

Research Article

Living Between Borders: Transnationalism, Identity and Exile in Gordimer and Adichie

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Abstract

This article explores transnationalism in postcolonial literature through the migrant experiences in *None to Accompany Me* and *Americanah*. Political oppression, economic instability, racism, and globalization continue to compel many Africans to migrate, yet migrants often retain deep emotional, cultural, and economic ties to their homelands. Drawing on transnationalism, diaspora, postcolonialism, and identity from scholars including Rainer Bauböck, Thomas Faist, Bill Ashcroft, and Homi Bhabha, this study investigates how migrants negotiate identity, belonging, and cultural preservation abroad. The article argues that migration does not sever homeland ties. Rather, migrants construct “transnational spaces” that bridge host and origin countries, sustaining familial, cultural, linguistic, political, and economic relationships while adapting to new societies. Central themes include exile, hybridity, resistance, sexuality, identity, and Bhabha’s “third space.” Through qualitative, comparative textual analysis of characters such as Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma, Ifemelu, and Obinze, the study shows how migrants resist assimilation, navigate racism and alienation, and use language, family ties, remittances, and nostalgia to maintain transnational connections. The analysis concludes that transnationalism is central to the migrant experience in contemporary African literature. Despite identity crises and cultural conflict, these novels present migration not as abandonment of origins, but as negotiation of multiple identities and spaces affirming the resilience and adaptability of the postcolonial subject in a globalized world.

Keywords

Transnationalism, Diaspora, Identity, Migration, Hybridity, Home

1. Introduction

Although disillusionment with governance often drives the characters in Gordimer [10] and Adichie [1] to migrate, they retain enduring links to home. This article asks: Do these characters leave entirely when they move? What connections do they maintain with their homelands? I contend that such characters migrate in search of opportunities to improve their own lives and those of their families and communities. For them, the host land becomes a place of refuge and a platform for creating a better future. Consequently, the postcolonial subject

in the diaspora faces a choice: accept new forms of colonization or resist them.

1.1. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, comparative literary analysis grounded in close reading. [10] and [1] were selected for their sustained engagement with exile, return, and transnational identity in South African and Nigerian contexts. The

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analysis is framed by transnational and postcolonial theory, with particular attention to Bauböck and Faist's [4] concept of transnational spaces and Bhabha's [6] notions of hybridity and third space. Primary data consist of textual evidence from the two novels; secondary data include relevant theoretical and critical scholarship. The aim is to trace how literary representation illuminates the lived tensions of transnational existence.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Transnationalism is central to contemporary migration discourse. [4] define transnational spaces as; "relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across borders of sovereign states" that "comprise combinations of ties and their substance, positions within networks and organisations... that cut across the borders of at least two national states" (p. 13).

Transnationalism thus depends on communication and bonds maintained across distance. Its significance has grown with modern electronic technologies and globalization. Natasha Garrett [9] describes transnationalism as integral to migration theories. She argues that transnationalism shapes the daily existence of people living outside their home countries. Even voluntary migration complicates migrants' relationships with both origin and settlement countries and profoundly changes how they think about self, family, and nation [9]. Ease of communication, technological advances, and globalization enable migrants to travel home, maintain frequent contact, and engage in cultural and business ventures while integrating abroad. Ludger Pries [13] notes that transnational social space denotes "pluri-local frames of reference which structure everyday practices, social positions, biographical employment projects, and human identities, and simultaneously exist above and beyond the social contexts of national societies" (p. 23).

Living across two or more countries requires connectedness across social and geographic boundaries. Language and culture shape how new migrants position themselves in relation to home and host countries and how they understand home, language, family, and identity. In *Postcolonial Transformations*, Ashcroft [3] argues that resistance to colonial influence on heritage can be physical or ideological, with ideological resistance often proving highly effective. He draws on Said's emphasis on space and location for analyzing postcolonial experience. In both novels, characters in unfamiliar spaces resist new forms of colonialism and racism ideologically rather than with arms. Quoting Said, [3] notes that privileging history has led scholars to see "putting phenomena in a temporal sequence" as "more significant and critically revealing than putting them beside or next to each other in a spatial configuration" (p. 20). Only in the latter half of the twentieth century has this hierarchy been challenged. For postcolonial studies, space has always been central to understanding identity. From its inception, postcolonial criticism has treated space as integral to the postcolonial experience.

Said's work is intimately spatial, and recognizing the importance of place and location has reshaped the field.

2. Home-exile Dynamics: South African and Nigerian Perspectives

In the novels under study, characters living in exile are forced to migrate from their countries of origin due to unfavorable socioeconomic and political conditions. In [10], patriots who fight for the freedom of their motherland, South Africa, face lynching and death, while others are driven into exile. During Apartheid, the white ruling class ruthlessly suppressed dissent. Consequently, those who had the courage to resist the oppressive regime, such as the Maqomas, were forced into exile. It is important to note that while exile takes a severe psychological and physical toll on them through numerous hardships, it does not deter them from remaining focused on their liberation goals:

The chestnut skin of a young black woman now darkened and puckered beneath the eyes, the saucy jut of dancing buttocks now built into a monument of solid, middle-aged flesh; a Figure of a man with one tired shoulder lower than the other, shining pink dome where Vera would have recognized only the lost blond curls, another whose belly fat, straining gaps between shirt buttons...She and Ben had hidden from the police in Ben's office before he fled the country- who would suspect a market research consultancy of harbouring one of the leaders of the uprising in 76. (35).

The narrative voice makes it evident that these patriots were forced into exile following the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Given the narrator's consistent and credible depiction of Apartheid, exile becomes a vital strategy for survival and for sustaining the liberation struggle. The narrator vividly illustrates the physical and emotional toll that living in London takes on the Maqomas.

The transformation that Sibongile undergoes serves as an allegory for the evolution of South Africa itself. Much like her nation, Sibongile matures; her changing appearance reflects a newfound radiance, mirroring the way South Africa's political system transitions into a more appealing democracy. Sibongile's characterization is pivotal, as she emerges as more resilient and confident than her husband, Didymus. This strength likely explains why Gordimer [10] ultimately empowers her with a leadership role by the novel's end. Her development is fostered in part by Ben and Vera Stark. Despite being white, the Starks consistently support the Black liberation movement. Ben's role in hiding Sibongile from the dictatorial apartheid police reinforces the ideal of the "rainbow nation," suggesting that true national progress requires collaborative efforts across racial lines.

While in exile, Sibongile and Didymus are stripped of their fundamental freedom, living in constant concealment for fear of being hunted down and assassinated by the Apartheid re-

gime. Consequently, they are forced to construct a "third-space" where they can express themselves without fear of capture. This thirdspace operates on two levels: it deconstructs the concept of "otherness" and transgresses restrictive spatial boundaries. This transgression extends beyond the individual to encompass systems of government and nations. Ultimately, a thirdspace can only be achieved within a territorial and psychological sphere if it dismantles interracial, tribal, academic, and class binaries to foster a society rooted in mutual respect and equity. [6] corroborates this view, noting:

Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma regained their names when they came back. In exile they had had code names; there would always be many people in the outside world who would know them by no other. Addressed by these names, they would react-answer-to them as they would to the names given them, attached as an umbilical cord to the location outside a coal mining town (Sibongile, daughter of a Zulu mother and Sotho father) and the steep hut village folded in maritime hills (Didymus, in the Transkei) where they were born and first answered to name at all. (43).

This socio-political dominance explains why the Maqomas must adopt coded pseudonyms to survive. Assuming new names in exile does not merely signify a survival tactic; it represents the couple's attempt to forge an entirely new identity. They carve out a secure space in the metropolis where they and their children can feel safe. This dynamic also highlights the impact of the psychological space, as they remain deeply connected to the political struggle unfolding back home. Thus, for the Maqomas, space becomes simultaneously real and imagined:

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Through this narrative, it is clear that these characters lack the luxury of free choice; they can neither choose their place of residence nor their way of life, even in exile. Their safety is never guaranteed, and their movements remain heavily restricted. Ellen Rosner Feig [7], in her article "Now that the Buffalo is Gone: Exile, Isolation and Representation in Contemporary Native Canadian Literature," conceptualizes exile through a structural lens:

Removal of Native Canadian children from their homes and/or communities is part of the history of the indigenous people. Whether it is social service arriving at home to forcefully remove children or the priest advising the family to send the child to a residential school... people of exile, that is those who are forced to either internally or externally leave their land or home, remain on a never ending

search for their space in the world. (185-86).

For Feig [7], any external force that compels an individual to leave their home constitutes exile, a framework that directly applies to the Maqomas' flight from Apartheid. Feig [7] emphasizes that exiled individuals are perpetually unsafe, driven by an intense desire to search for and construct a new identity in an unfamiliar land. This paradigm accurately reflects the Maqomas' trajectory in [10]. Forced to move from place to place while adopting fake identities, Didymus and Sibongile actively strive to rebuild their lives away from the stigma and dangers of Apartheid.

Because the barbaric Apartheid regime disregards basic human rights, the Maqomas are forced to constantly relocate for their safety. Their journey takes them first to Dar es Salaam, then to Botswana, and finally to London, where they reside until their eventual return to South Africa. Throughout their exile, the Maqomas endure a life of economic strife and deprivation. Yet, their determination shines through; despite these terrible conditions, they never lose hope, maintaining their faith in the liberation movement.

Nevertheless, exile leaves indelible marks on the family dynamic. The Maqomas' daughter, Mpho, is educated in England, and when her parents return from exile, she accompanies them back to South Africa. As a hybrid product of two distinct cultures, Mpho struggles to forge an identity, finding traditional African values somewhat alien. She unconsciously creates a psychological space where she mimics Western lifestyles. In [6] Bhabha defines "mimicry" as the state of the colonized subject after a prolonged, marginalized relationship with the colonizer, wherein the colonized attempts to adopt the colonizer's identity. Mimicry is:

"...the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other; as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; and in order to be effective, mimicry must produce slipping, its excesses and difference" (88).

Living abroad profoundly impacts Mpho; she can no longer speak her ancestral languages, neither Zulu nor Xhosa, preferring instead to communicate in a sharp London English dialect:

Sibongile spoke a mixture of her own Zulu with what she knew of Xhosa, not to be seen wanting in respect. But English was the medium for Mpho, English was the reminder to her that there was no running away from what she was, what circumstances made of her, a girl who had to have lessons in order to claim a mother tongue. Once home, the new world had to be made of exile and home, both accepted. (186).

Mpho's loss of her mother tongue profoundly destabilizes her personality. The psychological effects of exile cause her to lose touch with her cultural roots. Her attempt to prioritize the colonizer's language and identity over her own characterizes her as a classic "mimic" subject [6]. Ultimately, mimicry acts as a mask that conceals a fractured identity a mask that Mpho undeniably wears.

This South African experience finds a thematic parallel in Adichie's [1] depiction of Nigerian society. In [1], Adichie, like Gordimer [10], presents characters who are forced into exile by structural conditions beyond their control. However, Adichie's [1] characters are distinct in that their migration is driven by a diverse array of socio-economic anxieties, fleeing a contemporary Nigeria that can no longer provide the security or future they desire. Characters like Auntie Uju, Ifemelu, Emenike, and Obinze migrate to negotiate their identities and spaces, attempting to occupy and colonize new domains abroad.

While in exile, Ifemelu aggressively negotiates her positionality to assert her own identity. She occupies a literal and figurative thirdspace, deliberately resisting the conventional American assimilation practices expected of immigrants. Consequently, Ifemelu refuses to adopt American speech patterns, behaviors, or aesthetics. This aligns with Ashcroft's [3] theories on ideological post-colonial survival, particularly regarding individuals who resist new forms of colonialism and systemic racism through cultural preservation rather than armed conflict. This notion reflects on how these new spaces facilitate alternative modes of defiance:

One question this raises is: can one 'resist' without violence? Can one even resist without obviously 'opposing'? The answer to this is obviously 'yes!' Gandhi's 'passive resistance' to the British Raj is a famous and effective example. But the most fascinating feature of post-colonial societies is a 'resistance' that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in a different way, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being ... (20).

Ashcroft [3] demonstrates that resistance need not be overtly violent; like Gandhi, individuals can subvert dominant power structures peacefully. This nuanced engagement with colonial discourse is rarely classified as traditional resistance because it lacks overt militant rhetoric. While soldiers and politicians dominate historical headlines, ordinary citizens, artists, and writers are often the ones who successfully resist cultural assimilation by conceiving transformative visions of the world. In this context, cultural "transformation" defies conventional, party-political definitions of resistance [3].

Refusing to speak the language of the dominant culture and instead preserving one's native accent constitutes a potent form of resistance a strategy highly visible among Adichie's characters in [1]. Ifemelu's steadfast refusal to be absorbed into an alien culture provides an effective template for counter-colonial defiance. As [3] implies, the ordinary citizen who resists colonial ideologies through everyday choices such as rejecting foreign speech patterns, dress codes, and behaviors is just as vital to cultural preservation as the soldier fighting on the front lines.

Upon arriving in America, Ifemelu attempts to navigate her new environment and quickly learns that certain everyday de-

scriptors carry unexpected social taboos. Encountering a culture where words like "fat," "stupid," and "bastard" are heavily policed, Ifemelu realizes that social acceptance is deeply tied to linguistic and bodily conformity. This realization sparks a heightened awareness of her new surroundings:

She had not thought of them as fat though she had thought of them as big, because one of the first things her friend Ginika told her was that fat in America was a bad word, heaving with moral judgement like stupid or bastard, and not a mere description like short or tall. So she had banished fat from her vocabulary. But fat came back to her last winter, after almost 13 years, when a man in line behind her at the super market muttered, fat people don't need to be eating that shit, as she paid for her giant bag of Tostitos. (6).

Ifemelu quickly recognizes that life in America presents unique structural challenges. To fully integrate, immigrants are pressured to adopt Western lifestyles and values, with the acquisition of an American accent being treated as a prerequisite for social mobility. However, Ifemelu rejects this linguistic assimilation. By retaining her Nigerian accent, she resists this neo-colonial pressure and creates a comfortable personal space for self-expression.

This defiance, however, comes at a social cost; assimilated migrants frequently treat her as an unrefined novice, eager to flaunt their own degree of acculturation. As the narrator observes:

Ifemelu joined the taxi line outside the station, she hoped her driver would not be a Nigerian, because he, once he heard her accent would either be suggestively eager to tell her that he had a master's degree, the taxi was a second job and his daughter was on the dean's list at Rutgers; or he would drive in sullen silence, giving her change and ignoring her thank you, all the time nursing humiliation, that this fellow Nigerian, a small girl at that who perhaps was a nurse or an accountant or even a doctor was looking down on him. (10).

Life in America is far from utopian, and Ifemelu is forced to learn that economic survival often requires compromising her ethical boundaries. Driven to transactional sexual compliance with a tennis coach just to raise money for rent and tuition, Ifemelu learns the hard way that survival in the West demands brutal pragmatic adjustments. This reality is further highlighted when she is forced to assume another person's identity to secure a legal work permit, an arrangement facilitated by Auntie Uju:

You can't work with your student visa, and work study rubbish, it pays nothing and you have to be able to cover your rents and the balance of your tuition. Me, you can see I am working three jobs and yet it's not easy. I talked to one of my friends; I don't know if you remember Ngozi Okonkwo? She's now an American citizen and she has gone back to Nigeria for a while to start a business. I begged her and she agreed to let you work with her social security card. How, I'll use her name Ifemelu asked? Off course you will use

her name, Anty Uju said. (131).

This excerpt illustrates how African immigrants attempt to build informal mutual aid networks to survive systemic exclusion. To get a job, Ifemelu must legally erase herself by adopting Ngozi Okonkwo's identity. As she becomes more deeply embedded in American society, she also discovers that racial politics are directly mapped onto black hair textures. Braids are coded as "authentically African" and, by extension, unprofessional and unpolished a systemic bias that forces her to chemically relax her hair before a corporate job interview:

I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview, if you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional. "So there are no doctors with braided hair in America" ifemelu asked. "I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed." (146).

This desperate drive to succeed in an alien environment is not unique to the American landscape; it mirrors Obinze's experiences in London. When Obinze first arrives in England, he is filled with a naive euphoria, hoping to secure his financial future. Upon arrival, however, he realizes that the only way to obtain legal residency is through a costly, arranged sham marriage to a European citizen named Cleotilde. With the assistance of Angolan human smugglers, the fake union is brokered after Obinze deposits half of the agreed-upon sum into their account:

"Yes I am Obinze." He said feeling like a character in a spy novel that had to speak in silly codes. Brown led him to a quiet corner, handed over an envelope, and there it was, his license, with his photo and the genuine, slightly worn look of something owned for a year... a woman was walking towards the door talking loudly to her companion. "Look how crowded this place is. It's all shame marriages all of them now that Blunkett is after them". (286).

In their quest for survival, undocumented migrants are forced to marry total strangers. Through this scene, Adichie [1] uses a sarcastic narrative tone to expose the degradation experienced by immigrants who live as legal ghosts. The British woman's passing comment at the registry office acts as a vehicle for the author's underlying critique of the exploitative industry surrounding immigration documentation.

Africans like Obinze, who are reduced to undertaking these sham marriages, are driven entirely by systemic desperation. Obinze's subsequent encounter with Okoli Okafor at the registry office further highlights the harsh realities of London life, emphasizing that economic survival requires severe moral concessions. When Obinze attempts to seek assistance from old friends like Emenike, he discovers that the metropolis breeds individualism, leaving little room for hosting struggling acquaintances. Through his connection to Iloba, Obinze eventually secures a manual labor job by purchasing the identity of a man named Vincent Obi. Much like Ifemelu in America, Obinze must pay a substantial financial kickback to Vincent for the use of his identification cards:

"Thirty five per cent is the best I can do. This is business he had lost his accent and now spoke Nigerian English." Let me tell you there are many people in your situation" Iloba spoke of in Igbo. "Vincent my brother here is trying to save money and do his papers. Thirty five is too much o rika biko. Please just try and help us." (310).

The narrative captures the deep frustration of an immigration system that systematically strips individuals of their autonomy and humanity. At his workplace, Obinze exists in a state of perpetual paranoia, unable to enjoy his life due to the constant threat of deportation. This systemic vulnerability takes an immense psychological toll on him:

Obinze arrived at the ware house and knew right away that something was amiss. The men avoided his eyes, an unnatural stiffness in their movement and Nigel turned swiftly, too swiftly towards the toilet when he saw Obinze. They knew. It had to be that they had somehow found out. They saw the headlines about asylum seekers draining the National Health Service, they knew of the hordes further crowding a crowded island, and now they knew that he was one of the damned working with a name that was not his. (322).

This excerpt illustrates the grim consequences of life in a metropolis that denies undocumented migrants control over their own lives and identities. The psychological pressure is so severe that Obinze is nearly incapacitated by fear; a surprise birthday party planned by his coworkers almost causes a panic attack. Because he is living under the stolen identity of Vincent Obi, Obinze forgets his actual birthday, nearly exposing his fraud due to his hyper-vigilant fear of repatriation.

Ultimately, Obinze is cast as a deeply pitiable figure, anonymous, fractured, and stripped of selfhood in sharp contrast to Ifemelu, who actively fights to maintain her identity within her exile. In sum, this comparative analysis highlights the fractured lives of South African and Nigerian migrants within Western metropolises, charting how these characters navigate the hardships of displacement while maintaining complex, fraught emotional ties to their home nations.

2.1. Sexuality, Identity and Transnationality

Transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently demand juxtaposition. This is because many individuals' transnational networks of exchange and participation are grounded in a perception of shared identity; conversely, the identities of numerous individuals and groups are negotiated within social worlds that span multiple geographical locations.

Sexual identity refers to how one conceptualizes oneself regarding romantic and sexual attractions or involvements, functioning as an expression of one's sexual orientation. In [10], Gordimer parallels the socio-political development of South Africa from the Apartheid era to independence with the personal lives of her female characters. These characters, having lived in exile, experience shifting sexual needs and alliances that compel them to forge new identities. When the

Maqomas were forced into exile, they migrated with their children. The psychological and cultural impact of inheriting a hybrid background is distinctly visible in their daughter, Mpho. Living in England profoundly shapes Mpho's development; by age sixteen, she frequently goes clubbing and socializes freely with male peers behaviors that deviate from traditional African expectations of teenage decorum:

At the Starks, along with her parents she met and mingled with the Stark's friends, Vera's colleagues from the foundation, the protégé Oupa and the lawyers. The young people got on well together, Mpho was carried off to parties with these youngsters. Her relieved parents knew were decent. No drugs or drunkenness. (51).

Significantly, the Maqomas fail to monitor the company their children keep. Furthermore, the fraught relationship between Didymus and Sibongile deprives Mpho of the parental stability she needs during her formative years. Influenced by the chaotic nature of life in exile, her parents' marriage appears to Mpho like a complex, highly dramatic tennis match.

In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock [11] notes that colonial systems were fundamentally patriarchal, systematically relegating women to the periphery. With the dawn of the post-colonial era, however, women were thrust into the limelight, a transition exemplified by Sibongile and Vera. Consequently, these female characters must navigate the weight of their new public responsibilities while striving to balance their professional commitments with their sexual autonomy.

Because Mpho constantly moves between her parents' home and the Starks' residence, her parents lose track of her day-to-day activities. Mpho exploits this lack of oversight to explore her sexuality, yet she fails to establish a stable identity, ultimately falling prey to Oupa, an older, married man. In most immigrant households, cultural continuity and change occur simultaneously in creative, non-linear ways. While some family members adhere to traditional domestic ethics, others actively resist them. For instance, certain patriarchal values might persist such as demanding modest attire from a daughter while other aspects of that same ideology transform, such as encouraging higher education to ensure the daughter's financial independence from domineering men. This complexity underscores the necessity of avoiding cultural stereotypes in favor of examining individual values with respectful curiosity.

This dynamic shifts the focus to the identity of the second generation, raising questions of generational conflict versus harmony. It provides a springboard to examine the types of familial dynamics generated by transnational practices. The implications of these narratives suggest that contemporary children of immigrants often harbor a deep interest in and knowledge of their parents' native countries. Rather than attempting to "pass" or denying their roots to avoid discrimination, many actively embrace their heritage. However, at Mpho's age, navigating nightlife with male peers exposes her to vulnerabilities, resulting in her sexual exploitation by Oupa and an unplanned pregnancy:

Vera turned from Sally's assault to Oupa, uncertain whether to defend or accuse. What's happened to you and the girl? He's been sleeping with my child, my daughter. I take her to a doctor and I find she is pregnant. That's what's happened. That's the result of the nice people you introduced her to! Not a word from you, Vera, not a word of warning, you must have known she was running around with him. (171).

Their protracted displacement abroad causes Sibongile and Didymus to fail in their parental oversight. Deflecting accountability, Sibongile blames Vera for introducing Mpho to damaging company, demonstrating the Maqomas' tendency to project blame onto others. Ironically, the superior Western education Mpho receives in exile fails to safeguard her dignity and self-protection as a young woman.

To rehabilitate the pregnant teenager, Gordimer [10] places her under the care of her grandmother, who seeks to instill traditional African moral virtues in her. Large-scale sociological studies focusing on diverse ethnic groups reveal a plurality of acculturation styles between first- and second-generation migrants. In scenarios of dissonant acculturation, children and parents diverge along linguistic and cultural lines, precipitating generational conflict. Parents who maintain transnational connections often leverage distant extended family networks to manage these domestic crises. A common strategy involves sending a rebellious youth back to a relative in the home country to shield them from metropolitan peer pressures precisely the role the grandmother assumes in the novel. While this intervention can be successful, it can also backfire if the youth has already internalized a hybrid identity influenced by urban subcultures.

Similarly, the Starks' daughter, Annie, is negatively impacted by her upbringing on the margins of exile. Growing up in a displaced environment destabilizes her sense of identity and sexual development. Annie embraces a lesbian identity, eventually returning home with her partner, Lou, to the deep disappointment of her parents. Unmoved by her mother's disapproval, Annie fiercely defends her relationship and her lifestyle choices:

It's wonderful. Let me tell you. A woman is like you, she knows what you feel, what makes you feel, and so- she does -instinctively she does what she wants, she's feeling what you are feeling at the same time. It's not like that with a man, who wants his kind of stimulation while you want yours. Oh I suppose you have never made love with a woman, for all your independence. (158).

Gordimer [10] presents female characters with highly diverse sexual needs and orientations, demonstrating how Figures like Mpho and Annie are irrevocably altered by their time in the diaspora. Although Vera attempts to dissuade Annie from her homosexual lifestyle, the young woman remains convinced of her choices, arguing that a female partner offers a mutual empathy that selfish men cannot provide. This confrontation leaves Vera plagued by maternal guilt, blaming herself for failing her daughter.

A parallel assertion of female sexual autonomy occurs in Adichie [1]. Like Gordimer's protagonists, Ifemelu is unafraid to express her sexual desires, explicitly communicating her needs to her partner, Obinze. Outspoken and bold, Ifemelu coins the code word "ceiling" to signal her desire for intimacy. This uninhibited relationship highlights love as one of the novel's central themes. As the narrative progresses, Ifemelu migrates to the United States, where she engages with various sexual partners. She quickly learns that survival in America demands harsh pragmatic adjustments. Driven to financial desperation by systemic roadblocks, Ifemelu resorts to a transactional sexual encounter with a tennis coach for money:

Perhaps he was one of those white men she had read about with strange taste, who wanted women to drag a feather over their back or urinate on them. She could certainly do that, urinate on a man for a hundred dollars. The thought amazed her and she smiled a small weird smile. What ever happened, she will approach it looking her best, she would make it clear to him that there were boundaries she could not cross. (188).

This episode illustrates the severe frustration and desperation the capitalist metropolis inflicts on the migrant subject. Though Ifemelu initially tries to resist the transaction, she ultimately submits to it. The profound remorse she experiences afterward indicates that she takes no pride in the act, framing it strictly as a grim compromise for survival.

This brings to the forefront the gendered power dynamics of exile. In her essay "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," Gayatri Spivak [14] posits that examining female sexuality can deconstruct "masculinism" a dominant discourse that systematically deprives women of their agency and reduces them to subaltern status. Similarly, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir [5] argues that women will remain trapped in a subaltern space until they actively seize their own liberation. Beauvoir [5] asserts that a woman's primary obstacle in a patriarchal society is the realization of her autonomy, a freedom she must claim herself, as patriarchal institutions will never voluntarily grant it. She maintains that mainstream psychological and cultural theories since Freud have hypocritically addressed female issues by keeping their analyses safely within patriarchal frameworks:

"What peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other" (xii).

Beauvoir [5] views the woman as an object defined against the male subject, a positioning that facilitates her systemic domination. Thus, women, who ought to enjoy full existential freedom, find themselves subjugated by a male-governed world.

Adichie [1] challenges this patriarchal subjugation through Ifemelu. Although Ifemelu later enters sexual relationships with Curt and Blaine, neither man provides the emotional or sexual fulfillment she shared with Obinze. Consequently, throughout her displacement in America, Ifemelu experiences

a profound lack, longing to return to Nigeria and reunite with him. The fact that only Obinze satisfies her emotional core suggests that Ifemelu ultimately locates her true identity by anchoring herself back to her African roots.

These characters' trajectories demonstrate how migrants continuously negotiate identity within their adopted homes. Stranded in a diaspora characterized by alien lifestyles, cultures, and languages, they must balance their current realities with their cultural origins to avoid becoming psychological misfits. Literary analysis reveals a potent, inescapable link between transnationalism and the concept of "home." To function effectively in a transnational space, these characters must plant their bodies abroad while remaining emotionally and politically tethered to issues back home. Bauböck and Thomas Faist [4] argue:

"Transnationalism is often used both more narrowly to refer to migrants' durable ties across countries and more widely to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations." (9).

Living abroad requires individuals to continuously negotiate space within the host country while attempting social integration. While transnationalism is a broad umbrella term covering both life in the diaspora and relations with the homeland, it specifically tracks the active links and social networks an individual maintains with their original community [4]. Ashcroft [3] addresses this capacity for resilience, observing:

Observing the way in which colonial control was often ejected by national liberation movements only to be replaced by equally coercive indigenous élites, we might well ask: What does it really mean to resist? Does the term 'resistance' adequately describe cultural relationships, cultural oppositions or cultural influences in the era of globalization? Given the widespread feelings of opposition in colonized communities, 'resistance' enacted as violent military engagement, a national liberation struggle, or, for that matter, even as a programme of widespread social militancy, is surprisingly rare. Ultimately, 'resistance' is a word which adapts itself to a great variety of circumstances, and few words show a greater tendency towards cliché and empty rhetoric, as it has become increasingly used as a catch-all. (20).

Consequently, cultural resistance becomes an essential tool for the post-colonial subject. In both novels, characters residing in the diaspora resist total assimilation by maintaining vibrant transnational ties to the families, businesses, religious practices, and cultural norms of their home countries. The tendency to view transnationalism as diametrically opposed to assimilation obscures the rich diversity of the immigrant experience. In practice, migrants and their children routinely combine transnational and assimilative strategies across different stages of their lives, utilizing these unique blended spaces to construct flexible, hyphenated identities.

Furthermore, variables such as gender, race, and social class compounded by systemic encounters with xenophobia and

discrimination intersect with transnational identities to produce vastly diverse family narratives. Many displaced women, despite preserving strong ties to their native cultures, purposefully reject rigid cultural matchmakings (such as traditional endogamy) because they remain deeply critical of patriarchal socialization models within their original communities. Ultimately, at the individual level, displacement forces a process of selective biculturalism, wherein the migrant carefully chooses which values to discard and which to preserve.

2.2. Home and Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a term utilized by social scientists to expand migration studies over recent decades, specifically addressing the cultural and political dimensions of globalization. In *Changing Perspectives amongst Indian Diaspora in Germany: Culture and Gender*, Maya Subrahmanian [15] notes:

“The term transnational was intended to describe the new way of life adopted by the immigrants, in which they maintain the link with the home country and integrate with the settled country” (37).

This concept can be understood as a social process through which migrants construct social fields that transcend geographic, cultural, and political borders. Gordimer's [10] presents diverse scenarios involving individuals compelled to leave their nations of origin to live abroad. In “Thinking Caribbean Transnational Identity a New in Contemporary Short Fiction,” Maria Alonso Alonso [2] argues that migratory waves and transnational dynamics trace their origins back to the dawn of colonial expansion:

Transnational phenomena within contemporary communities are closely related to this idea of nomadic errantry since globalisation has favoured the different kinds of cultural identification, as well as different ways of experiencing cultural alienation. Constant travelling across the Atlantic Ocean symbolizes a sense of transnational poetics. From early colonization when the first forced diaspora of Caribbean inhabitants started, to contemporary migratory waves. (50).

According to Alonso [2], contemporary transnational movements echo historic nomadic patterns, accelerated by modern globalization, which fosters multiculturalism. This paradigm underpins the narratives under study, as displaced characters migrate to Western metropolises in search of asylum and safety. While in exile, characters like the Maqomas maintain an active ideological and organizational connection to the liberation struggle unfolding in South Africa:

The Maqomas of course had not come on one of the crowded charter flights and their reception was less flamboyant though no less emotional. Didymus was a veteran of the inner circle in exile, one who for all those years had been involved in international missions and certain other important activities, and they met by comrades equal to him in rank within the internal organisation. (44).

This passage reveals that the resistance against Apartheid

was waged simultaneously on both domestic and international fronts. Didymus participates directly in global diplomatic missions and strategic operations designed to dismantle the regime. He is depicted as a dedicated patriot who, despite being rejected and exiled by his homeland, remains committed to its liberation. This background contextualizes the profound joy surrounding his return; he is celebrated for his lifelong sacrifices for the movement. This dynamic introduces the prominent theme of the repatriation of exilic subjects into a post-Apartheid South Africa. In *Transnational Negotiations in Caribbean Diasporic Literature*, Kezia Page [12] posits that the psychological link between the exiled subject and the prospective return home is a foundational element of transnational writing:

From the negotiations that Caribbean writers make, it is clear that return is fundamental to their consciousness or ability to write... indeed neither exile nor diaspora can be considered outside of the return, despite the different subject positions that drive return in each- in one return functions as an antidote to displacement, in the other, a freedom is grasped to settle and grow in once alien spaces but with the implicit understanding that there is an original family/nation tree in a specific location to which one will eventually return or must return. (9).

Page [12] asserts that for displaced subjects, the anticipation of returning to their families and homeland serves as a psychological anchor. This anticipated return operates as an antidote to spatial alienation, mitigating the trauma of displacement. It instills exiled individuals with the resilience and focus required to endure metropolitan hardships while preparing for their eventual homecoming. This framework is vital to Gordimer's [10] text, where the promise of repatriation serves as both a catalyst for migration and a survival mechanism during exile. These freedom fighters adopt coded identities precisely to protect their ongoing involvement in the domestic struggle and to secure their eventual return to South Africa:

Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma regained their names when they came back. In exile they had had code names; there would always be many people in the outside world who would know them by no other. Addressed by these names, they would react-answer-to them as they would to the names given them, attached as an umbilical cord to the location outside a coal mining town. (43).

Despite the pressures of displacement, the Maqomas remain unyielding in their dedication to South African liberation. They utilize strategic pseudonyms to safeguard their lives and preserve their operational capacity within the movement. This highlights their profound determination, as they navigate spatial obstacles fueled by the certainty of a victorious return. Ultimately, the active links these subjects maintain with their homeland imbue the narrative with its distinctly transnational character.

A similar transnational dynamic governs the relationship between the Starks and their children in London. The emotional bond between the couple and their son, Ivan, remains

highly intense, sustained through a continuous exchange of letters. Gordimer [10] employs this epistolary device to illustrate the depth of Ivan's connection to his parents. His letters serve as a medium to detail his career, romantic relationships, and fatherhood, allowing the Starks to remain intimately involved in his life.

One of Ivan's letters reveals that his divorce is severely destabilizing his young son, Adam. As the boy displays increasingly delinquent behavior, Ivan relies on transnational family networks, sending Adam back to South Africa so his parents can instill foundational moral boundaries in him. When Vera receives a subsequent letter from Ivan, its tone shifts dramatically from their standard correspondence:

Several months before, there was another letter from Ivan in London. One unlike the short notes and postcards which supplemented phone calls and kept awareness of one another's existence, the Stark familial liens, hooked up. After the first page the letter broke off and had been continued under a new date: a letter the writer did not know quite how to write, whose reception he was unsure of. It was addressed to them both, this time. Vera handed it to Ben. A gesture to how much Ivan meant to him. (244).

Ivan's consistent reliance on his parents demonstrates the enduring power of filial bonds across geographic boundaries. In this particular letter, he confesses that Adam was arrested for driving under the influence, subsequently losing his license after a secondary speeding offense. Ivan's self-blame for his son's behavioral decline evokes a profound sense of pathos. His desperate plea for his parents to take custody of the young man in South Africa illustrates his absolute trust in their guidance.

Furthermore, when Ben temporarily leaves South Africa to reside with Ivan in London, he maintains regular communication with his wife, Vera. Although their marriage is deeply strained, prompting Ben's departure to seek psychological clarity, his arrival in London underscores his emotional reliance on Vera, whom he views not only as a spouse but as a primary confidante. Consequently, they maintain intimate contact to sustain their relationship and support their children, despite their physical separation:

Ben and Vera exchanged regular phone calls. Tacitly they were supposed to alternate but if a week passes in silence when it is Vera's turn to call, he will call instead. When the phone rang late in the night she knew it was him... usually she was in bed, her arm went out for the phone. Each gave an account of those of their activities they thought the other would like to hear. There were pleasantries, small anecdotes. (297).

Similarly, in Adichie [1], characters migrate from their home country to improve their economic standing and secure a brighter future for their households. Upon arrival in the West, they adapt to grueling labor conditions to provide for their dependents. In [4] the distinct categories of migrants and their varying expressions of transnational engagement can be termed:

The central element here is that mobility becomes an integral part of migrants' life strategies. This type of migrants does not leave his or her country with the aim of settling in another country, but tends to stay mobile in order to maintain or improve his/her quality of life. One may think here, first of all, all highly skilled professionals-executives, international officials, managers in multinational companies (56).

In [1] this economic drive is epitomized by Mariama, an immigrant worker at the African hair braiding salon Ifemelu visits. Mariama works exhausting hours solely to remit money to her extended family in Senegal. While this dedication to family support is commendable, Bauböck and Faist [4] note that such continuous financial remittances can distort domestic perceptions of life abroad:

Another dominant discourse is that migrant's show off their hard-earned income in their country of origin, leading to the misconception that 'money grows on trees' overseas. This misconception encourages in youth a desire to migrate and compels extended family members to make constant request for money and goods. (220).

This constant financial pressure from relatives is fueled by the utopian misconception that Western metropolises are spaces of uninhibited wealth. When diasporic characters successfully fulfill these material demands, they experience a profound sense of validation and achievement:

Wait my sister is coming to help. The phone rang again and Mariama spoke in French her voice rising, and she stopped braiding to gesture with her hands as she shouted into the phone. Then she unfolded a yellow western union form from her pocket and began reading out the numbers. "Trois! Cinq! Non non cinq!" (13).

For many domestic African households, the success of a relative abroad is measured primarily by their capacity for capital remittance. Ifemelu's mother openly boasts about the luxury items her daughter sends, to the point of performative indecision regarding which foreign shoes to wear to church. In this context, the religious space is transformed into a theater for displaying material wealth and foreign connections. This social pressure compels migrants to make extreme sacrifices to maintain financial flows. Ifemelu herself encounters severe systemic obstacles in America, yet she consistently prioritizes sending money and goods to her family:

It would not have occurred to Ifemelu to refuse the check: now she could pay some bills, send something home to her parents. Her mother liked the shoes she sent, tasselled and tapering the kind she could wear to church. "Thank you," her mother said, and then sighing heavily over the phone line, she added. "Obinze came to see me." (196).

When Kimberly offers Ifemelu a substantial financial check, the opportunity becomes impossible to decline due to her economic anxieties. Driven by the memory of her mother's joy upon receiving gifts, Ifemelu accepts the money, showcasing her deeply altruistic and protective nature. Her commitment to

maintaining her parents' comfort highlights the profound utility of transnational networks.

The Nigerian experience depicted in [1] aligns closely with this framework. The characters maintain vibrant connections to their homeland, leveraging their transnational status to influence their domestic communities. Despite living in the West, they exhibit a deep aesthetic appreciation for local African art forms and linguistic structures. This shared African heritage breeds an intense nostalgia for cultural artifacts within the alienation of the diaspora.

When Ifemelu visits the hair salon, she is comforted to find the staff watching a contemporary Nigerian movie. For the diaspora, these popular home movies function as vital tools for cultural preservation and value transmission. Ifemelu experiences an immediate wave of relief upon encountering this cinematic representation, noting that for the first time since her arrival in America, she hears the concepts of "Nigeria" and "good" bound together in a single cultural space:

Inside, the room was thick with disregard, the paint peeling, the walls plastered with large posters of braided hair styles and smaller posters that said QUICK TAX REFUND. Three women, all in T-shirts and knee-length shorts, were working on the hair of seated customers. A small TV mounted on a corner of the wall, the volume a little too loud, was showing a Nigerian film: a man beating his wife, the wife cowering and shouting, the poor audio quality jarring. (11).

These stylists, though native to Senegal, readily consume and celebrate Nigerian cinema as a shared expression of West African identity. In a globalized world, a minority group's capacity to assert itself within the "global village" depends heavily on its ability to market and project its cultural identity. Bauböck and Faist [4] outline the complex interplay between globalization, the diaspora, and transnational dynamics, arguing that:

While the impact of globalisation is often assumed to be universal and worldwide, approaches linked to the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism refer to phenomena that occur within the limited social and geographic spaces of a particular set of regions or states. Globalisation approaches and world theories differ from diasporic and transnationalist approaches in at least three respects. (14).

Thus, while globalization operates as an all-encompassing global framework, diaspora and transnationalism articulate localized cultural experiences within specific geographical parameters [4]. Consequently, any rigorous evaluation of transnational literature must account for the overarching structures of globalization. Displaced subjects consistently seek to leave a cultural imprint on their globalized surroundings, much like the salon workers who project African media within an American metropolitan landscape.

Furthermore, these characters experience maximum psychological comfort when expressing nuanced emotional realities in their mother tongue. Their adherence to indigenous languages demonstrates that despite their hybridity, they long for their primary cultural identity. For Ifemelu, linguistic

preservation is fundamental to retaining structural autonomy. This conviction sparks a sharp domestic conflict when Aunt Uju attempts to prohibit Ifemelu from speaking Igbo to young Dike:

Dike called out from the bathroom, where he had been sent to brush his teeth before bed. "Dike, I mechago?" ifemelu asked. "Please don't speak Igbo to him." Anty Uju said. "Two languages will confuse him." "What are you talking about, Anty? We spoke two languages growing up." (134).

In *Towards a Transnational Turn in Narrative Theory*, Susan Stanford Friedman [8] emphasizes the vital necessity for post-colonial subjects to articulate their lived experiences using their native languages despite the pressures of foreign displacement. Adichie [1] frames Ifemelu as a character proud of her Igbo lineage and highly resistant to total linguistic assimilation. Ifemelu refuses to fully surrender to the language of the colonizer, finding intimacy and comfort in her native tongue.

Characters like Ifemelu intentionally carve out an intermediate space between metropolitan expectations and indigenous norms. Ifemelu functions as a pan-African subject, utilizing this hybrid domain to assert her cultural identity without letting American lifestyle pressures erase her heritage.

In the diaspora, speaking Igbo becomes a profound act of solidarity and survival. In London, when Iloba attempts to convince Vincent to lease his identification documents to Obinze, the initial conversation is stiff and defensive. However, the moment Iloba shifts the dialogue into Igbo, he breaks the cultural ice, steering the financial negotiation toward a mutual, fraternal understanding:

Thirty five percent is the best I can do. This is business. He had lost his accent and now spoke Nigerian English. Let me tell you, there are, many people in your situation. Iloba spoke up in Igbo. Vincent my brother here is trying to save money and do his papers. Thirty five is too much o rika biko, please just try and help us. You know that some people take half. Yes he is in a situation. I am helping him but this is business. Vincent's Igbo had a rural accent. (310).

The narrative meticulously captures the pragmatic realities of modern Igbo mercantile culture. Within this socio-cultural framework, business dealings operate on distinct parameters of professional pragmatism, independent of familial sentiment. This cultural reality conditions Vincent's unyielding response to Iloba's pleas on behalf of Obinze. Ultimately, this interaction underscores the overarching theme of diasporic survival, tracking how displaced subjects continually navigate hostile metropolitan systems to claim a secure space and a stable identity.

3. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that transnationalism in Gordimer [10] and Adichie [1] is represented as a complex process of negotiation involving identity, belonging, resistance, and survival. Although the characters migrate from their countries

of origin due to political instability, economic hardship, racial oppression, or the search for upward social mobility, migration does not sever their attachments to home. Rather, the diaspora becomes a dynamic, transnational space in which migrants continuously maintain emotional, cultural, linguistic, economic, and ideological connections with their homelands. Through these enduring ties, both novels reveal that migration is not merely a physical movement across geographical borders, but a continuous reconstruction of the self across multiple cultural domains.

The analysis further reveals that the experiences of exile and displacement profoundly fracture and reshape the identities of the characters. In both texts, migrants struggle to reconcile the values of their indigenous cultures with the structural pressures of assimilation in host societies. Characters such as Ifemelu, Obinze, Sibongile, Didymus, Mpho, and Annie occupy what Bhabha [6] conceptualizes as the "third space" an intermediate zone where identities are constantly negotiated, dismantled, and redefined. While some characters actively resist total assimilation by preserving their native languages, cultural aesthetics, and ethical values, others experience a more turbulent hybridity, characterized by alienation and cultural fragmentation. In this regard, the study establishes that transnational identity is fluid rather than static, perpetually shaped by the friction between home and host cultures.

Furthermore, both novels foreground the intrinsic relationship between transnationalism and post-colonial resistance. Gordimer [10] and Adichie [1] portray migration not as a passive submission to globalizing forces, but as a site of ideological counter-discourse against racism, colonial legacies, xenophobia, and systemic social exclusion. The refusal of characters like Ifemelu to abandon her cultural consciousness, natural hair, or Nigerian accent becomes a subtle yet potent form of resistance to neo-colonial assimilation. Similarly, the Maqomas' long-distance involvement in the anti-apartheid liberation struggle illustrates how transnational spaces can serve as vital platforms for political activism and national commitment. Thus, transnationalism emerges not simply as mobility, but as a mechanism through which post-colonial subjects assert agency and preserve cultural integrity within hostile metropolitan environments.

Additionally, this study has shown that transnational practices are actively sustained through informal communication networks, financial remittances, emotional attachments, and cultural preservation. Migrants maintain deep-rooted relationships with relatives and communities back home through targeted capital support, continuous dialogue, and the preservation of indigenous languages and artistic traditions. These practices reinforce the reality that the homeland remains central to the migrant imagination, even when a physical return is delayed, fraught, or impossible. The narratives therefore challenge the Eurocentric assumption that migration inevitably culminates in cultural erasure or complete assimilation. In-

stead, they reveal that migrants successfully develop hyphenated identities that allow them to belong simultaneously to multiple worlds.

Finally, this study concludes that both Gordimer [10] and Adichie [1] frame transnationalism as a defining condition of the contemporary post-colonial experience. Their novels expose the acute psychological, cultural, and social tensions faced by displaced subjects while simultaneously emphasizing their resilience, adaptability, and enduring attachment to their roots. By foregrounding the intersections of exile, identity, sexuality, language, race, and belonging, both authors contribute significantly to post-colonial and transnational literary discourse. Ultimately, this study affirms that migration does not erase an individual's origins; rather, it creates fluid, transnational spaces where identities are continuously negotiated, hybridized, and reconstructed across borders.

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Author Contributions

Angandze Sheily Ngobalep: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Software

Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the conclusions of this study are available on request from the corresponding authors.

Conflicts of Interest

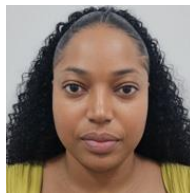
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Biography



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