

Glorija Mavrinac

Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
glorijamavrinac@gmail.com

The Westernization and Colonization of the African Mind through the Media

Abstract

*The presentation deals with the issue of media imperialism and racism in the novel **Americanah** (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigerian novelist and writer. The paper starts from the position of electronic colonialism theory about danger of seductive media content. Violent media propaganda and transcription of western media content in Nigerian mass media affects the abandonment of African cultural patterns and forcibly changing behaviors of domicile population. Characters in the Adichie's novel are great example of the mind colonization and westernization that is followed through the media. In the presentation we will show how media imperialism led to racial fetishism and losing pre-colonial values in african society.*

Key words: media imperialism, electronic colonialism theory, racism, mind westernization, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

1. Introduction

A new type of Western domination has been introduced in African countries after the end of colonization: the colonization of the mind. The theoretical part of this paper aims to show how this constitutes a neocolonial intention by the West, opening up the question on the ways this process is carried out. In addition to the institutionalized implementation of western cultural imperatives in the everyday lives of indigenous cultures, there also exists a westernization of media content i.e. media imperialism characterized by copying content from global media sources. The theoretical part of the text will focus on defining terms and showing the interdependence between the colonization of the mind and media imperialism, while the second part will examine electronic colonialism theory in the novel *Americanah* by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in order to explain how media imperialism, i.e. the transfer of western cultural patterns onto the African context through the media, displaces cultural identities of domicile nations and leads to a westernization of the African mind. Given this novel deals with the problem of media violence against African immigrants in the Western world, we shall analyse how media discourses intensely marked by centralist western imperatives influence the self-perception of the African subject. The novel has a pronounced role in recording and presenting the obscure outcomes of the returnee's attempt to reintegrate in the African world. The paper will relate this process to media imperialism in Nigeria.

2. A theoretical approach to the term *colonization of the mind*

In order to analyze elements of colonization through the media as presented in the novel *Americanah*, the issue of the *colonized mind* needs to be approached from a theoretical point of view. This term does not have many detailed theoretical explanations and is often used with the assumption its meaning is clear. Although a unified definition of the term has not been established, we shall present some authors who deal with the phenomenon of domination over someone's cultural space, and our aim is to be precise in delineating the semantic scope of the term. Using this term with the assumption its meaning is clear must be related to a high level of semantic transparency. This phenomenon follows European invasions of the African continent¹¹¹, and relates to the westernization of social and cultural patterns of a particular nation. The first colonization exploits the land and the human body, while the later colonization of the mind uses western mechanisms to influence people's worldviews, their desires and ideas about themselves as individuals and as members of their communities.

Although he does not offer a precise definition of the colonized mind, in his books *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Frantz Fanon uses a perfect knowledge of the human psyche to diagnose the issue of white men dominating over black men. In a diachronic review of how the Western episteme has dominated non-Western cultures, Fanon concludes:

111 This paper will focus on the problem of colonizing the Eastern mind, but we can assume that the same tools may be used for analysing the patterns of *the colonization of the mind* in any other non-Western area.

When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality. On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology, and its own unhappiness which is its very essence (Fanon 1968: 124).

Fanon's teachings imply that domination over land and body is not the final goal of colonial repression: it is the control of consciousness, i.e. as we have already said, the intention to see oneself in western frames of reference. A mind seduced in this way will not oppose the neocolonialism systematically destroying the economy of African countries and will be susceptible to colonial domination for decades after the end of colonialism. We shall explain different forms this submissiveness takes in analyzing one particular novel. We believe that the development of the prolonged colonialism, i.e. the colonization of the African mind, develops on two levels. The first one relates to the westernization of the education system in Africa, and the second to the westernization of media content. Before we show how these levels correspond and before we explain how culture is transformed through these influences, we need to offer a precise definition of the term.

The term itself is a sort of antonym to the term of decolonization of the mind, mentioned in the title of the book by the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o¹¹². What we aim to determine as the *colonization of the mind* in this work, Thiong'o calls *the domination of the mental universe of the colonised* noting that economic and political control which the West sees as imperatives in the neocolonial system, cannot be effective without a mental domination which is achieved through controlling *the tools of self-definition a certain culture uses in relation to other cultures* (Thiong'o 1986: 16). By using the metaphor on the transition of psychological violence from the battlefield to the classroom (Ibid., p. 9) Thiong'o concludes that the infiltration of colonialism in the African school system is the cornerstone of a westernized collective mentality. The desired result of colonizing the school system and media is the production and establishment of a Western culture in a non-Western area which is particularly visible in the western types of accepted knowledge, as prescribed through curricula¹¹³. This results in a paradox of a non-Western man producing western beliefs in areas

112 The book titled *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, influenced by Fanon, was published in 1986.

113 Numerous literary works question and undermine the imposing of western values instead of taking account of African needs in the education system. For example the novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) by the Senegalese author Ousmane Sembène deals with education in Senegal which sees facts on Europe as more important than facts on Africa so that

outside the West. Colonial schools in Africa base their teaching content around facts on Europe or North America, completely disregarding or construing African pre-colonial past. Fanon concludes this is the best indicator of the colonizer's wish to *impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country* (Fanon 1968: 24). The education system is therefore the cornerstone in construing the theory on, as postcolonial critics call it, pre-colonial barbarity, precisely because revitalizing it may entail the affirmation of indigenous resistance. Paulo Freire concludes that an oppressed society allows such mind domination due to an internalized image of freedom being a gift and not a product of indigenous fighting which is why one should be grateful for it (see Freire 2000: 47)

Fanon, Thiong'o and Freire imply that the domination over the mental space of the oppressed is determined by western culture entering institutions, in this case through dominating the African education system. According to these authors, the colonization of the mind is the final result of European domination manifested through the westernization of non-Western models of behaviour, that is, black people aiming to imitate white culture. We mentioned earlier how the development of such an outcome of prolonged colonization is determined by two levels, the first one being mediated through education and the second one through media content. In both cases this means the transfer of white models of cultural social dealings to the African context.

Since the intention of this text is to point to the obscurity of media spaces and explain the workings of discourse influenced by western imperatives in a non-Western context, one should keep in mind that the precondition of manipulating media content is a reading public educated in a way to accept these types of content. The westernization of African education and the adjustment of teaching content to western needs precedes and is an important precondition of African media westernization. Education is therefore the first step in the process of colonizing African worldviews since without its implementation the non-Western subject would provide resistance and would not agree to being a reading, listening and viewing public of colonized media. In this analogy these types of content in TV and written media are interpreted through mechanisms of strengthening western knowledge the African subject gained in education. In this sense the media do not represent a lesser tool in the prolonged process of colonization. Without the pervasiveness of the media, the individual would no longer be immersed in imposed western facts after getting a degree and there would still be a possibility of escaping the colonizing domination. By consuming western media content transposed into the African context, the colonized subject tries to adjust its self to western needs and thus remains a hostage to the colonizer.

students are better acquainted with the geography of France than Senegal. The protagonist of the novel, N'Deye Touti reads only European writers because she believes *there is nothing she can learn from African authors* (Sembène 1970: 58) which is also a product of imposed French literary education that values exclusively European literary history. Thiong'o himself will follow this theoretical position in the novel *Weep Not, Child* (1964) by positing the idea that the implementation of European education into African education results in the *colonization of the mind*.

3. Electronic colonialism as a powerful tool in the process of colonizing the mind

We already offered arguments on how the westernized forms of media content can be interpreted in third world countries as a powerful tool of neocolonial strivings for the transformation of the African society so now we shall offer a theoretical basis for these ideas.

In early 1980s, Thomas L. McPhail writes on media-transferred colonialism in his book *Electronic Colonialism: The Future of International Broadcasting and Communication* (1981), and in *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders, and Trends* (2002) he lists four¹¹⁴ types of colonialism, naming the last one *electronic colonialism*. McPhail defines it as a social phenomenon beginning in the 1950s¹¹⁵ involving the dependence of poor countries of the post-industrial society on the necessity of importing *communication hardware* and foreign production programmes, when a whole set of western habits, patterns of behaviour and socialization processes are also taken over. McPhail uses the term *electronic colonialism theory*¹¹⁶ to define this approach to a repeated colonization through the media and its inevitable influence on transforming non-Western cultures (see McPhail 2006: 19).

McPhail is not alone in this theory. Oliver Boyd-Barrett mentions the term of media imperialism seeing it as information addiction and owners of the media and media processes in poor countries being susceptible to the pressure exerted by western, rich empires. As two basic characteristics of media imperialism, the author lists the unidirectional character of the media influence and of this cultural invasion, as well as the imbalance in owning capital between the colonizing country and the one in which the colonized medium exists. According to Boyd-Barrett, this is a direct consequence of the global media market monopolization (see Boyd-Barrett 1977: 122, 123).

Ejaz and Ahmad note that global sources¹¹⁷ achieve more credibility compared to local media sources in less developed countries, and the reason for this is the economic profitability of media organizations in developing countries. The availability of global media information in all countries across the world leads to the copying of their content and reporters are led only by simplicity and profit, not caring how such an affirmation of western set of attitudes and values impacts domicile cultural identities. Ejaz and Ahmad see these actions as deepening the chasm of inequality between countries and the ones whose information is transferred become powerful rulers of the information era we live in (see Ejaz, Ahmad 2011: 135).

Since the novel we shall now analyze deals with consuming media content of non-Western Others in the U.S and on the other hand, with media imperialism and the transfer of western cultural patterns onto the African subcontext, it is necessary to correlate all these theoretical postulates. We shall

114 Military colonialism, Christian colonialism, mercantile colonialism and electronic colonialism.

115 If we take into account that most countries in Africa gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s, it is clear that one type of colonialism has merely been switched for a different type, in McPhail's words, by electronic colonialism.

116 Electronic colonialism theory.

117 BBC or CNN for example.

now examine electronic colonialism theory in the novel *Americanah* and show how this affects the transformation of the self of African subjects in the western region as well as the increased collective unhappiness on the African continent.

4. Changes to African subjects through the media in the novel *Americanah*

The theory of the novel *Americanah* rests on all these theoretical grounds and offers a so-called low angle view. This is a postmodern novel of heterodiegetic narrative and structurally divided into eight parts examining and questioning the motive of a returnee. On one level the narrative world is determined by questioning the position of the non-Western Other in American society and on the other level, by positioning the returnee in Nigerian reality. The protagonist Ifemelu goes to college in the U.S. and returns to her country after thirteen years. The author plays with the narrative present dealing with Ifemelu's last days abroad and a narrative past told in an almost flashback fashion. In these analepses the narrator gives a portrait of the transformation to Ifemelu's self, that is, describes the path of her westernization. Akingbe and Adeniyi explain how this narrative examines the problem of racism and ethnocentrism in the U.S. and the UK¹¹⁸ with the intention of starting a *well-intentioned* cultural dialogue in America's racialized society. The authors add that the realization of the transcultural objective, which the author aims to set as the dominant requirement of the novel, is continually prevented in multiple ways through factors such as racism, racial segregation and stereotypical portraying of non-westerners (see Akingbe, Adeniyi 2017: 43).

In analyzing the role of social networks in the novel, Fouad Mami notes that Adichie references the novel *Americana*¹¹⁹ (1971) by Don DeLillo¹²⁰ in her title, a novel dealing with insoluble issues and negative consequences of media influence on the society. Mami concludes that playing with the lexeme of DeLillo's title has a two-fold role. Firstly, the choice of title refers to the colloquial Lagos expression for an American returnee and on the other hand, using it Adichie suggests the positioning of the media influence in the migration process. In Mami's view, her attitude towards the media is not as pessimistic as DeLillo's, which is seen in presenting possible positive relations between the media and immigrants (see Mami 2017: 171). The optimistic view on media narratives mentioned by Mami involves recording the possibility of using some media for raising awareness on the issue

118 In addition to the interplay between the narrative past and present, there are two narrative strands in the novel. The first one deals with Ifemelu's departure for America, and the second one follows her high-school sweetheart Obinze and his social mobility. Before getting rich he travels to the United Kingdom, a society which similar to the U.S., also struggles with issues of racism, stereotypization and cultural divide. The basic plot deals with Ifemelu's and Obinze's relationship, but this is not the focus of the present paper.

119 The titles of the novels are not the same, Adichie modifies DeLillo's title by adding the letter h (*Americanah*).

120 Grgas explains that this novel focuses on the positioning of electronic media within the American society and DeLillo presents *consciousness contaminated by a surge of American visual cultural icons*, through which he analyses the *irreversible loss of one way of life exchanged for entering the era of predominant imagery* (Grgas 2000: 97). *Americana* is not the only novel by DeLillo dealing with such issues. A great number of his novels such as *White Noise*, *Libra*, *End Zone*, problematize obscure influences of media representations on today's society and criticize experience that is mediated through the media.

of racism with the outcome of representing the inner perspective of the black objectified collective. After repeatedly consuming types of media content which open up spaces for the emergence of racism and xenophobia, the protagonist launches her own media space of resistance – a blog on racial issues – but first we must explain the westernization process in African immigrants and their changed self-perception encouraged by the media and by being immersed in the white world.

In coming to North America, Ifemelu witnesses the final step in the process of changes to African subjects. First she meets her high-school friend Ginka and suspects she suffers from anorexia. Ginka's fascination with the West and the ideal of the white female body leaves visible marks on her black body; she uses creams to whiten her skin, and painful concoctions to straighten her hair. She subjects herself to various methods with the goal of being equated with a white woman. The whitening process is not reserved only for the outer plane, there is also the wish to whiten her cultural level. By reading internet portals every day, Ginka fetishizes western culture and aims to incorporate it in her own universe of knowledge and behaviour by modifying and rooting out her African cultural identity: (...) *Ginka came to America with a youthful adaptability and lightness, cultural determinants became a part of her so that now she went bowling and knew what was going on in the life of Tobey Maguire* (...) (Adichie 2015: 129). By using the example of Ginka, the author crosses the western and non-Western ideal of female beauty, aiming to deconstruct the aesthetic imperative imposed by the media. So Ginka tells Ifemelu that she started losing weight soon after coming to the continent and came to the *edge of anorexia* because being thin is desirable here, which is not the case in Nigeria (Ibid., p. 128). She is a stereotypical consumer of women's magazines, falling victim to imposed aesthetical beauty imperatives, based of course, on western standards. Any type of nonconforming to these imperatives is framed and marked as a kind of otherness, which we will analyse further later on.

The next westernized subject Ifemelu comes into contact with is the character of Aunty Uju in whose home she plans to live. In the context of the novel she functions as a metonym of those emigrants who see the original culture as a burden and a signifier of their difference, the cause of their exclusion from dominant systems. Western culture therefore has advantage over the culture of their own people and, as we saw in the example of Ginka, they adjust their bodies to western standards. As a metonym for this set of attitudes, Aunty Uju tries to completely erase traces of the culture she left behind, filling up the new empty spaces with social imperatives of the West. Here we should also mention that Uju adjusts her own name to the English language: *Aunty Uju's phone rang. "Yes, Uju speaking." She pronounced it like yu-ju. "That's how you pronounce your name now?" asked Ifemelu afterwards. "That's how they pronounce it." Ifemelu grit her teeth and struggled not to say: "Sure, but that is not your name."* (Adichie 2015: 115). The symbolism in exchanging the African name for an invented American variant is related to her idiolect which gives almost an ironic edge to this type of behaviour.

Uju forbids Ifemelu to talk with her son Dike in the Igbo language, hoping that using English will contribute to his better assimilation in the society. Her idiolect contains a high level of TV commercials and popular media content. In accordance with this, the identity of Auntie Uju is mediated through language, and her self is expressed in the way she composes sentences. This does not only involve using English instead of Igbo; the media articulated idiolect suggests a self immersed in the world of advertising and brands. In other words the language reflected as a set of media phrases becomes proof of American discourses and brands at work at the subconscious level. In this sense we interpret Uju as a parodied embodiment of popular American culture which is based on postulates of consumerism which in its turn aims to seduce the minds of potential future consumers. The characters store up these consumerist information not only by watching TV and reading internet ads, but through their own immersion in the everyday lives of cities swarming with signifiers¹²¹ whose billboards they soak up both at the conscious and subconscious level thus becoming incorporated in the consumerist grind.

In following the development of these characters which starts with the change in self-perception and ends with a westernized cultural assimilation of the body and the self, we return to Fanon. He defines the black man as a social being in two dimensions which can be applied to most migrating African subjects in the novel; the first one involves its position among other black men, and the second one its position in white society. Fanon concludes that the white environment will significantly change behaviour as well through transforming its self-perception, as we have shown in previous examples (see Fanon 2008: 8). This is a sort of wish to mimic social interactions which the black man nurtures in order to become a part of the dominant white society.

In this sense the author uses the character of Uju's son Dike in an almost mythic and didactic mode. We already mentioned his mother forbids him to speak in the Igbo language and tries to eradicate all traces of African culture. Since he is unable to realize the desired cultural identity, Dike tries and fails to commit suicide. This suggests in a Fanon manner that suppressing the African self cannot result in a positive outcome and Dike's refusal to transform and Americanize his self can be seen through a common motive of postcolonial critique – a palimpsest. In her wish for positive integration in American society, his mother tries to separate him from the culture he wishes to be a part of, but his African self acts in the background and resists such cultural inversion. After his rehabilitation, Dike travels to Nigeria, succeeds in achieving an absolute consensus with society – impossible to achieve in the U.S. – and experiences a coherent identity which also could not be achieved if the subject is displaced from the culture he/she relates to. In the sense of genres, the way we follow the character of Dike makes this a Bildungsroman. In such an analysis Ifemelu would be the typical helper without whom the unification between subject and culture would be impossible.

121 In the context of a postmodern megalopolis which according to Fredric Jameson is crowded with information and thus becomes an economic centre (see Jameson 1991: 98).

5. Medialization of private spheres and the articulation of media imperialism in the novel

The novel deals with the power of electronic media in the sense of restructuring not only public, but also private spheres. Descriptions of most American households include spaces symbolizing this infiltration in the everyday life of the middle class. These are for example rooms for playing videogames and descriptions of interiors with the TV in an almost elevated position making it the centre of American family life. In his analysis of the changes in American society brought on by television and electronic media, Grgas writes: *The effect of American TV programming exemplifies the frightening increase of stimuli flooding the human consciousness at the end of the twentieth century. In the field of cultural production transferred through the media, the subject is faced with a "semiotic saturation of signs"* (Grgas 2000: 96).

Since television imagery changes the consciousness of the subject, interpersonal relationships are also influenced by these changes. Grgas quotes James B. T. Witchell in listing data confirming the idea of American culture medialization: *Up to fifty million of people watch this 'device' every night. The experience of watching has become the social and intellectual glue holding us together, our basic community* (ibid 95). The novel *Americanah* repeatedly deals with the consequences of American TV programming mentioned by Grgas, in showing how relationships within a community are modified according to requirements of the new culture. One example of restructuring private spheres and adjusting social relations to electronic media becomes obvious when Uju brings her partner¹²² to meet Dike and Ifemelu. The novel mocks the displaced forms of such social situations and as soon as he arrives, a group of people that have just met start watching TV. Before resigning themselves to TV images the group almost does not have anything to talk about. It is the TV content that offers the protagonists with topics for debates and conversations and thus creates in Grgas's words, *characters trapped in electronic imagery* (ibid 97). Through the African family copying patterns of American medialized culture, addiction to electronic media is parodied as well as their infiltration in the structure of human relationships, which is true both for Americans and immigrants who accept new cultural values in their wish to be assimilated.

Baudrillard states that *reality has taken over the hiperreality of codes and simulations. We are now led by the simulation principle instead of the old principle of reality. Purposes have disappeared, we are birthed by models* (Baudrillard, 2001: 51). Characters in the novel *Americanah* become consumers of these simulations and direct participants of a postmodern world ruled by hyperreality. Various examples in the novel confirm this thesis but we can highlight in particular Ifemelu's fear from leaving the house as a product of being informed on crime in American streets. Uju remains centred in reality in terms of awareness that the everyday is susceptible to various media interpretations: *If you keep watching television you'll start believing this is constantly happening.*

¹²² Just as previously mentioned female characters, Uju's partner uses creams for skin whitening. Through this motive, Adichie aims to highlight how imposed aesthetic imperatives of the West are not related to gender, i.e. not only women fall victim to them.

Do you know how much crime there is in Nigeria? It's just that they don't report about it back home like they do here (Adichie 2015: 119). This mocks American social paranoia and media content that offers fertile grounds for developing groundless fears. This also opens one of the key issues of this paper, the difference, or the sameness of content in Nigerian and American media. As we stated in the theoretical introduction to this paper, media companies completely take over content from global media companies due to economic profitability. Since the media in Africa copies other content, violence in foreign countries is reported on more often than violence in their own land. The African subject therefore creates an illusion of safety in Africa due to the consummation of reality construed in such a way, and sees the West as an area of robbery and violence. This is just one example of how media imperialism influences media consumers to shape their experience of Africa in relation to the West.

In dissecting TV and written media, the novel posits the idea on how various forms of western media content open up spaces which can easily be filled with xenophobia and stereotypes on black men which then lead to the development of racism. Western media seem to contain signifiers of the African world reduced to safari, starving children or *beautiful*¹²³ white women helping Africans in need. In this sense the image of objective African reality is never fully transmitted and an image with no actual basis in reality is created in the mind of the consumer of such content, in Baudrillard's terms, hyperreality which interprets the African man as an Other who needs to be helped by the Western world. We can read one of Said's definitions of orientalism from this, i.e. an orientalism as a way of thinking based on the epistemological and ontological difference between the East and West (see Said, 1999: 25). Such a media metonymic view of culture, more precisely, relating Africa with poverty and weakness in the minds of media consumers, has very obscure consequences both on black and on white people. These negative reflections and the feeling of guilt felt by the whites towards the blacks are shown in the novel through the character of Kimberly, a woman in whose family Ifemelu works as a *babysitter*. She feels an unnecessary need to treat Ifemelu with guilty conscience for something she did not do, and in her excessive care not to hurt Ifemelu's racial feelings, repeatedly apologizes for her own or someone else's behaviour towards the protagonist. The reason for this is the already mentioned media-construed hyperreality positioning Africans at the margins of society, shaping an image of a helpless subject requiring a special mode of behaviour.

The novel also questions how the media become a sort of eschatology of redemption, that is, how the media aim to heal the feeling of guilt alongside creating a collective amnesia of the history of slavery. One example is the part in the novel where students watch the series *Roots* in class and the

123 In this part of the novel Ifemelu discusses a newspaper article on an American celebrity helping starving children in Ethiopia with Kimberly and Laura. Revolted by such media constructs, Ifemelu ironically comments on her thinness: *And she is just as thin as the children that surround her, but she is thin by her own choice and they do not have the right to choose* (Adichie 2015: 167). This criticizes charity work as well, by questioning whether people do good in order to support those in need in Africa or whether this is merely the wish to achieve a certain type of prestige brought on by such activities in society: *There was a certain luxury in doing charity work with which she could not identify* (Adichie 2015: 174).

word nigger is censored. One of the female students, whose views Ifemelu supports, says that the censorship of such words will not help in eradicating racism in America: *If the word was used in this form, then it should be shown in that way* (Adichie 2015: 142) Moderating reality in TV and written media leads to the impossibility to see the full picture which creates the illusion of racism being eradicated from American society and makes it impossible for the white majority to relate to those who were subjected to such xenophobia.

6. Ifemelu's colonization of the mind and metatextuality as a counter-narrative and media space for resistance

The violent mechanisms of media influence we mentioned earlier result in accepting western cultural imperatives and reshaping Ifemelu's self. Guarracino categorizes the novel as immigrant fiction so the balancing of the protagonist between two cultures is the expected outcome (see Guarracino 2015: 8). We should note that Ifemelu negatively perceives previously mentioned changes of cultural identity and at first decisively keeps the postulates of African culture, but faced with an extremely violent media apparatus and American discourses, she soon herself becomes a consumer of American culture. Existing in a new social context leads to being subjugated to imposed western aesthetical imperatives which Ifemelu frowned upon, when she analyzed Ginku's and Uju's transformation. The process of transformation in her cultural identity begins by copying television presenters' accents¹²⁴ with the aim of suppressing her own idiolect by imitating Afro-Americans. As one of the most representative units of culture, language is the first thing to be replaced in the process of displacing cultural identity, i.e. in shaping a sort of transculturalism of the individual. Ifemelu is unhappy with American everyday life and fears violence and robbery in the streets, as a result of consuming media representations as if they were real, so during her first months in the U.S. she barely leaves her apartment. Adichie offers an overview of TV content opening up spaces for Ifemelu's desires and fetishizations of western models of behaviour:

She watched the same series she watched in Nigeria. The Fresh Prince of Bel Air and A Different World and she discovered new ones she did not know before, Friends and the Simpsons, but she loved the commercials best. She longed for the life they showed, a life filled with happiness with a sparkling solution for all problems, through shampoos, cars and ready-made food, and this in her mind became the true America (...) (Adichie 2015: 118).

¹²⁴ Here we highlight an interesting quote showing how Ifemelu's learning, of both language and culture, is a conscious process, i.e. a certain goal she wishes to achieve: *And her accent was convincing. She perfected it by carefully listening to friends and TV presenters silencing their T's, softly rolling their R's, starting their sentences with "so" and smoothly sliding that constant response "oh really" over their lips, but her pronunciation was too controlled, a matter of conscious decision* (Adichie 2015: 178).

In spending her days wandering through the media imagery, the protagonist tries to implement the content of commercials in her everyday life. Thus she is introduced to the American culture of overeating and consciously becomes its consumer, trying to satisfy her emotional hunger for food unavailable in Africa. The same media impose the western aesthetic imperative of beauty and a gap is created between desiring such constructs and the consequences of the overeating culture. We might see a two-fold decentralization of the subject created through the media here; firstly, its decentralization is manifested in the impossibility to coexist in two cultures. Due to her insight in her own colonization of the mind, the protagonist is aware of the half-Americanization which cannot be reconciled with the dominant African identity which leads to her feeling lost i.e. decentralized. Secondly, succumbing to opposing forms of media content results in excess weight as a product of being fascinated by excessive food intake on the one hand and on the other hand in the fetishization of thinness which is a result of reading fashion magazines.

Browsing through these magazines, the protagonist defines the aesthetic imperative of the female body imposed by them:

And so, three black women in perhaps two thousand magazines and all of them are either mixed race or it is not obvious they are black so they might be Indian or Puerto Rican or something like that. None of them is dark. None of them looks like me, and this means these magazines won't advise me on the makeup I should use. Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks until they blush and it is expected that all readers have cheeks that blush once you pinch them. This article talks about different hair products for "everyone" – and "everyone" here means blondes, brunettes and redheads. I don't belong to any of these categories (Adichie 2015: 299).

Texts such as these produce what Spivak terms epistemological violence, i.e. a kind of *diverse project of constructing a colonial subject as an Other*, with the *simultaneous and asymmetrical obliteration of all traces of the Other*, and what is happening here is actually the *simultaneous and asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of this Other in its precarious Subjectivity* (Spivak, 2013). The burden of otherness in this context is carried by Ifemelu, but here the personal suggests the collective traumatic impulse created through this type of exclusion from the media space. The author dissects content of women's fashion magazines and tries to dismantle the construct of the aesthetic imperative for female beauty so that Ifemelu's reading of exclusive, almost racist texts, represents an end to the passive acceptance of xenophobic content. Ifemelu is no longer a passive subject and is raised to the level of an active agent who starts her own blog on racial issues to warn about the obscurity of giving space to such content in the media.

Parts of the blog are inserted in the narrative tissue of the novel and function as independent metatexts questioning the general media racism. The divergence from the realist style, i.e. metatextual forms, highlight the already mentioned optimistic view in relation to the media. The author does not see the media exclusively as producers of otherness and xenophobia, she sees in them the possibility

for empowering the voices of those who have been silenced or discriminated. The success¹²⁵ of the blog and the collective of discriminated women created in the comment section below the posts, indicate a positive attitude towards the availability of publishing one's own content on webpages and we see the blog as a counter narrative to the previously listed types of content and a sort of media space for resistance.

7. Media imperialism and the westernization of the Lagos society

Already at the beginning of the novel we can see the media imperialism in Nigeria. The author profiles a range of characters not interested in Nigerian art. Ifemelu for example does not know anything about Nigerian films because the local TV program mainly offers Americanized content (Ibid., 19, 20). We perceive two stages in the process of colonization of the mind which we have explained in the theoretical part. Once they finish their formal education in colonial schools, the protagonists seek Americanized media content and so the westernization of the individual's mind is continued through his consumption of western-centric media.

In addition to economic profitability of media imperialism which we have already mentioned, the reason for this westernization of TV and newspaper content are also returnees such as Ifemelu. Her return to Lagos represents the height of analyzing the obscurity of the colonization of the African mind and she is reluctant to admit she herself experiences Lagos as an attack which means she has become an Americanah. In this context Fanon's ideas are realized on how the subject returning from abroad must be radically changed (see Fanon 2008: 13). Returnees have high positions, better work conditions and benefits in relation to those who have not gained an education abroad. Years spent in Europe and America have westernized their taste and they use their positions of power to consciously or unconsciously promote ideas of the West. We can find proof for such ideas in Ifemelu's journalist work for the *Zoe* magazine which serves as an excellent example of how media imperialism reigns in African written media. This magazine, due to a westernized taste of the journalists, and cost-effectiveness, produces articles equivalent to those in the West. The paradox and gap created through such an electronic colonization is manifested in absurdities such as the recommendation by the editor for a Sunday broccoli soup, which is impossible to find on Nigerian markets or writing about clothes most Nigerians cannot afford (Ibid., p. 421). Ifemelu opposes such copying of content from American tabloids and warns of social problems caused by imposing western imperatives in the economic and political environment unfavourable for their realization. In this sense an analogy is created between advertising and prostitution postulating the idea that young women sell their bodies in order to afford what is offered by the media or become *slaves* to rich men for the same reason (Ibid., str. 424). In other words, cultural patterns of Americanized

¹²⁵ In writing her blog, Ifemelu gains a great number of followers which brings her a high income. Here we must note that this blog may be an example of postmodern irony. Although Ifemelu aims to dismantle aesthetic constructs, her blog is funded, among other things, through advertisements showing white *long-necked* models (Adichie 2015: 306). In this sense Ifemelu is aware that her actions are wrong and contradictory, but keeps on with them.

behaviour are removed to an unattainable African subcontext turning the majority population into a mass that fetshizes everything coming from the West. Due to this unachievable consumerism, there is a collective sense of dissatisfaction in Lagos, stemming from the consummation of westernized or colonized media content. Adichie uses an excellent syntagm to name the side-effects of the newly formed social functioning: *addiction culture* (Ibid., str. 424). This does not only mean being addicted to money the African subject needs to acquire in order to buy advertised products under international prices, but being addicted to seeing oneself through western mechanisms, i.e. the total dependence on the West. This is therefore a colonialism mediated through the media which will, unlike the colonialist exploiting human bodies and land, exploit the human mind and thus create a new slavery dynamic of functioning.

8. Conclusion

Through analysing the novel *Americanah*, we have attempted to show the correlation and issue of the African subject and media on two levels. The first one deals with the African immigrant in the U.S. and his reception of those types of media content which open up the spaces for exclusion and xenophobia consequently leading to racism. We analyzed subjective constructs of media representations through the perspective of the protagonist. In this we aimed to show how the metonimization of the African continent in the sense of representing an incomplete picture of objective reality, makes the African immigrant feel like a marginalized and helpless Other in relation to the white man who has been elevated to the level of a humanitarian through media tools, i.e. someone who helps the black man by having the obligation to treat him with compassion and pity. The novel offers a sharp critique of women's magazines and the way they have imposed western aesthetic imperatives. The author negates their content by showing the consequences of insecurity and decentralization such texts may have on the self-perception of non-Western girls and women. As a result of all of this, the novel deals with the westernization of cultural identities of non-Western immigrants and the perception of the African self as the cause for the exclusion from dominant systems, as we have shown in the analysis of suppressing originally adopted cultural patterns in some characters of the novel.

On another level we talked about media imperialism in Nigerian media which is evident in the novel when the protagonist returns to Lagos. Media imperialism, as the newest form of colonialism, results in a decentralized subject torn between a self-reception determined by the West mediated through the media and the objective reality which cannot be framed within such media constructs. We noted several times how the displacement of western cultural patterns to a context which does not offer the possibility of their realization results in a state of general unfulfillment for the consumer of colonized magazines. We attempted to offer various examples of how cultural identities are displaced, how one's self is suppressed and how bodies or cultures are whitened as a result of consuming media which impose strict, models of appearance, thinking and behaviour defined by Western tastes.

The blog written by the protagonist and her journalist work is offered as an opposing narrative to these media practices, and through these the author appeals to a media accepting the heterogeneity of races and cultures and the necessity to adapt content to the needs and possibilities of its consumers. We interpret the metatextual style, i.e. parts of Ifemelu's blog in the narrative tissue of the novel, as a sort of media space for opposing the objectification and construing of the African continent and its population as read, seen and heard in some media.

References:

Sources

Adichie, Chimamanda, Ngozi, *Americanah*, V.B.Z., Zagreb, 2015

Books

McPhail, Thomas L., *Global communication: Theories, stakeholders, and trends*, MA: Blackwell Pub, Malden, 2006

Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Stvarnost, Zagreb, 1968

Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin White Mask*, Pluto Press, Sidmouth, 2008

Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York and London, 2000

Grgas, Stipe, *Writing Space: A Reading of the contemporary American Novel*, Naklada MD, 2000

Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991

Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1999

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, London, 1986

Articles

Akingbe1, Niyi, Adeniyi, Emmanuel, "Reconfiguring Others': Negotiating Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*", in *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Kolkata, 2017, pp. 37-55

Boyd-Barrett, Oliver, "Media Imperialism: Towards an international framework for an analysis of media systems", in *Mass Communication and Society*, ed. Arnold, Edward, London, 1977, pp. 116-135

- Eijaz, Abida, Ejiaz, Ahmad, Rana, "Electronic Colonialism: Outsourcing as Discontent of Media Globalization", in *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Irving, 2011, pp. 134-143
- Guarracino, Serena, "Writing «so raw and true»: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah", in *Between IV.8*, Cagliari, 2015, pp. 1-24
- Mami, Fouad, "Destereotyping African Realities through Social Media in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah and Belkacem Meghouchene's Sophia in the White City", in *Postcolonial Interventions: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Kolkata, 2017, pp. 161-197

Internet sources

- Spivak, Gayatri, Chakravorty: *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, <https://okf-cetinje.org/gajatri-cakravorti-spivak-iz-kritike-postkolonijalnog-uma/> Accessed: 4 September 2018

Pozapadnjivanje i kolonizacija afričkog uma posredstvom medija

Sažetak

Rad problematizira fenomen kolonizacije uma koji je na području Afrike uslijedio završetkom kolonizatorskog sustava. Pozapadnjivanje te napuštanje vlastitih kulturnih obrazaca i preuzimanje zapadnih modela ponašanja uvjetovano je, među ostalim, prodorom zapadnih medija i njihovom nasilnom propagandom. U radu će se analizom romana *Amerikana* (2013) nigerijske autorice Chimamande Ngozi Adichie prikazati kako medijski imperijalizam i elektronički kolonijalizam izmještaju afričke kulturne identitete te će se na primjeru likova iz romana prikazati kako konzumeri takvih sadržaja gubitkom koherentnog identiteta postaju lakomanipulirajuća masa. U radu će se ponuditi odgovor na pitanje o tome koliko su mediji utjecali na fetišizaciju zapadnih vrijednosti, izbjeljivanje kulture te naposljetku gubitak pretkolonijalnih vrijednosti.

Ključne riječi: medijski imperijalizam, teorija elektroničke kolonizacije, rasizam, pozapadnjivanje uma, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.



This journal is open access and this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.