Material Objects as Promoters of a Resistant Subjectivity: The Creation of an Alternative Space in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Imitation"

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Abstract This article explores how Nkem, the female character in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "Imitation" (2009), builds a resistance space from where she exalts her subjectivity and rebels against an oppressive marriage that voids her. Her physical and mental paralysis is mainly triggered by an absent and distant husband called Obiora, who forces his wife into a materialization process that translates into Nkem being gradually infected by the fakeness and voiceless condition of the art pieces that he brings home from Nigeria. Consequently, she is commoditized and turned into one more imitational art piece in Obiora's collection, stressing her immobility and dependence on her husband. However, the originality and uniqueness of the African Ife bronze head that Obiora brings with him at the end of the story trigger Nkem's reflection, leading her to also recognize her own value. Through the projection of her subjectivity on the original African art piece, Nkem takes advantage of her in-betweness as a Nigerian in the United States and her house's interstitial status to create a "third space" where she can redefine herself outside the patriarchal ideology that Obiora epitomizes, as well as retrieve the African identity she had lost during the reterritorialization process undergone in her white American neighborhood. The redefinition of her relationship with the surrounding African items and the consequent appropriation of the space that this implies empowers her, since "territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power" (Sack 5) and our identities and self-definitions are inherently territorial (Agnew 179).

Keywords resistance space; Adichie; third space; identity; materialization process

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Introduction

The concept of space as closely attached to identity and power has been broadly explored in academia. Whereas the negotiation of a subcultural and alternative identity within a hegemonic order has been closely attached to the need of winning a space, of marking out and appropriate territory (Clarke et al. 45), Ludger Pries approaches "space" as a concept that "not only refers to physical features, but also to larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values and meanings that the specific and limited place represents to immigrants" (Pries 40), adding that "space is thus different from place in that it encompasses or spans various territorial locations" (67). In addition, scholars such as David Robert Sack and Gillian Rose inform the connection between space and power. Whereas the former claims that "territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power and […] the way in which a society and space are related (Sack 5), the latter understands "territoriality" as "nothing more or less than a claim to control people by controlling an area" (Rose 100). Thus, identities, to be strongly defined and empowered, need of a spatiality that allows their development.

Along these lines, Gillian Rose argues that "identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists, among others, have argued that the meanings given to a place […] become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them" (Rose 88). He adds that "one way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place," claiming that this place needs to conform a space "in which you feel comfortable or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place" (89). Indeed, Homi Bhabha understands these "in-between spaces" as sites that "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1994:1). Bhabha draws upon Victor Turner's idea of liminality, together with its symbolic registers (rite of passage, limen, communitas, etc) to claim that the symbolic registers are located on the ritual, to explain the vexed, non-dualistic and shifting nature of identity in the modern world.

Accordingly, the influence of territoriality on identity politics and power relations leads to the consideration of *space* as a site for resistance. In this respect,

Reece Jones coins the term "spaces of refusal" to define a zone of contact where sovereign states practices interact with alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being (Jones 687). In those spaces, people adopt various means for avoiding sovereignty, even when the traditional response of flight is not available (Agnew 2008; Scott 2009; Jones 2012). Stanford Friedman's, Gloria Anzaldúa's, and Homi Bhabha's (1994) relevant studies about the borderland define the space that the characters inhabit as a space of resistance, a contact zone "where fluid differences meet, where power is often structured asymmetrically but nonetheless circulates in complex and multidirectional ways, where agency exists on both sides of the shifting and permeable divide" (Stanford Friedman 273). Stanford Friedman remarks that both borders and borderlands have been approached as "spatial metaphors for the liminal space in between" (273) and points at Homi Bhabha as "the preeminent theorist of the interstitial, of the examination of culture in the moment of transit" (274). Indeed, he coins the term "third space" to define "countersites" that result from the interstitial and erratic movements.

Drawing on the interconnection between identity, power, and space, in this article I explore how Nkem, the female character in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "Imitation" (2009), builds a resistant space from where she exalts her subjectivity and rebels against an oppressive marriage that voids her. Her physical and mental paralysis is mainly triggered by an absent and distant husband called Obiora, who forces his wife into a materialization process that translates into Nkem being gradually infected by the fakeness and voiceless condition of the art pieces that he brings home from Nigeria. Consequently, she is commoditized and turned into one more imitational art piece in Obiora's collection, stressing her immobility and dependence on her husband. However, basing myself on the idea that objects become recipients of identity formation (Kopytoff 1986; Appadurai 1986; Watts 2011), I argue that the originality and uniqueness of the African Ife bronze head that Obiora brings with him at the end of the story trigger Nkem's reflection, leading her to also recognize her own value. Through the projection of her subjectivity on the original African art piece, Nkem takes advantage of her in-betweness as a Nigerian in the United States and her house's interstitial status (which represents an "African museum" in American soil) to create a "third space" or counterspace where she can redefine herself outside the patriarchal ideology that Obiora epitomizes, as well as retrieve the African identity she had lost during the reterritorialization process undergone in her white American neighborhood. The redefinition of her relationship with the surrounding African items and the consequent appropriation of the space that this implies empowers her, since "territoriality is a primary geographical

expression of social power" (Sack 5) and our identities and self-definitions are inherently territorial (Agnew 179). In this vein, I approach the interstitial space depicted in this short story as an "active literary space," a term inspired by Doreen Massey's concept of "activity spaces" (Massey 54), which is defined as a space "within which a particular agent operates" (54). The space that Nkem occupies constitutes an "active literary space," since it provides her with the chance to speak up and express herself freely.

The Dominant Role of Obiora.

"Imitation" was first published in *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), a collection of short stories written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that mainly explores the lives of Nigerian women and their struggles as wives, immigrants, and victims of religious or political violence. In my view, the female protagonist in "Imitation" (2009) undergoes an identity transformation process that leads her to a resistance stance towards the patriarchal system, for she develops from a submissive and dependent wife to a self-autonomous individual who defies the impositions of social and marital boundaries. The story begins when Nkem receives a call from a Nigerian friend who tells her about her husband´s infidelity. Nkem finds out that, while she stays in the United States taking care of their children, her partner stays in their second residence in Lagos with another girl instead of travelling for business as he told her. The third person narrator guides us through the acts and thoughts that she undergoes due to this revelation. In addition, we are given access to some details of her past, such as how lucky she felt when she married Obiora, since she thought that his privileged social and economic position would offer her a new luxurious life away from the poverty conditions she suffered in Nigeria. As the story unfolds, her view about her marriage changes dramatically while leaving her innocence behind, facing reality and adopting a critical stand towards her husband. Eventually, Nkem becomes more rebellious against her marriage, which results in her decision of changing her lifestyle and moving back to their second home in Nigeria.

When it comes to examining the relevance of space and identity in Adichie's literary work, "Imitation" is one of her pieces of writing that better portrays the rearticulation of the main character's identity and the space that she occupies, as both Nkem's and her American house's transformation remain at the core throughout the narrative. As other stories in Adichie's short story collection, such as "The Arrangers of Marriage," "Jumping Monkey Hills," or "The Thing Around Your Neck," "Imitation" depicts a black African woman in a foreign land who experiences sexism, racist attitudes, and social alienation. Whereas identity and

space have been acknowledged as recurrent motifs in Adichie's literary works (Sharobeem 2015; Nwanyanwu 2017; Toyianen 2017; Lascelles 2020), this article focuses on "Imitation" and offers a more holistic analysis of this short story, as it does not only analyze Nkem's lack of own voice within her marriage, but also her identity transformation through a relation with the surrounding art pieces, and the consequent and gradual metamorphosis of her American house into a "counterspace" at a narrative level, where she regains control over her life. In this regard, the article explores the influence of the geographical and domestic space on Nkem's identity, and it also emphasizes the female protagonist's construction of her own private space, which is not really placed in the U.S or Nigeria but in her inner self, as it does not completely belong to the geographical nor the domestic. This space is not fixed or defined but experiences a continuous transformation that provides Nkem with some agency and, unlike the commoditized African art pieces, frees her from remaining static and purposeless. Even though some studies have tackled Nkem's evolution as connected to the art pieces and the theme of imitation (Egbunike 2013) and explored her hybrid identity by applying Bhabha's theory (Khaleel 2019), there is a need of further studies specifically analyzing the impact of Nkem's hybrid identity and her relationship with the art pieces on the construction of a resistance space at a narrative level.

Indeed, the title "Imitation" (2009) makes a reference to the art pieces (imitations of the originals), concretely an African mask, that her husband brings home from his journeys. The arrival of these objects to the house encourages Nkem's reflection upon their meanings, origins, and imitational nature, thus establishing bonds between the items and herself. Indeed, the important role that objects play in the formation of human identity has broadly been explored by academics such as Alison P. Watts, who asserts that "anthropologists, sociologists and literary theorists have long recognized the role of material culture in individual and societal negotiation and performance of identity politics. Items of clothing, cooking implements, religious beliefs and traditional crafts bear witness to elements of identity performance and help re-present our social identifications to the outside world" (Watts 3). As things can be powerful recipients of identity formation, Nkem's evolution towards a more independent and self-sufficient woman is hugely attached to the African art pieces that her husband brings to their house. Her inner growth completes when at the end of the story Obiora brings her an original art piece for the first time: the Ife bronze head. At this moment, she finds the courage to be critical and express herself, as if she were influenced by the authenticity and uniqueness of this object.

Arjun Appadurai or Igor Kopytoff have also studied the way in which objects become recipients of identity formation, understanding the term commodities as "things that have use [generally social] value and that can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart […] that has, in an immediate context, an equivalent value" (Kopytoff 68). Furthermore, they claim that these commodities can be understood as storytellers, in the sense that they possess life histories that are open to individual interpretation and manipulation. In this respect, Kopytoff applies the same type of questions that are used for human beings' identity formation to the construction of biographies for things. He asserts that in developed societies "a person's social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting," which causes "uncertainty of identity," and adds that "in the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context" (89).

As Alison P. Watts suggests, Adichie depicts Obiora as the owner and transporter of things between his houses in Nigeria and Africa (Watts 18). In this sense, he embodies the role of the colonizer, because he decontextualizes these art pieces by not only dislocating them at a geographical level, but also at a conceptual level when he infuses them with a new meaning. Following Appadurai's and Kopytoff's terminology, Obiora diverts these commodities, understanding by "diversion" the metamorphosis through which objects are "placed into a commodity state though originally specifically protected from it" (Appadurai 16). In this light, the African art pieces that he brings to the United States undergo a process of diversion since, although some are intended to have a religious and sacred role in its original context, such as the Benin mask, they are ultimately diverted from their transcendental meaning when Obiora acquires them for a decorative purpose. By approaching his actions as acts of appropriation that make him become a dominant figure, I support P. Watts's idea that it is by means of assigning biographical narrative to the art pieces that he constructs his identity as a "specially chosen […] custodian" of the items (18). Ironically, in telling the significance of the masks to his wife, Obiora describes British (epitomizing the figure of the colonizer) as looters when he says that they stole "the original masks in the late 1800s during what they called Punitive Expedition," and that they "had a way of using words like 'expedition' and 'pacification' for killing and stealing" (Adichie 25). He also adds that "the masks […] were regarded as 'war booty' and were now displayed in museums all over the world" (Adichie 25). Thus, there is a clear parallelism between the colonizers and Obiora, that points at the latter as a collector who turns

his house into a "museum" where he "displays diverted commodities with newly contextualized significations" (Watts 19).

Furthermore, his dominant role is doubly emphasized. Firstly, Obiora and Nkem's American neighbors imitate him when they start decorating their walls with the same type of art pieces. According to the most conservative postcolonial discourse, the act of turning indigenous Nigerian objects into mere decoration is traditionally attached to Western dominant individuals (in this case, their white American neighbors). Yet, it is Obiora who assumes the role of colonizer when carrying out the African pieces of art's diversion and transforming them into commodities for possession and display. At this point, he epitomizes "the Western taste for the things of the past and of the other" (Appadurai 27).

Secondly, his role as storyteller strengthens his domineering position. Many academics and writers have approached words and storytelling as important devices for control and repression. In this light, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie asserts that "like our economic and political worlds, stories are defined by […] how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told" (Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"). According to her, their relevance lies in the fact that "they are very dependent on power," and defines power as "the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definite story of that person" (Adichie). Therefore, Obiora exerts this power every time he tells her wife the story of the art pieces that he brings home, because he projects his subjectivity on the items as wells as on Nkem's imagination. As Nkem acknowledges at the beginning of the narrative, it is only her husband who makes the apparent lifeless objects look alive. Even though sometimes she doubts about what he says, she is impressed by the passion Obiora transmits when telling his stories:

> We never appreciate what we have, Obiora always ended by saying, before repeating the story of the foolish head of state who had gone to the National Museum in Lagos and forced the curator to give him a four-hundred-years old bust, which he then gave to the British queen as a present. Sometimes Nkem doubts Obiora's facts, but she listens, because of how passionately he speaks, because of how his eyes glisten as though he is about to cry. (Adichie 25)

As it happens many times in the narrative, Obiora is here assuming the role of storyteller, and by doing so, he forces a teacher/pupil relationship in which he acts as the instructor. It seems that he underlines the moral of his short story, which is that "we never appreciate what we have," to implicitly infuse his wife with the

need of appreciating her husband and the amenities he offers her. By telling his own version of the story, he also projects a subjective biography upon the art piece, and it is precisely by means of this subjective projection on the art collection that he exerts his power over his wife, imposing his own point of view of History.

Nkem as a Commoditized and "Imitational" Subject.

While this analysis establishes a link between Obiora and the figure of the colonizer as traditionally understood, a parallelism between Nkem and the objects of possession works, in my view, as the core of the narrative. This correlation can be perceived in the fact that both are diverted and "commoditized." In this sense, Arjun Appadurai claims that in many societies women are regarded as commodities. She says that "marriage transactions might constitute the context in which women are most intensely, and most appropriately, regarded as exchange values" (Appadurai 15). Obiora can also be approached as the responsible for imposing a "single story" on his wife, the same as he does with the items that he brings from Nigeria. As a result, she undergoes a dislocation process, as her husband is the only reason why Nkem moves to the United States before been partly abandoned by him. Her voiceless and dependent condition in the marital relationship highlights her passive role: Nkem picks up the mask and presses her face to it; it is cold, heavy, lifeless. Yet when Obiora talks about it- and all the rest- he makes them seem breathing, warm (25).

In this excerpt, the passivity of the female protagonist is remarked. Nkem, like the art pieces, remains speechless, and it is only by means of her husband that she acquires a voice. The connection between the mask and Nkem is evidenced through the union of both faces (maybe in a visceral desire to express), and the use of the epithets "cold," "heavy" and "lifeless," which seem to allude to a state of metaphorical death. They could also be depicting her lack of free will and autonomy while remaining in clear opposition to the epithets "breathing" and "warm," possibly related to Obiora.

As Kopytoff points out, a person can be commoditized in the sense that he/she can be materialized (Kopytoff 65). The individual can be taken out of a certain society or group and then *re-socialized* and *re-humanized* by receiving a new social identity. Nkem is objectified after being *de-socialized* from Nigeria and *re-socialized* in America in the form of a wife in a new marital status. In this sense, Nkem becomes a possession and a decorative piece that not only is displayed in the eyes of Obiora (who has a girlfriend in Lagos and visits Nkem just on little occasions), but also in her white American neighborhood due to racial and cultural differences,

as it is shown at some points in the narrative: "…the neighbors didn´t start to ask about him until later. Where was your husband? Was something wrong?" (24), or "… her accent, her foreignness, made her seem helpless to them" (24). These sentences evidence how Obiora's actor role fosters her transformation into another art piece or commodity.

Accordingly, Appadurai and Kopytoff understand commodities as having life histories, and both claim that "the commodity phase of the life history of an object does not exhaust its biography; it is culturally regulated; and its interpretation is open to individual manipulation to some degree" (Appadurai 17). Nkem's materialization is emphasized by the analogy established between the art pieces and herself in terms of their speechless condition. The commoditization of both Nkem and the items prevent them from having a strong and authoritarian voice, which gives Obiora the space for manipulating his wife while imposing his own historical view on the art pieces. In the same way, Nkem's biography is subdued to certain cultural and social restrictions that silence her individual voice:

> They never decided that she would stay with the children- Okey was born three years after Adanna. It just happened. She stayed back at first, after Adanna, to take a number of computer courses while Obiora said it was a good idea. The Obiora registered Adanna in preschool, when Nkem was pregnant with Okey. Then he found a good private elementary school and told her they were lucky it was so close. […] She had never imagined that her children would go to school, sit side by side with white children whose parents owned mansions on lonely hills, never imagined this life. So she said nothing. (27)

The sentences that open and close this paragraph are remarkable because they stress her lack of participation in family decisions, or even decisions concerning her own life. The narrative voice tells us how she is imposed a passive role and accepts it, mainly as a result of all the luxuries that her marriage offers her and that she never imagined she would have as a low-class Nigerian girl. When at the end of the story Nkem rebels against Obiora and communicates him her decision of leaving the United States, she realizes that "he has never heard her speak up, never heard her take a stand" and wonders if the reason why he liked her is that 'she deferred to him, that she let him speak for both of them" (41).

Additionally, the interconnection between Nkem and the art pieces can be explored under the light of the theme of imitation. The contraposition of real and imitational things is constant throughout the narrative. Nkem watches the art

pieces, "imagining the originals" (26). She also wishes her children say "daddy" "to someone real, not a voice on the phone" (26). While she cuts her hair, she remembers a woman she once met, who had short natural hair without any relaxer or texturizer. She discusses with Amaechi, her house girl, how hard it is for her to find real African yams in the United States and "what Rugrats character the children mimic best" (33). As the story develops, she seems to realize about the fakeness of her life, and starts aiming for a "real" husband, a "real" dad for the children, "real" African products, even for the "real" her that was lost once she got married and moved to America:

> She does miss home […] She has sometimes thought about moving back home, but never seriously, never concretely. She goes to Pilates class twice a week in Philadelphia with her neighbor; she bakes cookies for her children's classes and hers are always the favorites; she expects banks to have drive-ins. America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin. (37)

The nostalgic tone adopted in this excerpt suggests that her longing for home might be partly caused by living a fake and imitational life in the United States. The need of being in contact with her "original" self is triggered by the imitational art pieces that constantly foster her reflection. For this reason, she spends her time "imagining the originals, imagining the lives behind them" (Adichie 26).

The correlation between Nkem and the African items in terms of their imitational status can be further developed, since both suffer an imposed recontextualization in America that problematizes their authenticity and, thus, their value. In the introduction to *The Social Life of Things* (1986), Appadurai argues that in premodern times it was the exclusivity what gave value to a commodity, because distances were longer, and the production was limited. However, he adds that in the current modern West, "the reproduction of objects in a mass basis becomes possible, the dialogue between consumers and the original source becomes more direct, and middle-class consumers become capable of vying these objects. The only way to preserve the function of these commodities in the prestige economies […] is to complicate the criteria of authenticity" (Appadurai 44-45). Even though, as I have previously argued, the fake art pieces that Obiora brings to the house carry an important role in the redefinition of his patriarchal dominance, their value is low in practice due to their imitational nature. Nkem can be depicted likewise, because although she constitutes one of the relevant pieces that conforms Obiora's patriarchal "museum," her value in the house or in the family is diminished through her voiceless condition

and her little participation in decisions concerning her marriage.

Similarly, her authenticity and valuable status as a woman and as a wife is questioned when she finds out about her husband's infidelity. Her friend tells her on the phone that the girl with whom Obiora is living in Lagos has short and curly hair. She adds that she has "small tight curls. Not a relaxer. A texturizer" (Adichie 22). The detail of the texturizer (used for softening thick hair) becomes relevant, since it evidences the fact that Obiora's lover imitates a type of hair that she does not originally have. Nkem decides to follow the same steps when she "picks up the scissors" and leaves "hair about the length of a thumb nail, just enough to tighten into curls with a texturizer" (28). It can be claimed that this change of style constitutes a desperate attempt to recover Obiora by imitating his lover's hairstyle, which can be translated into an urgent need for stressing her authentic and original status as Obiora's wife.

Nonetheless, despite the decontextualization of Nkem and the items, together with the consequent diversion and appropriation that they undergo, Nkem finds the chance to evolve as an individual by means of the art pieces. Kopytoff asserts that biographies for things can be constructed when applying the same types of questions that apply to human beings. He deepens into this question by claiming that in developed societies "a person's social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting," which causes "uncertainty of identity," and adds that "in the homogenized world of commodities, and eventful biography becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and re-classifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context" (Kopytoff 89). In this respect, in her analysis of the story "Imitation," Alison P. Watts remarks that "social hierarchies and power differentials suggest that many 'established' object biographies and historical narratives speak in the voice of the dominant, hegemonic discourse" (P. Watts 17).

Thus, by following Kopytoff's theory, Nkem can be approached as a subject who takes advantage of the uncertainties of valuation and of identity in commodities to re-articulate the dominant biographical narratives beneath these objects. This allows her "to engage in simultaneous relationship with multiple ghosts in order to locate and embrace the biographies that best speak to and influence her identity formation process" (P. Watts 17). Indeed, Nkem takes advantage of the items that surround her, as well as the uncertainties of evaluation and of identity attached to these commodities, to rebuild the biographical narratives beneath the objects imposed by Obiora. Consequently, the re-articulation of the meanings that these objects emanate encourages the character's reflection upon them and establishes a strong bond be-

tween the objects and herself. This connection results in a mutual influence that ultimately leads Nkem to the redefinition of her identity and to the questioning of social borders that limit her free will**.**

Inhabiting a "Third Space" as a Means of Resistance.

The question of place is subtly, yet clearly, highlighted from the beginning of the narrative, and its connection with the African art pieces to foster Nkem's identity transformation has been overlooked in other studies of "Imitation." Spaces gain prominence in the story when the narrator explains that Nkem is from Lagos and an immigrant in the United States, that she lives in a suburb near Philadelphia, in Cherrywood Lane, that her husband and her have two homes, and that he lives in Nigeria and America. This last geographical duality, and the fact that Nkem feels as an outsider in America, constitute core themes in the story and point at the female protagonist as an individual in an inbetween position. Likewise, the museum as a space of possession and display, where the works from different artists and places converge, further adds revealing meaning to the way Obiora understands his American house. Even though he criticizes British people for having stolen African masks during the Punitive Expedition and complains about a head of state who went to the National Museum in Lagos and forced the curator "to give him a four-hundred-year-old bust which he then gave to the British queen as a present" (25), Obiora behaves as them. He gets imitational and authentic art pieces from other places (Benin mask, Nok terra-cota, Ife bronze head) for the aim of possession and display, turning their house into a private museum, and his wife, into one more decorative item. In this sense, Nkem is forced to inhabit a "third space" where she is stripped of her original identity, that is, the identity that she had before arriving to the United States. However, the gradual appropriation of the hostile environment she inhabits by means of interacting with the art pieces fosters her rebelliousness against Obiora, with the consequent enhancement of her own individual voice, for "identities themselves, our self-definitions, are inherently territorial" (Agnew 179) and require a space to develop.

More specifically, I approach the interstitial space that the character builds by taking advantage of her liminal condition as an "activity space" (Massey 54), that is, a space within which a particular agent adopts an active role (54). The new relationship that she establishes with the Ife Bronze Head triggers her American house's transformation into a "countersite," in the sense that it is not delimited by national or other "invisible" demarcations anymore (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and B. Mhalanga 4), and the political and social hegemonic rules that repress her

are replaced by peculiar ones. Nkem builds her own private space, which is not really placed in the U.S or Nigeria but in her inner self, as it does not completely belong to the geographical nor the domestic. This space is in flux and experiences a continuous transformation that provides Nkem with the chance to speak up. In this respect, the process of constructing her own alternative space constitutes a final goal to resist oppression. Both the art pieces and Nkem come to life and speak for themselves, thus escaping Obiora's control over them and transforming his particular "museum" into a self-autonomous space where Nkem transcends imposed boundaries and fixed identities by inhabiting what Bhabha calls "the realm of the beyond" or "third space."

It is when Obiora comes back from his last journey that Nkem's development into an empowered subject makes itself clearer. He refers to the Ife bronze head as an art piece they have to be careful with due to its originality, and Nkem answers:

> "An original," she says, surprised, running her hand over parallel incisions on the face.
> "Some of them date back to the eleventh century." […] "But this one is eighteenth-century. Amazing. Definitely worth the cost."
> "What was it used for?"
> "Decoration for the king's palace. […] Isn't it perfect?"
> "Yes", she says. "I'm sure they did terrible things with this one, too."
> "What?" (39)

This excerpt shows that, towards the end of the story, Nkem's tone becomes much more rebellious. The authenticity of the Ife bronze head and its consequent high value trigger the transformation of Nkem's attitude. It nourishes a renegade identity with a strong critical thinking, as the sentence "I'm sure they did terrible things with this one, too" suggests, and her reply produces surprise on her husband. The insertion of this authentic art piece into her house arouses her self-esteem. It also allows the redefinition of her space and, thereupon, her identity, which until this moment has been marked by the fake objects that dominate her house. Also, the king's palace that Obiora introduces in the dialogue constitutes another key space in the narrative, as it works as a metaphor of their house, where Obiora acts as the king and Nkem is once more compared to the art piece her husband has just brought. Eventually, her development into a more self-confident woman culminates when, right after talking with her husband about the new authentic art piece, she addresses him authoritatively for the first time: "I want to know when a new houseboy is hired

in my house […] And the children need you" (42).

Therefore, Adichie depicts the American house full of African art as a "dynamic space of cultural change characterized by shifting identities" where Nkem's identity is "fluid, relational, and always in flux" (Kalua 23) in relation to the imitational and authentic art pieces. Even though this space of inbetweeness brings vexation and ambiguity, it also "points up the immense freedoms which come out when contradictions are synthesized and overrun in the Third Space" (Kalua 25). As a result, the female protagonist takes advantage of her interstitial status to build a personal territory in search of a place of comfort in which she can develop herself freely. Indeed, Nkem achieves to transcend the territorial impositions that both the United States and her house (transformed into her husband's particular "museum") hinder her individual will.

Conclusion

To conclude, the repressed character in Adichie's short story "Imitation" (2009) takes advantage of the items that surround her, as well as the uncertainties of evaluation and of identity attached to these commodities, to rebuild the biographical narratives beneath the objects imposed by her husband. Consequently, the re-articulation of the meanings that these objects emanate encourages the character's reflection upon them and establishes a strong bond between the two. This connection results in a mutual influence which ultimately leads Nkem to the redefinition of the hostile space she inhabits. This confining domestic space is controlled by her husband, who imposes a materialization process both on Nkem and the imitational art pieces. Indeed, Nkem is turned into a commoditized entity infected with the objects' immobility, both physical (as they are unable to leave this space) and mental (as the stories that Obiora tells her wife about the objects attest Nkem's dependence on him when it comes to verbalizing all the items that are in their house). Eventually, Nkem is influenced by the only authentic art piece that Obiora brings from Africa in terms of its authenticity and high value. Her hybrid condition allows her to initiate the reappropriation of her domestic space that, being an "in-between space," provides her with "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1).

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