

(Trans) national Simultaneity in Adichie's *Americanah*

Key Words: Diaspora, transnationalism, globalization, simultaneity, Adichie Americanah, transnational identity, and transnational home

Adichie's *Americanah* as I argue is a transnational narrative and its characters transnational subjects. So this paper analyses the novel from a transnational point of view. For accomplishing this thesis, I have brought some of the pertinent theoretical ideas from the broader rubric called transnationalism. In the novel, the Nigerian characters like Ifemelu and Obinze who go across their national borders are represented as the transnational subjects. By representing them as the transnationals, Adichie takes departure from the essentialist ways of understanding identity, home, culture, location and nationality. Throughout the paper, I concentrate on the idea of how and why Adichie represents her characters as the transnational subjects.

Adichie is one of the most critically acclaimed writers of our contemporary time. In her novels, she basically talks about Nigerian people and especially of women. *Americanah* (2013) is her third novel. Perhaps, it was her most critically acclaimed work among others. *The New York Times* selected it as one of ten best books of that year. Likewise, it was also awarded with 2013 National Book Critics Circle Fiction. In *Americanah*, Adichie offers us a wonderful story of Ifemelu and Obinze in one of the Nizarian communities Lagos. Ifemelu and Obinze love to each other seriously but Ifemelu leaves Nigeria for the USA to pursue her educational career. But, Obinze could not follow her as per their plan who leaves for the UK instead. In the USA, Ifemelu is soon to be disillusioned of the dream she had of America as the country of limitless opportunities. She undergoes many problems there. So much so, she is also sexually exploited by a white man. Many white people make different stereotypes about her. Anyways, she could finally be settled in the

adverse environment of the USA. However, even after being well-accommodated there, she decides to return to Nigeria. Overall, the novel recounts the story of Ifemelu and Obinze in Lagos, in their host countries and again back to Lagos. Basically, Adichie narrates Ifemelu's painful process of articulation in the USA who could accommodate herself in a racially harsh country America.

In the novel, different characters willingly leave their homeland. Ifemelu, the protagonist of the fiction, goes beyond her national border of Nigeria to America so as to earn educational and financial security. There is no war or any type of forces that compel her to leave her country of origin. Similarly, Obinze, Ifemelu's Nigerian boyfriend, who is very ambitious and passionate of becoming an American citizen, goes across to England. And, their border crossing experiences make the characters like Ifemelu and Obinze the transnationals. From the host-land, Ifemelu makes different linkages or connections across the border of America to Lagos via different means of telecommunications like email, phone calls, and letters or by sending remittances. Likewise, she also connects herself to Obinze who lives in England. In turn, Obinze also sends money to Ifemelu, writes emails and letters to her frequently and also calls her time and again. So, in *Americanah*, the vibrancy of nation-states borders have been very fragile or porous from where different flows are coming and going continuously.

When Ifemelu leaves her country and starts living in America, she has to tackle many problems. However, she slowly and gradually familiarizes herself there. In America, she lives for about fifteen years becoming a part of American culture while living there, she learns American accents, straightens her braided hair, and adopts some of the American ways of living. And this adoption or assimilation of American cultures for a Nigerian woman brings a shift in her identity. Similarly, in

America, she makes different American friends. So much so, she becomes the girlfriend of the white-American man called Curt. When their love broods, she starts living with Curt as a part of his family members. After some years of her staying in the USA, she also achieves the provision of the American citizenship so that she can stay there as long as she wants. This citizenship also allows her to cast vote in the election. In this regard, she comes to belong to America being a Nigerian girl though. What can be more transnational than a Nigerian girl becoming an integral part of American identity, culture, and politics? Therefore, as I argue that Adichie in *Americanah* represents her characters like Ifemelu as transnational subjects marked by various forms of multiplicities like home, identity, nationality and citizenship. By doing so, Adichie takes a point of departure from the essentialist way of looking at the issues like identity, home, nationality, and culture.

So this novel recounts the story of contemporary Nigerian immigrant experiences through the narrative of young diasporic people like Ifemelu and Obinze. These Nigerian characters voluntarily migrate from their homeland across the border of their country: the experience of migration shapes their identity. In host-land, they undergo the experience of simultaneously belonging to two cultures and nations. On the one hand, they try to accommodate themselves in a new culture while on the other, they follow their own Nigerian way of life. And, this gives birth to a new hybrid subjectivity in *Americanah*. Likewise, the immigrants like Ifemelu have a desire to recreate an image of their homeland in the adverse condition of the host-land. So, they try to maintain their identity based on their memory of home, but at the same time they adopt themselves in a foreign cultural location.

While living in the foreign country, they make different linkages across the border of their country of adoption. For example, Ifemelu sends remittances to her

family, frequently calls them or maintains cross border links to Obinze through emails. So, she reaches out the border through different means of *telecommunications* like phone calls and emails. Not only this much, after some years in the USA, she finally decides to return to Nigeria. In this sense, Adichie portrays the immigrant's capacity to travel back and forth in the age of globalization that is facilitated by advanced technologies. Therefore, the nation-state's borders are very porous in Adichie's *Americanah* since characters like Ifemelu show the capacity to transcend their borders both physically and virtually.

Since the basic purpose of this paper is to examine the novel from the lens of transnationalism, so it is imperative to bring some pertinent ideas from the theory of transnationalism. That is why, in order to back up my arguments, I employ key theoretical concepts by different transnational literary critics like Steven Vertovec, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Jay, Nyla Ali Khan, Natasha Garrett and Nelson Shake etc. Glick Schiller defines transnationalism as "process by which immigrants forge and sustain *simultaneous* multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (qtd. in Garrett 4). This definition emphasizes the term simultaneity suggesting that the transnational people show the capacity of belonging to two societies at the same time. Transnationalism as such was a social phenomena. However, since 1970's, there has been a transnational turn in literary studies. And, the embrace of transnationalism in literary studies has reshaped all existing ways of looking at home, identity, culture, nationality etc. On this basis, I have attempted to explore how Adichie redefines the essentialist ways of looking at the above - mentioned issues.

For accomplishing my research aims, I have chosen to analyze this novel from the lens of transnationalism. The choice of this novel is motivated by the fact that it

focuses on young educated Nigerian people who migrate voluntarily to America or other European countries but make various cross - cultural and cross - border interactions from there to their homeland. So, I decided to choose this text since it is about current flow of cross - border migration and its effects on identity and culture. In this sense, Adichie offers us the issue of cross - border migration which resembles to the situation of our country as well. Similarly, my choice of theory of transnationalism is motivated by the fact that this lens allows me to examine the issue of cross-border migration from a fresh perspective. Moreover, this lens also allows me to view different contemporary issues like identity, home, belonging, nationality and culture in an unprecedented way. And, I have a *motive* of offering a fresh knowledge on this text. Therefore, I hope to contribute academically since I have tried my best to pop up with a fresh knowledge incorporated by a fresh tool.

So far as critical analysis of *Americanah* is concerned, many scholarly critics have come up with their scholarly dissertations and research articles. It is almost undebatable fact that *Americanah* shaped a distinct career for Adichie as a novelist. Many newspapers, articles, and research journals poured their all efforts to analyze the novel from different perspectives. Some critics claimed that the novel is a narrative of migration. Some other focused on the issue of identity and belonging. In this regard, many critics have attempted to interpret the novel by using diaspora theory. While some other critics viewed *Americanah* from the postcolonial perspectives. Likewise, some scholarly researchers analysed this novel from the feminist perspective. So, it can be said that there are an array of critical analysis on the text.

In the article "Journey and return: Visiting unbelonging and otherness in Adichie's *Americanah*", Soheila Arabian and Vida Rahiminezhad review Adichie's

novel *Americanah* from the lens of diaspora. Taking its protagonist Ifemelu as the point of departure, Arabian and Vida analyze Ifemelu's diasporic sense of unbelonging, anxiety, displacement and her final return to her own homeland. Arabian and Vida well clarify these concepts by bringing some theoretical concepts from diaspora theory. They choose William Safran, James Clifford, Khaching Toloyan as the major theorists. Based on their ideas, Vida and Arabian suggested major four characteristics of diaspora theory: displacement, belonging, otherness and return. In the article, they develop their argument by saying, "immigrants leave their country of origin towards west with a hope of making a new home but racial discrimination in western societies alienates them as other and brings them a sense of unbelonging which affects their decisions considering the issues of return" (536). This shows that for the African people like Ifemelu, America gives more pain instead of helping them to materialize their dreams of success.

Firstly, Vida and Arabian regard "displacement as the most important aspect of diaspora" (537). In order to be a diasporic subject, one has to be displaced (either voluntarily or involuntarily) from their original Centre to at least two peripheral places" (537). Then, the diasporic subject starts maintaining a "memory, vision or myth about their original homeland" (537). In the novel as well, Ifemelu has been dispersed from her place of origin i.e., from her homeland to the USA that later on engenders a sense of unbelonging, alienation and anxiety due to racial discriminations: "Discrimination and racial issues alienate her as a black which brings her a sense of unbelonging toward America, consequently, she returns to her African origin and reveals her sense of belonging toward Nigeria" (538). As a diaspora, Vida and Arabian argue, Ifemelu is otherized in the USA since the "original settlers do not accept [her] and discriminate [her] as different inferiors so for diaspora people there

is always a sense of alienation while living in the host-land” (539). In this sense, Ifemelu can be taken as a diasporic subject who suffers a lot in the host-land and finally returns to Nigeria. So, Vida and Arabians aim at discussing the novel from diasporic perspectives. And, in order to achieve their aim, they brought some theoretical concepts from diaspora studies.

In one scholarly review of the novel, Sarala Krishnamurthy tries to point out some of the issues that Adichie raises in the novel. Krishnamurthy takes *Americanah* as a novel that belongs to “the diasporic literature genre” (54). According to her, it is a diasporic text that incorporates the themes of “homelessness, nostalgia, sense of alienation, a deep longing for mother/ fatherland, an unreasonable clinging to tradition . . .” (54). So, the novel proves to be a diasporic text that deals with the emotional and mental changes of its eponymous heroine Ifemelu. Krishnamurthy also talks about the issues of race in the novel. In a nutshell, the novel, according to Krishnamurthy is a perfect diasporic text that can appeal people from all countries.

In her article, “Writing ‘so raw and true’. Blogging in Adichie’s *Americanah*”, Serena Guarracino attempts to analyze the novel from the postcolonial perspective by linking it with media discourse. Previous to her, the novel was interpreted from postcolonial perspective— the focus was solely on the language of resistance. Not only this much, in the early form of postcolonial literature, the emphasis was also on language as the most powerful tool of resistance. But, Guarracina tries to explore the changes taking place in the field of postcolonial literature by exploring the technological dimension in the postcolonial writings. She claims, “*Americanah* offers a good case study for some reflections on the role of technology in writing and especially on the global resonance of postcolonial writing” (2). This shows that Guarracina studies the changes taking place in the field of postcolonial literature.

Besides, Guarracina also describes the changes taking place in the postcolonial narratives. To exemplify, she takes this novel as a new form of hybrid narrative: a novel in which the main narrative is followed by blog narratives. Guarracina argues that the early form of postcolonial literature has been changed significantly along with the technological advancement in the once colonized countries like Nizeria. So, she argues, "contemporary writers are part and parcel of such cultural and commercial landscape" (6). And, Adichie is fully aware of the shifts taking places in her cultural milieu.

Guarracino consents that Adichie makes a social commentary in the novel but the way she does it is different. Since she is using the blog as a metanarratives device: "[Adhichie] wanted this novel to also be social commentary, but [she] wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction" (2). It is because of the use of an African blogger and also the use of blog as the metanarrative device that she could tell the story differently. That is why, the novel is no other types of postcolonial text. Taking this idea under consideration, Sarah Brouillette rightly argues that the novel needs a "responsible reading of postcolonial text" (qtd. in Guarracino 4). Therefore, Adichie, unlike other postcolonial writers, does not only focus on linguistic aspects rather also focuses on different cultural products that African youths use these days, style and the increment in digital literacy like the use of blog and internet by most of the Nigerian people.

In a dissertation entitled *Representation of Female African Immigrant Experience in the West: A Case Study of Chimamanda Adhichie's Amercianah*, Koseki Margaret Chepkorir sets out to interrogate the challenges faced by female African immigrants as reflected in this novel. Not only this much, this research also compares and contrasts the male and female experiences of African immigrants in the

West and also analyzes the author's vision on African immigrants. In order to achieve the desired effect, she uses "African feminism" as a theoretical framework that enables her to show different set of experiences of African female immigrants that cannot be adequately told by the mainstream feminism. Besides, she also shows the "complicity" between several factors like race, gender and class that aggravates the female immigrant's situation in the USA: She writes that her paper "explores how social tensions like racial discrimination and stereotyping alongside economic hardships are presented through writing on immigrants" (1). Chepkorir agrees that the African immigrants like Ifemelu and Obinze have to be suffered a lot in the foreign land. They have to be the victims of different types of stereotypes and racial discrimination.

Especially, the African females are doubly marginalized in the USA. So, Chepkorir firstly deals with the first challenge namely "racism" (97). The African female have to be the victims of racial prejudices among the whites. Not only this much, she argues that the African women also become the victims of "patriarchy" (98). But, what is the strong aspect of her argument is that she also deals with the way females in the novel handle the challenges by "creating social networks to enable fellow female immigrants to navigate their way in the host-country" (99). Likewise, another strong aspect that she makes in a course of the discussion is that she also scrutinizes Adichie's vision regarding the African youths. She argues, "Adichie uses the return narrative to collapse stereotypes of African as an inhospitable continent and Africans as a people who have no attachment to African and prefer to settle in the west as immigrants whether legally or illegally for that matter. Adichie debunks this myth by using characters that portray Africa as a place worth returning to and where

one can achieve success." (100). In this sense, we can say that Chepkorir's study of this novel seems to be very thorough.

In the article entitled "To Be from the Country of People Who Gave: National Allegory and the United State of Adichie's *Americanah*," One famous literary critic Katherine Hallemeier reads this novel in a unique way. It is almost evident that most of the critics focus on the different problems like alienation, fragmentation, identity crisis etc., of the Nigerian immigrants like Ifemelu. But, Hallemeier goes beyond such type of sympathetic reading of Ifemelu and Obinze. She argues in a thought provoking way:

I also argue, contra Franklin, that it is American citizens, and not Nigerians, who become objects of sympathy in Adichie's book. By assuming the economic and political privilege of its Nigerian protagonists and pitying Americans for their limited opportunities, *Americanah* presents an alternative, utopic vision of global power in which the united states stands as a foil to the promising future of late Nigerian capitalism. (232)

From these lines, Hallemeier's different perspective to view the novel can be justified. She does not take the Nigerian characters like Ifemelu and Obinze as worthy of sympathy so much as she posits them as self-centered and selfish who finally adopt the global wave of capitalism. Ifemelu's movement to America, according to Hallemeier, is not an act of identity crisis rather this movement offers Ifemelu an immense economic success. Hallemeier concludes arguing that this novel "lacks the wholesale condemnation of global capitalism" (248) rather Adichie celebrates it.

The above critical analyses show that many critics have approached the text in several ways. As discussed already that Vida and Arabian analyzed *Americanah* from diasporic lens. They argue that Ifemelu is a diasporic subject who characterizes four

basic features of being diasporic: displacement, unbelonging, otherness, and return. While another critic Guarracino analyzes the novel from postcolonial study linking it with media discourse. Guarracino claims *Americanah* as a different type of postcolonial text that does not just entail a language of resistance so much as the digitally literate Nigerian characters like Ifemelu. Likewise, Chepkorir examines the novel from the lens of African Feminism who posits that the African women like Ifemelu have to be the part of widespread racial and gender discrimination in the foreign land. In spite of this too, they try to maintain a bond among the women so as to fight the injustices. Thus, there is an array of critical overview on *Americanah*. In this regard, I found out that critics just try to analyze Adichie's *Americanah* from either diasporic studies or feminism or postcolonial studies. However, no research has been done analyzing *Americanah* from transnational perspective which I am going to carry out in this paper. Thanks to all articles on *Americanah* which enabled me to know the existing knowledge on *Americanah* so that I could establish a niche. And, I am going to fill this niche by scrutinizing *Americanah* from the lens of transnationalism. For this, I have brought theoretical ideas from some of the prominent transnational critics namely Steven Vertovec, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Jay, Natasha Garrett and Nelson Shake. Besides, I have also brought some of the pertinent ideas from other articles and books on transnationalism.

The novel addresses some of the transnational issues of our contemporary time. The time that novel represents is of advanced telecommunications and transportations. A person can connect himself or herself beyond the nation's boundary. Living in their rooms, people can reach out and travel throughout the world virtually. Likewise, people can travel physically in just few minutes with the help of transportations. Hence, the world has been what Marshal MacLuhan calls, "the global

village” resulted from the compression of time and space (164). So the time that Adichie shows in the novel is the age of globalization. And, this novel articulates the idea of how the cross border migration looks like in the age of globalization. Natasha Garret claims, “A better way of understanding migration in the context of globalization is by reconceptualizing it as transnational migration” (4). And this novel also concentrates on the immigrants like Ifemelu who makes different linkages across the borders with the help of different means of technologies. Steven Vertovec, one of the major thinker on transnationalism, argues, “New technologies are at the heart of today’s transnationalism” (5). Adichie emphasizes on cross border connections of people facilitated by new technologies that makes the novel a transnational narrative.

The novel is a transnational narrative since Adichie is fully aware about the milieu of technological changes and its effect on the immigrants lives: “At first the immigrants wrote infrequent letters, but as cybercafés opened, cell phones spread and Facebook flourished, they communicated more often” (Adichie 14). This shows that Adichie’s way of looking at the issue of cross border migration is transnational since her major focus is on the cross connections of people: both physical and virtual. So as a transnational narrative, this novel focuses on the mobility facilitated by internet-mediated communication technologies: email and phone calls. In other words, this novel evokes the virtual world by referring to online services like smartphones and social media. So with this shift in the understanding of mobility, the immigrants’ lives have been analyzed differently.

The idea of mobility occupies an important place in the literature of transnationalism. Previously, in the colonial period mobility was conceptualized as the physical movement of people from one territory to another. However, the rise of transnational literature has reconceptualized the notion of mobility. In the era of

globalization, the world across the local is easily accessible virtually as well. Being physically present in one country too, the people can easily reach beyond or become mobile virtually as well. Sheller and Urry argue, “The new mobility paradigm currently manifesting itself in social and human sciences highlights the multiplicity of forms that mobility takes” (212). They continue arguing that in addition to human physical travel, these include the physical movement of objects, imaginative travel, and virtual travel via the Internet and communicative travel, person to person messages through different media. So physical mobility has been shadowed by virtual mobility in the wake of transnational turn and Adichie also involves in articulating this very idea. The novel contains one character called Ginika, Ifemelu’s friend living in the US, who not only has regular contacts across the border, rather she frequently sends different physical or tangible objects across the border: “Ginika had lapsed into Nigerian English, a dated, overlooked version, eager to prove how unchanged she was. She had with a strenuous loyalty, kept in touch through the years: calling and writing letters and sending books and shapeless trousers she called slacks across America” (Adichie 123). In this regard, Ginika’s effect reaches out the border both virtually and physically.

Adichie represents the characters like Ifemelu and Obinze in nexus to the use of telecommunications like email and phone calls. Ifemelu and Obinze are the Nigerian immigrants who reach beyond the national boundaries and can make different types of linkages to their homeland in spite of living physically in the host-land. As for an instance, Obinze continuously connects with Ifemelu across the national border: “Obinze, so like him to have an explanation. Obinze, who anchored her through that summer of waiting- his steady voice over the phone, his long letters in blue airmail envelopes” (Adichie 119). That is why Obinze is a transnational

subject who has strong bonds across Nigeria to America. Not only this much, those immigrants can travel their homes back intermittently. Natasha Garret, one of the scholar on literary transnationalism, avers,

The relative ease of communication and travel allowed by the modern technologies advances, propelled the age of globalization . . . migrants become more increasingly able to travel their home country, communicate frequently with people back home, or engage in cultural or business ventures while, at the same time integrating into the host society. (4-5)

Here, Garret focuses on the idea of living or engaging into two countries simultaneously. In few pages, my prime focus is on Garret's above-mentioned idea that enables me to see how the transnational people can live two countries simultaneously.

Adichie especially choses email and cell phones by means of which Ifemelu reaches out virtually across the boundaries: "Later that day she would send an email to Obinze's Hotmail address: Ceiling I don't even know how to state I ran into Keyode today . . . I have missed you and I miss you" (Adichie 224). And Obinze also receives different emails sent by Ifemelu: "that evening he receives an email from Ifemelu . . . I will tell you everything that happened. I have missed you and I miss you" (237). In this regard, telecommunications like email has a crucial presence in the novel. Adichie uses the word email more than two hundred times. This use of email like technologies have enabled the immigrants like Ifemelu to make connections across the borders. That is why Ifemelu is a transnational subject. Ifemelu involves into the process of simultaneity since being physically present in America too, she makes virtual connections out of America at the same time. So, she has two presences simultaneously: physical and virtual. Paul Jay, probably the most influential figure in

the field of literary transnationalism, puts forward his argument that transnational people “live their lives in the literal and virtual spaces, between nations, perpetually in transit between two locations” (178). And Ifemelu exemplifies what Jay argues in these lines.

In the last part of chapter thirty four, we can find Ifemelu talking to her family members from America. She can travel across thousands of miles from America instantaneously or in a blink of eyes. She almost informs them each and everything, She told her parents about Blaine, that she was leaving Baltimore and moving to New Haven to live with him. She could have lied, invented a new job, or simply said she wanted to move. ‘His name is Blaine’, she said. ‘He is an American.’

She heard the symbolism in her own words, travelling thousands of miles to Nigeria, and she knew what her parents would understand . . . she used that word in describing him: ‘good’.

‘An American Negro?’ her father asked, sounding baffled.

Ifemelu burst out laughing. ‘Daddy, nobody says Negro any more’.

‘But why a Negro? Is there a substantive scarcity of Nigerians there?’

She ignored him, still laughing, and asked to give her mother the phone . . . because she lived in America. Rules had shifted, fallen into the cracks of distance and foreignness. (314)

This paragraph shows that transnational people like Ifemelu can go beyond the nation-state’s borders with their virtual presences in their homelands. From America, their homeland Nigeria becomes a virtual space to visit in the few minutes. And, this mobility has been possible because of the technological turn of globalization.

Throughout the novel, Adichie emphasizes the cross border connections of different characters. With this regard, chapter 42 is the most remarkable. In this

chapter, characters like Obinze and Ifemelu are represented as being able to reach beyond the nation's borders and able to connect across the borders: "Obinze checked his Blackberry often, too often, even when he got up at night to go to the toilet, and although he mocked himself, he could not stop checking . . . He tried Facebook Kosi was active on Facebook. He had at first been excited by Facebook. Ifemelu's reply to his email came an hour later. Her email made him happy . . . she had asked for his number. She could not feel so strongly about his mother . . . so he wrote to her again giving her all of his phone numbers, his three mobile phones, his office phones and his home landline" (369-370). These lines justify the fact that Ifemelu and Obinze are the transnationals who keep in "touch" (371) with each other in Adichie's words irrespective of where they are and how far they are. One transnational critic Janah Ramzani argues that in the age of transnationalism, "space and time have contracted; even more people have travelled and migrated; technology and communication system have circulated ideas, images and voices across distant locales" (6). Ramazani's theoretical ideas back up my argument that Ifemelu and Obinze exemplify the ethos of transnationalism who keep in touch with each other in spite of being far away from each other. And this cross border connection of people is the main focus of literary transnationalism.

Ifemelu keeps in touch with her family members by sending remittances across the American border to Nigeria. When Ifemelu earns some money, she sends them to her family. When Ifemelu says to Mariama about her departure to Nigeria, Mariama asks Ifemelu to send money instead of going there: "Better you send money back. Unless your father is a big man? You have connections" (16). So, in spite of having the physical presence in America too, she affects the Nigeria economy. Similarly, when she falls in the economic problems in the beginning, Obinze also

helps her by sending money across the Nigerian border to America; "Obinze offered to send her some money. 'How can you be sending me money from Nigerian? It should be the other way around' she said. But, he sent it to her anyways, a little over a hundred dollars carefully sealed in a card" (145).

Therefore, even the sealed money in a card can also travel from one country to another country that pertains some cross border flows. In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai talks about five types of global flows. Among them, "finance scapes" is one of the "global flows" (33). This concept of finance scapes refers to the economic flows that goes across one country to another. And, the remittances Ifemelu sends from American to Nigeria is the best example of finance scapes. Appadurai postulates that the emergence of such scapes is because of the "eruption of electronic media and migration" (3).

Likewise, this novel also entails different characters travelling to and fro in the globalized world. Ifemelu's parent instantly enters America in a few minutes to meet her daughter who works and studies there: "And, so Ifemelu sent them invitation letters, bank statements, a copy of her green card. The American embassy was better now: the staff was still rude, her father said . . . They came for three weeks. They seemed like strangers" (301). In this sense, Adichie's parents have been the temporary visitors in the USA in Jay's words, Ifemelu's parent characterize "the fluidity of movement across the border" (9). And, this people's capacity of moving freely here and there is one of the most important feature of transnationalism. Jay taking the novels like Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and other transnational texts of migration, writes, "All these novels underscore how the structure and rhythm of migration is changing as globalization accelerates . . . a traditional form of migration to the USA and a new form of

migration in which individuals and families move back and forth constantly between their home and adopted countries” (177). The characters like Ifemelu are represented as capable of moving here and there. And this people’s capacity of moving easily between more than two countries make them the transnational subjects. The transnational critics call this type of capacity as the new form of mobility. Anna Leena Toicanen rightly points out that “New technologies democratize mobility by enabling forms of travel that are not limited to physical movement. Yet one should not be too enthusiastic about their laboratory potentials” (no pag.). This shows that new means have changed the idea of mobility these days and this has a vital effect on the immigrant’s lives. This is because they can travel easily from the host-land to their homeland. And this immigrant’s capacity of travelling easily between two spaces is one of the most important feature of transnationalism. This novel is also remarkable to represent this new form of mobility in the age of globalization. That is why it is one of the best examples of transnational narrative.

Likewise, Ifemelu has also the potentiality to move around the transnational space. She is represented as having the ability to freely go back Nigeria from the U.S.A. and again return to the U.S.A. from Nigeria. As she got American citizenship, she can easily travel between the homeland and host-land: “Ifemelu’s blue American passport shielded her from choicelessness. She could leave Nigeria: she did not have to stay” (389). Because of her American passport, Ifemelu can move freely not only between Nigeria and the U.S.A. but also around the world. During her relationship with Curt, her boyfriend, Ifemelu often travels out of the country: “her passport filled with visa stamps” which allows her to go wherever she wishes (200). Jay posits that transnationalism is a “model of migration characterized by the back-and-forth movement of people across borders” (12). This shows that transnational people move

back-and-forth transcending the nation-state's borders. From the above-mentioned textual quotation from the novel and Jay's theoretical back up, it has been overt that Ifemelu epitomizes the ethos of transnational subject for whom borders have been very "porous" (Shake 8). Thomas Faist also reinforces this very mobility and networks. As already done textual discussion, it is clear that Adichie focuses on both mobility and networks.

So far I have tried to show how the novel articulates the ideas of transnationalism. For this I have brought some textual supports and also backed them up with the pertinent theoretical ideas. And this transnational analysis paves an avenue for me to further my analysis of how this novel takes departure from the narrative of diaspora. This is because Adichie incorporates the cross-border connection in the age of globalization. Diaspora is the very much localized study of the immigrants. It just tries to examine how the displaced people or immigrants adopt themselves in a new territory. However, transnationalism examines the way immigrants adopt themselves and makes connections across the border. Diaspora is especially a study of ethnic group living away from their country of origin whereas transnationalism is the study of an individual migrants. Likewise diaspora is the study of permanent form of migration whereas transnationalism is the study of temporary migrants. Natasha Garret in her comprehensive study of transnationalism distinguishes diaspora from transnationalism:

I chose to use the term transnationalism in my study, as opposed to diaspora as diaspora is often used synonymously with transnational community, and much like transnationalism, is somewhat overused or used inadequately. Levitt (2012) defines diaspora as groups who were forcibly expelled from their homelands and who remain socially marginal in societies that received them

as they waited to return . . . Faist (2000) argues that the term diaspora is appropriate only if the group has suffered a traumatic experience. Diaspora can become a transnational community only if they develop an attachment to the host country. (6-7)

This paragraph clarifies the idea that transnationalism differs from the literature of diaspora in some respects. As shown in the paragraph, unlike diaspora, transnationalism especially focuses on the study of voluntary migration. Although diaspora also talks about the involuntary and voluntary types of cross-border migration. However, its prime focus is on the involuntary type. So transnationalism and diaspora differ only in emphasis. And the characters like Ifemelu migrate voluntarily not forcibly: “As teenagers in Lagos secondary school, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Ifemelu departs for America to study . . . she suffers when Ifemelu decides to return home, she and Obinze will face the hardest decision of their lives” (221). This shows that Ifemelu has left her homeland so as to pursue her higher education not because she was forced by someone to leave. It is Obinze who cherishes a dream of being the American citizen. There is not any compulsory forces that trigger him to leave his homeland. He belongs to the middle class people. He spends standard life among the Nigerians. Yet he firmly pines for going America: “But for Obinze, ‘It had always been America. A longing matured and nursed over many years . . . Days after he graduated from university, bloated with knowledge about America, he applied for a visa at the American embassy in Lagos” (233). Here it is obvious that Obinze like young Nigerian youths do not leave their countries forcefully like the African and Nigerian slaves who were forced to abandon their countries. In this sense, this narrative turns out to be transnational in nature. Henceforth, it is imperative to claim that in the novel, Adichie occupies an important space in the narrative of

transnationalism by taking departure from diaspora studies. In the first part of my analysis I tried to show that Adichie's main focus is on the cross border connections of people. And this focus has made this novel a transnational narrative.

Thomas Faist in his essay "Diaspora and Transnationalism: what kind of Dance Partner?" also points out the subtle differences between two of them:

Although both terms refer to cross border process, diaspora has been often used to define religious or national groups living outside an imagined homeland, whereas transnationalism is often used 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 organizations. (9)

This paragraph shows that the prime focus of transnationalism is on the cross border ties. And as shown in my above analysis that Adichie fully focuses on the cross border ties that Ifemelu makes from the U.S.A. to Nigeria.

Both Diaspora studies and transnational studies examine what happens to people when they have to move from one territory to another one. Yet there are some differences as well. The former focuses on the idea of integration while the latter on cross border engagement. Diaspora studies supposes that the immigrants can and have to adopt or accommodate themselves fully in the host-country. This is because they have no option to return their homeland. Since their homeland is just a kind of the imagined land from where they were expelled forcefully. The diasporic study does not try to point out the connections that the immigrants make to their home country from the host-countries since it believes that the immigrants have already left their home countries with a little hope of returning. But transnationalism expands the horizon of diasporic study by examining the lacunae of diaspora study. Garret also takes this idea

under consideration: “Transnationalism challenges the idea of Diaspora studies that sees immigrant not as permanent relocation from one country to another, a process that was always culminated into full assimilation. The authors suggest that a better way of understanding migration in the context of globalization is by reconceptualizing it as transnational migration”(4). Adichie too reconceptualizes migration in a transnational ways.

Thus diaspora is the study of permanent form of migration which supposes that immigrant leave their home countries not for 3-4 years but for forever who have the capacity to fully adopt themselves in the host country. But unlike the diaspora, transnationalism is the study of the temporary migrants in the age of globalization. Nowadays many youths from the formerly colonized countries are leaving their countries for the U.S.A. or U.K. or other developed countries for their study or earning money. And they stay in the host countries for some years until they finish their study. In the novel, Ifemelu and Obinze are not the permanent migrants so much as they migrate to America only for some years to earn money and study. One of the officers in the American embassy says to Obinze, “That should get you a six months visa you can stay with Nicholas in London see what you can do with your life. Maybe you can get to America from there . . . I know that your mind is no longer here” (Adichie 234). So Obinze is getting a temporary visa to England from where he can enter the USA. Similarly Adichie also renders Ifemelu as the temporary migrant: “What if she got back to Lagos and realized what a mistake it was to move back? Even the thought that she could always return to America did not comfort her as much as she wished if to be” (Adichie 188). In this sense, Ifemelu is a transnational who can move here and there for they do not stay in one place permanently. So, Ifemelu and Obinze are not the diasporic subjects so much as they are the transnationals during

their staying in the host countries, they also make different ties across the host country. As for example, they keep in touch with their family members through Facebook, phone calls or skype. They also send remittances to their homeland as well. And they finally return to their homeland after some years. And transnational studies analyzes this type of immigrants which make it different from the study of diaspora. Faist comes up with the idea of “longue duree” (22) to talk about the difference between diaspora and transnationalism.

Another important difference between diaspora and transnationalism is that the former is one-dimensional whereas the latter one is two-dimensional. The diaspora focuses on the activities of people just in the host countries whereas transnationalism focuses on the immigrants activities in both the host and home countries simultaneously. In Faist’s words, diaspora looks what the immigrants do “here” in the host countries whereas the transnationalism looks both “here and there” at the same time:”Yet few studies have systematically analyzed the role of migrant’s organizations in promoting that dual process of sustaining political actions here and there as a simultaneous venture- simultaneity as being one of the main characteristics of transnational approaches” (30-31).And I have already talked abundantly about how Adichie incorporates the idea of simultaneity in the novel. That is why, her narrative becomes a distinct transnational which goes beyond the diasporic narrative as well.

In an article “The Dynamics of Migrants’ Transnational Formations: Between Mobility and Locality,” Janine Dahiden elaborates the distinction between transnationalism and diaspora studies. Dahindel comes up with two terminologies: mobility and locality to clarify the transnational studies. According to him, mobility is “the virtual movement of people in transnational space” (51) whereas locality means “being rooted politically, socially, and economically in the country of immigration”

(51). And diaspora study just takes the idea of locality under consideration since it is the much localized study of the immigrants in the metropolis. It just examines how the immigrants incorporate themselves in the host-country. However transnational studies also looks at the issue of mobility. At the same time, transnationalism also takes the idea of locality under consideration. Dahinden avers, “Looking at transnational formations as the effect of the combination of these two dimensions—mobility and locality” (51). This shows that transnationalism is not the opposite of diaspora studies so much as it is the expansion of diaspora studies which extensively looks at the issue of migration in the age of globalization. And I have already offered some of the textual justifications to show how Adichie’s protagonist Ifemelu represents both aspects that is mobility and locality simultaneously.

This novel contains many characters who have the capacity of having two identities simultaneously. Ifemelu exemplifies this idea who upon leaving Nigeria becomes an American as well. So her border crossing experience has redefined her monolithic or singular identity. Nelson Shake points out the complexity that is going in the field of identity in the heyday of transnationalism: “While transnationalism focuses on issues of identity . . . [it] examines identity on a much larger scale by discussing the changes that are happening to the structure of the nation and how that affect people” (9). From these lines, it is clear that in the age of transnationalism, identity has been complex and multi-layered. Garret too agrees that the transnational turn in literary studies has “reconceptualized the concepts of home, language, family and identity” (4). Adichie too represents her transnational characters as having multiple identities simultaneously.

Before moving to the USA, Ifemelu was Nigerian. But as she crosses the Nigerian border to enter America, her identity becomes hybrid. In order to

accommodate herself in the American society, she has to follow the American way of living; on the other hand as a Nigerian, she cannot relinquish her Nigerian self. In the beginning, she seems to be hesitating to accept the American cultures. Wambui, Ifemelu's friend says to Ifemelu, "very soon you will start to adopt an American accent . . . you will start to admire Africans who have perfect American accents like our brothers here" (140). After some times in the USA, she adopts American accents: "And the following weeks, as autumn coolness descends, she begins to practice an American accents [and] she hungered to understand everything about America" (134-135). After some months, she starts sounding like an American. One of Ifemelu's friends remarks about Ifemelu, "Wow. Cool. You sound totally American" (175). Not only this much she also straightens her hair. Previously, she had braided her hair. But while living in USA she relaxed her hair and also removes her braid:

Since she came to America, she had always braided her hair with long extensions, always alarmed at how much it cost. She wore each style for three months, even four months until her scalp itched unbearably and the braids sprouted fuzzily from a bed of new frown so it was a new adventure, relaxing her hair. She removed her braids, careful to leave her scalp unscratched, to leave undisturbed the dearth that would protect it. Relaxers had grown in their range . . . the hair dresser said, 'But you look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you have got the white girl swing!' her hair was hanging down rather than standing u, straight and sleek. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She did not recognize herself . . . [now] she would be a wonderful fit in the company, she wondered if the woman would have felt the same way had she walked into that office wearing her thick, kinky, God-given halo of hair, the Afro. She did not tell her parents how she found the job; her father said, 'I

have no doubt that you will excel. America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them, “while her mother began to sing when Ifemelu said that, in a few years, she could become an American citizen. (203-5)

This paragraph shows how Ifemelu’s identity marker has been changed in America. Although she tries her not to adopt the American cultures, yet she has to since in the age of transnationalism, every so-called pure idea has been contaminated; “there are no such things as pure, autonomous cultures that are not ‘contaminated’” (Jay 3). Ifemelu’s previously existing pure Nigerian identity has been contaminated because of her border crossing experiences. Adichie herself says, “Everything is conflicted, identity this identity that” (22)

Originally, Ifemelu has Nizerian identity yet her border-crossing experiences challenge this identity since as she goes across her country to the USA, she is often tagged as American. This can well be seen in Ifemelu's talk with one of the telemarketer:

The telemarketer is talking to Ifemelu

'May I ask who I'm talking to?'

'My name is Ifemelu.'

He repeated her name with exaggerated care. 'Is it a French name?'

'No Nigerian.'

'That where your family come from?'

'Yes' she scoped the eggs onto a plate.

'I grew up three.'

'Oh, really? How long have you been in the US?'

'Three years'

'Now cool you sound totally American.'

'Thank you'. (173-74)

This conversation shows that Ifemelu, though a Nigerian woman, comes to be the American who has as perfect accent is the original American. So, her identity becomes complex and multi-layered.

On the one hand, Ifemelu has developed the American self. But, at the same time, she can sometimes switch into her American self." They hugged, looked at each other lapsing into their Nigerian voices and their Nigerian selves, louder, more heightened adding 'O' to their sentences" (222). This shows that Ifemelu is not only a Nigerian but also American at the same time. Arjun Appadurai argues that simple national storyline is out-dated since the new transnational identity is "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" which "centre -periphery models" cannot explain sufficiently (6). Ifemelu's identity becomes complex and overlapping as she moves from Nigerian cultural territory to the USA's. This cross-border experience gives birth to a new hybrid identity that is at issue with the so-called Central American or the peripheral Nigerian identity.

In Homi K. Bhabha's words, Adichie involves in the production of "hybrid identity (qtd. in *Reder*, 208). The term hybridity refers to the creation of a new cross-cultural forms like identity. Chris Baker informs that Bhabha takes such hybrid identity as a "Third self that destabilize and blur the fixed cultural boundaries" (202). Ifemelu's transnational identity is also a third self since it neither belongs to the American nor to the African identity. Rather, it is somewhere in between.

As Ifemelu returns from America, she also has to be recognized as both American and Nigerian. In this very regard, her friends use one slang word "Americanah" to refer to her transnational hybrid identity: "Ameicanah!" Ranyinudo

teased her often. You are looking at the things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real American. At least you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!” (386). Here it is obvious to claim that if someone leaves his/her country to live in others country, their identity markers shift significantly. Jay also points out the nexus between the location and identity. He analyzes the novel *White Teeth* and claims that there is the “relationship between identity and location, how place and displacement route identity, organizes itself around the desire for a space free of historical context and struggle . . .” (168). Ifemelu is originally Nigerian. However upon returning from America after fifteen years, she has been American as well. In Jay’s words, as a transnational subject Ifemelu engages herself in “the production of hybrid subjectivities and cultural practices” (104).

So much so Ifemelu is also called “madam America” (385). But she is Nigerian also. Adichie herself comments on Ifemelu’s position as one of the American returnees: “She could possibly spoke with a teenage American accent that made her sentences sound like question, except for when she was speaking to her mother on the phone; then her English took on a flat, stolid Nigerianness” (402). This textual quotation proves Ifemelu’s double identities: one Nigerian and another American. So much so many of her friends pass some of remarks on her American self: “In the car Ranyinudo said, ‘Taking to your new boss like that . . . you had come from, America, she would have fired you immediately . . . But he relaxed when I told him you come from America’ he added” (393). All these textual analyses are the proofs that everyone’s border crossing experience challenges the pure national identity since identity is “constantly shifting and fluid experience” in Nyla Ali Khan’s words (44). Khan analyzes Salman Rushdie’s novels who talks about the futility of

searching the pure national identity in the age of transnationalism. He argues, “one of the most absurd aspects of this quest for national authenticity is that it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such thing as pure unalloyed tradition from which to draw” (qtd. in Khan 25). Thus in the age of cross-border migration, the idea of pure identity loses its vibrancy since the immigrants develop the hybrid forms of identity.

So far it has been clear that this novel has popped up with a transnational definition of identity. Likewise, Adichie also redefines the traditional notion of home and family. She replaces the idea that a person can have only stable home and just one family with the transnational understanding of home and family. Natasha Garret in “Finding One’s Place in the World: Transnationalism and the Notion of Home” clarifies what the home and family are for the transnational people:

The redefined concept of immigration has pushed for reconsideration of the concept of home. Home has been traditionally conceptualized as a fixed place; being at home means being stationary, centered bounded, fitted, engaged and grounded. In the context of transnational migration, the connection between home and place becomes problematic. This is because transnationals travel a lot (many of them don’t) or live in more than one place . . . with the conception of the so-called ‘astronaut families’ . . . some people living for economic and educational purposes. (46)

This shows that transnationalism has brought changes in notions like home and family. Ifemelu establishes two homes and has also two families simultaneously that make her a transnational subject.

Ifemelu establishes her home away from her real and original home. She has her real and original home and family back in Nigeria. But She has her mother and father in Lagos where she really feels home: “[Ifemelu] thought: I’m really home. I’m

home” (411). Similarly, she is excited about her family in Lagos: “still, she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She has, finally, spun herself fully in being” (475). This shows that Ifemelu has her real home and family in Lagos. She really becomes happy and nostalgic as well with her family members in Lagos:

She spent weekends with her parents in the old flat [of Lagos], happy simply to sit and look at the walls that had witnessed her childhood; only when she began to eat her mother’s stew, an oil layer floating on top of the poured tomatoes, did she realize how much she had missed it. (397)

So Ifemelu has her one home and one family in Lagos to which she feels sentimental about.

But after going across the Nigerian territory to American, she comes to establish another ‘astronaut families’. This notion of astronaut family in transnationalism refers to the temporary family established by the temporary immigrants like Ifemelu.

For example, in the USA, Ifemelu has well established herself as she has in Nigeria. She gets love from Blaine, an American citizen, whom she lives with like his family member. Although they are not married to each other, yet they consider each other as the family member. Ifemelu informs his parents about Blaine and says that she has been a family member of Blaine's house; "She told her parents about Blaine that she was leaving Baltimore and moving to New Haven to live with him. ‘His name is Blaine,’ she said 'He's an American" (314).

Ifemelu as a Nigerian woman too, could well settle and establish herself in the USA. For Ifemelu, America has become as familiar as Nigeria because she has support from Blaine, her boyfriend whom she is living with in the same apartment or

house. So, Ifemelu also feels home there in the USA because she gets warm love and care by Blaine: “Her blog was doing well, with thousand of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she has a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blaine 'you are the absolute love of my life' he'd written on her last birthday” (6). Therefore, Ifemelu has her newly established home in the USA whereas she has her "ancestral home" (Adichie 176) back in Lagos. Garret also claims that the transnational individuals have two or more than two homes and families:

Out of all social relations, the ones among immediate family members are central to the lives of most people, for better or for worse. For transnational individuals, having the immediate family members in the new country can transform the new dwelling into a home: 'Immediate family, spouse or partner, and children, situated and physically present in a certain place, all constitute a focal point for mobile individuals. Immediate family is so important because it gives a feeling of stability, an unchanging element in a life full of changes. (48)

This paragraph illustrates the fact that the transnational individual can have two homes at the same time: their original home and immediate home. The immediate home and family that they establish in their host country is so important that provides them with the emotional security.

Ifemelu has her immediate home and family in American whereas she has her original home back in Lagos: But, Ifemelu is more emotionally attached to her original home: “Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. And, of course, there was also Obinze, her lover, the only person with whom she had never felt the need to explain herself” (6).

This paragraph illustrates the idea that Ifemelu has more emotional propensity towards her original home. Thus, for Ifemelu, Nigeria is her original homeland where she has all her loved ones. But, in America too, she also has her home and family.

And, as a transnational, she can move between two homes:

Nigerian in bleak houses in America, their lives demanded by work, nursing their careful savings through the year so that they could visit home in December for a week, when they would arrive bearing suitcase of shoes and clothes and cheap watches, and see in the eyes of their relatives, brightly burnished images of themselves. Afterwards, they would return to America to fight on the internet over their theologies of *home* because *home* was now a blurred place between *here and there*. (Adichie 117)

The transnational individuals like Ifemelu can move between their host-land and homeland. They challenge the 'mythologies of home' that is the belief that one has a fixed home. But, since transnational individuals have home and family across their original country. So, they can move here and there. From this analysis, it can be inferred that this novel aims at reconceptualizing the traditional notion of home as a fixed and stable thing. In the age of transnationalism, home is a very fluid thing. Garret argues that the transnationals have two home. "Big Home and Little Home" (52). The Big Home is their original home and the Little Home is the home that they establish later in the host-land.

In America, Ifemelu stays for about fifteen years. During most of those years, she lives with Blaine, an American citizen with whom Ifemelu lives for more than three years. For other remaining years, she lives with her white boy friend Curt in his home. In Garret's words, she establishes her astronaut family with Curt.

Curt's mother had a bloodless elegance, her hair shiny, her complexion well-preserved ... Curt called her 'Mother' which had a certain formality on archaic ring. On Sundays, they had brunch with her. Ifemelu enjoyed the Sunday ritual of those meals. [Curt] often asked [Ifemelu] to give up baby sitting; they could spend more time together if she didn't have to work everyday. (200)

So, Ifemelu also has her immediate home and family in the USA.

Ramazani was probably the first transnational critic to read the modernist writers like Gertude Stein from a transnational point of view. Commenting on Stein's position, Ramzani writes: "'America is my country' remarked Gertude Stein, only to fracture this nationalistic claim by adding, 'Paris is my home town'" (23). Ifemelu's position totally resembles to that of Stein since for her Nigeria is her country and New York has been her hometown. And this has been a significant part of transnationalism as Ifemelu has the multiple belongings simultaneously.

Henceforth, this novel is one of the most important transnational narrative that entails many characters who exemplify the features of transnational subjects. Adichie represents her characters like Ifemelu, her protagonist who moves from Nigeria to America, and Obinze, Ifemelu's lover who moves from Nigeria to Britain, as the transnational subjects marked by various forms of simultaneity namely of home, identity, belonging, citizenship etc. As the transnational subjects, Ifemelu and Obinze are represented as capable of reaching beyond the nation-state's boundaries either virtually or physically. Ifemelu as the transnational subject makes different linkages across America to Nigeria with the help of different types of telecommunications. Not only this much, Ifemelu can also freely and easily travel between her homeland and host-land. So for her, the national borders have become very porous and fragile. This peoples' capacity of making connections across the borders is one of the most

important features of transnationalism which Ifemelu and Obinze epitomize in the novel. Overall, I tried my best to explore Adichie's *Americanah* as the transnational narrative since it has the key feature of literary transnationalism known as simultaneity. This simultaneity encompasses simultaneity of home, family, citizenship, belonging, nationality, and most importantly the identity. The transnational people like Ifemelu has the potentiality of having multiple homes, multiple belongings, multiple identities and multiplicities at the same time that makes this simultaneity possible. As shown in my above analysis that Ifemelu as a transnational subject has double homes that is in America and in Nigeria. Similarly, she also has two identities: African and American simultaneously. Likewise, as the transnational subject, she belongs as equally to America as she does to Nigeria. So, she is the epitome of transnational subject. By representing her characters as transnationals in the novel, Adichie accomplishes two important tasks: one she takes departure from the narrative of diaspora and secondly she challenges the essentialist way of understanding various issues like identity, home, nationality, location and culture.

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