tribal form/mask) in the present (petrol vessel) is a stark reminder

of the historic, cultural, and personal experiences that we carry with us. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, her past experiences that she carries with her affect how she is read by other characters – as an "Americanah". *Wax Bandana*'s use of traditional forms and the history associated with the tribal mask, its original uses, and modernist appropriations affect the reading of the art object as such, though the materials and the sculpture are contemporary and presented within the present, it is the relationship to tradition and more recent histories that activate reading(s) of transnational, transcultural experience. The text activates the voice of an individual(s) experience, and the sculpture shows us their face.

ACTION, THE EAR, AND THE ETERNAL RETURN: TRANSNATIONALITY AND THE GLOBAL CITIZEN

If then, it can be accepted that postcolonial subjectivity is not a fixed position between colonizer and colonized, but rather a space of overlap and eccentricity – that of a transnational, transcultural existence, and a crossing of borders – and that the character portraits in both *Americanah* and *Wax Bandana* exemplify and occupy this very space, what does this mean for the Western readers reception and a renewed engagement with transnational identity?

The relationship between transnational existence and the *singular instability*, much like postcolonial subjectivity and the *singular instability* foregrounds a conversation, which helps facilitate a movement away from the centre-peripheral binary that has governed Western art discourses for so long. By identifying postcolonial subjectivity as the *singular instability*, and equating the *singular instability* with the transnational, a motion is in place that challenges the identification of "post-colonial" which still identifies the subject in relation to the former colonizer, whereby the transnational artist and work is no longer subjugated by a relationship with the former colonizer, but becomes a unique progressive entity operating within spheres of influence.

As such, a dialogue begins to form between the reader/viewer and the text/work. The complication(s) of the motion or "action" of the character(s) and their manifestations within the work confuses and distorts the preconceived ideations of a solely African identity for the Western audience. This challenges the "ear" that the reader/viewer is able to "hear" or "see" the work with. Consequently, and as Derrida puts it in his *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, "everything comes down to the ear you are able to hear me

with" (1985 p 4). Regardless of the likelihood of each reader(s) having a distinct and different reading of the same text as further present in Derrida's *Ear of the Other* whereby the "eternal return"[55] allows for an almost limitless interpretability of any text or work of art, it is the "action" or "motion" of the characters – either their physical travel within the world as with Ifemelu in *Americanah*, or the worlds presence made visible through artefacts placed upon them as in *Wax Bandana*, the reader/viewer is irrevocably aware of a crossing of borderlands, of an overlap and eccentricity.

The transnational experience is eternally returned to the character(s): the perspective of the artists *locale* is preserved, without subjecting it to a binary relationship to the West. The transnational identity and character exist in a space of overlap where the text/work, and the character(s) that make them up can no longer be subjugated solely by authorial intent, or reader (re)interpretation, but exists as a dialogue between spheres of influence. As a result, the "ear" that the reader/viewer is able the "hear" or "see" the work with, is actualized through the character presentations of transnational experience(s) and encourages the action to be returned to the literary and artistic character(s) as a counter to the centre-peripheral binary of other-ness toward an engagement and understanding of the transnational experience and identity as representative of the new global citizen.

WORKS CITED

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi (2013). *Americanah*. London: 4th Estate..

"African Artists Reimagine the Humble Yellow Jerrycan" *Vuga!*, vuga.wordpress.com/2017/03/23/african-artists-reimagine-the-humble-yellow-jerrycan/.

Akinwumi, Tunde M. (2008). "The 'African Print' Hoax: Machine Produced Textiles Jeopardize African Print Authenticity." *Journal of Pan African Studies* ,

Balshaw, M. (2012). *We face Forward: Art From West Africa Today*. Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery.

[55] For more on the Eternal Return, see also: Malabou, C. "The Eternal Return and the Phantom of Difference"

Coghlan, Niamh (2009) “Romuald Hazoumé.” *Aesthetica Magazine*, www.aestheticamagazine.com/romuald-hazoume/.

Daniel, R. M. (2015). “The Little Can That Could: History of the Yellow Jerry-can”. *Flying Penguin*, http://www.flyingpenguin.com/?p=21160

Data Team, (2015) “Global Population Forecasts: How the World Will Look in 2050” *The Economist*, https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2015/08/04/global-population-forecasts

Derrida, Jacques., and Christie V. McDonald (1985). *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation; Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida: English Edition*. New York: Schocken.

Downey, Anthony (2009). "ROMUALD HAZOUME: LA BOUCHE DU ROI." *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/425385/pdf

Enwezor, Okwi (2010). "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109.3, 595-620, https://watermark.silverchair.com/SAQ109-03-08EnwezorFpp.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kkhW_Ercy7Dm3ZL_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAAgwwggIIBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggH5MIIB9QIBADCCAe4GCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBglghkgBZQMEAS4wEQQMokMPQNZzcbMOmuMxAgEQgIIBv7vmnLRqyavBSBoUHErcrU-ai7NU1EZUUACxGjyclo6tMlgU05PDq7yNqtsl0cHHdwze3xX6ExngrbefN4awQMA3guoQVqjvy7QMtAaaXt9LaYH5DZpU9lM2MSh0lf7AnLFX_yLIFgxYxJufdshDEiF86lGW8x5FFFk8oO7dBVgPt56GkFzxCYTPZgjM-bjewLe5BYLcWjcFUpFyZ7JP0wOdxpQ1yVbLZ-4VF9xBszRpsX_ogOsXvtMPtP9dr7RPC4lNGCQS85GNnbDxLpKloGylnP1W1WRnC1SVVHXUrODayo_nV5Rjl5uYZJP_GaOPIsuVQr0c0jI0cUvCoPkWFjmouC4zPO7R_AXB2C3qaLG2We7elBVAmtkeduC-mHtDbm5QSK5s0tqjxMQACYMSrY5i9EnxllHjynV8kC2LBzlXcXyvb4BWQA4Tg8Myphk8cQzU9EsyvbKd1Lp_BGBtDQhXbf_FEXGlCCy06wtxNOcEwvW6mhPo96_HRzTHw43y2ZaeIoczQT1k5YMWoxKCM74s4LpPzZ8RFSK6lLfMNIHGg6Fd2gVlBGcmCg2cZ8KgVhbl7aXp-azdN3vzQ

Hassan, Salah M (2010). "African Modernism: Beyond Alternative Modernities Discourse." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109.3, 451-473. https://watermark.silverchair.com/SAQ109-03-01HassanFpp.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kkhW_Ercy7D3L_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAAgowggIGBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggH3MIIwIBADCCAewGCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBglghkgBZQMEAS4wEQMrVlrBhQXkhIlDtEsAgEQgIIBvdB5M_xv3TPTM3R6vyzr3QtVOslW3zSYtKbXrWkevJ3JVdqRjaId2WbSLF1vWtqY9gEGJW5T_MuzqSVlh__fgOfQRNLZ9cU8f0rMiqH7c_GC6ArEtMs9pYkAlXN2mIMOJMDimzMrhoz4IIxf2fbIxCz1du4cwOJ5HuAd5Y1KhOgBo8ArR9wAkrTNFxb9oRU20z5FrbTe0onzaLGuWAF7UWB4cy7ovbE4ea_b_ASHXZWwNIrwVTccDDpSFe7k_c5PIyZAzRsRaASP3mZhapKUyCeMrXSrCpKmsMCsSfTgBYkk3wvYbyTNEl_3Y3lX8ttGr1ZGb7booId8aZe80RgJZB0dq6W53h9W5Z1YxMQeYjQrWcdJ47VTGJSvxYcm8iL6jHhygzgT5jFiRO7oetl19Kt3auxX0eX42HZNWImcNypLkcHhU8Yiei3qhftlhFx175tU02Xdq3bJDtDgEFzDKvydtSPHeG0acA5dtBondYvuLWA7pdG2w2qcgwDCN7xM4Y3nuYx9cDXrYp2E5Q4RWUc18_83eveBslKx9xCMOv_BDoDTlaqTnpnezrSssIFh7Ujssc

Hiddleston, Jane (2005). "Derrida, Autobiography and Postcoloniality." *French Cultural Studies* 16.3,

http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1177/0957155805057295

Houghton, G. (2016). *Romuald Hazoumé: All in the Same Boat.* London: October Gallery.

Houghton, G. (2009). *Romuald Hazoumé: Made in Porto-Novo*. London: October Gallery.

Huddart, David. (2007). *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*. London: Routledge,

Malabou, C. (2010). "The Eternal Return and the Phantom of Difference" *Parrhesia* No 1, 21-29, http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia10/parrhesia10_malabou.pdf

Okeke-Agulu, Chika. (2010). "The Art Society and the Making of Postcolonial Modernism in Nigeria." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109.3, 505-527. https://watermark.silverchair.com/SAQ109-03-03Okeke-AguluFpp.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kkhW_Ercy7Dm3ZL_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAAhQwggIQBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggIBMIIB_QIBADCCAfYGCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBglghkgBZQMEAS4wEQQMpRhZ0UJur4eIND6pAgEQgIIBxwsvrRutmrDXczqyYT1z9pwEX8ip7GMcwqgycipRh3NWkTWAYexjnt1cgO_QHB5WGbPZfd9w8j8PonnL5EHmeXj3m5dZCpcYuc2k4NfG3wjUB0_xMW1ZGqrL_w1GKGyewe872ygHj6rwaI56wbD1KZJbh5whenvaZeulup6skXt8GVLnpQXhdZ7o2V1oYCJLcdW5zCRFSdHA0GG1g95_WSqz3oPzdhvJEooTlEPONExD8enbFApEljqr6Fy6IF2a5lK0FXcXXIIaUh5MN6WZu8OFyO74KJqN0ry9wxLHa17m0VXjOKs_JrOo7oyLORwjKTQajGSslEsNxdGTRndDFuYE8uzjptXxfQ7YLy_gGVKAlRwx2KsluJXeoPvdO49R7AxIjshRbpKokRX2BQ3o2YdV0RX9hAARQcuTSU1frceTzExCO9ptR48Cyqx5u6sS1Rq2uf5g_K2eeiKjdHefp5kvGha4h6RD00UFtnzkYgFiAFXEj7h13yEAAh9PpmjSwaFZbnybas85muQG2E6wsU7z

D8fsSDb6CX7SU37WiRw6DNYUcecEUDAsv2HCyUx54eL9j5jplV1dF1Y98mXu

Pantazis, S (2013). "We Face Forward: Art from West Africa Today." *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 32, 142-145.

Romuald, Hazoumé (2009)'Made in Porto-Novo'". *Aesthetica*, http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/romuald-hazoume-made-in-porto-novo/

Saltz, J. (2013). "Saltz on Critic Thomas McEvilley, 1939-2013. *Vulture*, http://www.vulture.com/2013/03/thomas-mcevilley-1939-2013.html

Slemon, Stephen (2002). "The Scramble for Post-Colonialism." *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*. London: Routledge, 5-32, https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/books/e/9781134846061

IMAGES

Americanah. Accessed: www.Chimamanda.com

Clottey, S. A. *Trials and Tribulations*. 2015. Mixed media: plastic and wire. Jane Lombard Gallery. NYC.

Hazoumé, R. *Wax Bandana*. 2009. Mixed media: jerry-can and cloth. October Gallery. London.

Quarshie, J. *Auntie Dedei*. 2016. Acrylic on canvas. Zeitz MoCAA. Cape Town.

Venn Diagram. Authors own.