



Glocal Identity Replaces Stereotypes: A critical examination of Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*

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ABSTRACT

Glocal is a term widely used to refer to the fluidity that characterises the situation into which the phenomena of globalisation and localisation have evolved today. Few disciplines reflect the essence of this transition better than the popular writings, especially from the African continent and the Indian subcontinent. Several new-generation texts from Africa and India consciously focus on the exploration of the geographical, cultural, and individual narratives in their stories in order to break global and local stereotypes and establish new identities. This study aims to understand the deliberate use of historical narratives in order to replace stereotypes with a glocal identity. This study examines the geographical, cultural, and individual narratives in two texts, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Adichie and *The Gypsy Goddess* by Meena Kandasamy, to understand the way in which the authors evolve the glocal nature of the texts through the systematic deconstruction of the stereotypes.

Key words: glocal identity, breaking stereotypes, Adichie, Meena Kandasamy

Introduction

In the 21st century, when hybridity (Alou, 2017) and heterogeneity (Cawelti, 2001) are the characteristics of the popular culture, a similar trend is reflected in popular literature. Writers are intent on moving beyond the earlier postmodern narratives with popular themes surrounding the centre and the margin, the global and the local, the oppressor and the oppressed, the perpetrators and the victims. Today's young authors strive to create new glocal identities that replace the stereotypes of the postmodern era and as Chimamanda Adichie says, revisit the past to make sense of the present (Adichie Website). These authors use the essence of the glocal, that is, the geographical, cultural, and individual identities (Vesa, n.d.) to break the stereotypes while telling the local story to a global audience who wish to hear from them. Set in the 1960's during the Civil war in Nigeria, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Adichie and during the massacre of the villagers in Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu, *The Gypsy Goddess* by Meena Kandasamy, are historical fictions revisiting the narratives of the oppressed and the oppressor. This study critically examines the two texts for geographical, cultural, and individual narratives that counter the established stereotypes and create new glocal identities while revisiting the past.

Geographical Identities

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Vesa (n.d.) refers to the imaginary geographical spaces created by American writers of non-American origin to set their story in. These imaginary spaces, according to Vesa (n.d.), are not familiar to the readers and yet, they expect 'authentic' stories from these spaces. It is a similar popular interest and demand clubbed with people's lack of knowledge about such imaginary geographical spaces that encourage 21st century authors like Adichie and Kandasamy to write about them. By writing about Biafra, Adichie (Sarkhel, 2015), and about Kilvenmani, Kandasamy, bring alive the geographical spaces of Biafra and Kilvenmani to the world audience.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie creates the geographical identity through the book "The World was Silent when We Died" written by one of the chief characters, Ugwu. The 1967-70 Biafran war or the Nigerian Civil War had erased Biafra from the world map. Ugwu begins his book by drawing the boundaries of Biafra that existed for three years on the map of Nigeria (pg. 82). The rest of his book (pgs 115, 155, 205, 237, 258, 375) delineates the history of Nigeria, the way it was formed haphazardly in the 'scramble for Africa' to quench the British colonial and imperialistic greed, the way Britain and most of the other world powers including America and Russia and other African nations supported Nigeria and refused to recognise the Biafran cause even when an entire ethnic community was starved to submission, and the way the world watched silently when the Biafrans died. Through Ugwu's narrative, which is a book within the novel, Adichie, deliberately breaks the stereotype of a familiar geography that is commonly expected in popular literature and creates not only a geographical identity for Biafra but also a historical grounding that breathed life into the struggles of Biafra's people.

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy, the inescapable author, begins the narrative with the map of the Nagappatinam Taluk, Tanjore District. It is the geographical context of Kilvenmani, the village where the massacre of 44 Dalits on December 25, 1968 shook the world out of its complacency regarding caste-based discrimination and its accompanying horrors. Kandasamy also peppered her asynchronous narrative with the historical context of Tanjore, Nagappatinam, and Kilvenmani. And why does she adopt this narrative technique? According to her, it is to help the reader comprehend the human story beyond the quagmire of the political and historical versions of the event (pg. 70). Kandasamy thus breaks the stereotype of a unified, unchallenged geographical and historical background inherent in popular literature and tells a different story from a hitherto unfamiliar territory.

As Vesa (n.d.) suggests is the truly glocal characteristic, both authors "reroot themselves neither in the global nor in the local" context, instead, they create an in-between, imaginary geographical space that the reader never visited but feels unexplainably attracted to.

Cultural Identities

In his discussion about finding an appropriate concept to analyse popular culture, Cawelti (2001), decides on the concept of formulaic writing as an appropriate one. He asserts that popular culture could be analysed based on the overarching formulas that is collectively agreed upon and understood. For instance, in popular culture, detective stories not only follow the plot structure where a detective goes about solving a mystery but also ensure that the detective actually solves the mystery. It is this popular formulaic writing stereotype of meeting readers' expectations that Adichie and Kandasamy replace with the unexpected glocal cultural identities in their novels. In a formulaic popular novel, the main characters in the novel would have

contributed significantly to the ideological cause that forms the theme of the novel and also would have had superhero powers to turn the tide in their favour. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Gypsy Goddess* there is no such resolution to the plot.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, none of the main characters – Ugwu, Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene, or Richard - really win their ideological war of Biafran nationalism. They share their cultural identities with that of their Igbo tribe, who in real life, dreamed of a bright future but could never realize their dreams. At the beginning of the novel, we hear the Igbo intellectuals gathered at Odenigbo and Olanna's residence discussing Nigerian nationalism and the role of the educated, elite Igbo in nation building. Once Biafra announces its secession from Nigeria, these Igbo intellectuals, including Odenigbo and Olanna lack the formulaic superhero zeal or power to resolve the issue of nationalism with minimal losses. Like in real life, they are too embroiled in the disappointments, quarrels, reconciliations, and hopes of their personal lives to give more than ideological and day-to-day support to the Biafran cause. Even Ugwu does not conscript to the army initially. Later, when he is forced to do so, he is unable to make a significant difference in favour of the heroes – the Biafrans in this context – despite being the 'target destroyer'. Though Kainene, Richard, Olanna, and Odenigbo ran the refugee camps during the war, they could not contain the starvation, the rising death toll, the disease, or the misery. The one heroic act of Kainene crossing the borders into the enemy lines to find food for the refugees remains fruitless like the heroic act of the Biafrans who hoped for an independent future built on the sacrificial blood of at least a million massacred Igbo people.

Kandasamy also portrays the struggle of the untouchables in real life strokes with its inherent stories of victimization, rebellion, retaliation, and pointless deaths. The villagers of Kilvenmani adopt the ideological realm of Communism because it gives them the opportunity to fight against the injustice meted out on them by the landlords. However, the Communist party with all its goodwill, petitions, appeals, strikes, meetings, and marches was helpless on the night when the landlords led by Gopalakrishna Naidu locked the Dalit women, children, and aged in the hut and set them on fire. Also helpless were the Dalit men who were shot at indiscriminately when they tried to hide in the surrounding fields or help falling comrades. The subsequent trauma of the remaining villagers who had to live on, their ordeal at the farcical trials at the courts, and their continued rebellion for every handful of rice portray a cultural identity that defies the stereotypical narratives where the victims win the war in the end.

In both the novels there is yet another cultural identity that is established by the authors and that is, of the language of the people. The inter-sentential code switching (Nnenna, 2016), where parts of the sentences are in Igbo or Tamil, followed by English phrases or clauses that completed the sentence is a unique narrative technique used by both Adichie and Kandasamy in order to bring the alien or the 'other' oppressed cultures closer to the global audience.

Individual Identities

Adichie's and Kandasamy's writing techniques that establish the individual identities of the authors themselves, the local people who form the subject of their novels, and their intended readers are the most global element of their writing that replaces the stereotypes of narration, characterization, authorial intervention, and reader participation.

While Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* appears on the surface to be a conventional novel, the narrative technique that shifts between the 'polyphonic' (Upadhyaya, 2016) perspectives of Ugwu, Olanna and Richard is quite unusual due to the characterization employed in the narration. Each of these narrators has an individual identity that is crucial to the perspective they present and instrumental in breaking the stereotypes. Ugwu is the uneducated, backward Igbo who gets an entry into the inner circles of educated Igbo elite, which include the likes of Odenigbo and Olanna, both associated with Nsukka University. However, the Ugwu-Odenigbo-Olanna relationship is always that of a servant and a benevolent master. This postcolonial residue within a native community is one of the breaks from the stereotype that establishes the glocal character of the novel. Olanna is the 'femme fatale', who, unlike stereotypical heroines who are either the victimized damsels in distress or wonder women, is a combination of both with the strength of an independent, modern woman and the inherent weakness associated with feminine attributes like motherhood and compassion. Richard is the most glaring break from the stereotype of a macho, white man. His identity is that of a comparatively tame, dependent English man who believes that he is as Igbo and Biafran as any ethnic could claim to be and whose servile love for Kainene is both debilitating as well as strengthening all at once.

Kandasamy's attempt at creating individual identities is built more on narrative techniques that delves deep into revealing the author's thoughts, research, struggles with writing, particular writing techniques, demands on the author by both the reader and the publisher, and the author's proximity with the event and people that form the subject of the narrative. Moreover, *The Gypsy Goddess* is a work of apparent anger and activism of the author which is a rare combination of individual identity found in popular literature even today. Though Adichie also talks about her anger and Igbo activism on her website, she does not break the popular stereotype of author engagement in her novel. Kandasamy's explicit 'dialogism' (Upadhaya, 2016) in *The Gypsy Goddess*, on the other hand, is both arresting and disturbing at the same time. Kandasamy directly engages the readers by appealing to their conscious to act as responsible citizens and raise their voice against the rampant caste-based discrimination in the society. These are aspects of the novel that creates individual identities of both the author and the reader and makes the work unarguably glocal in nature.

Finally, in both the novels, the authors emphasize on the individual identities of women who were not just victims of the atrocities but vociferous, active and courageous rebels who relentlessly fought for justice and kept their men motivated toward the cause (Athwale, 2014, Zanou Capo-Chichi, L.C. and Bodjrenou, F., 2016).

Conclusion

The critical examination of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* shows that these 21st century authors are consciously deviating from the formulaic style of writing in the popular literature with its inherent stereotypes. Instead, these authors create glocal identities in popular literature by manipulating the geographical, cultural and individual identities within the contexts, the characters, and even the roles of the authors and the readers. These identities invariably and intentionally break the popular stereotypes thus, creating a new reading of literature in the increasingly glocal world.

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