

**A CULTURAL DIPLOMACY OF DIFFERENCE IN THE AFRICAN NOVEL:
A READING OF ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S *CALL ME BY MY RIGHTFUL NAME***

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Abstract

This article aims at showing the literary contribution of Isidore Okpewho to the aesthetics of cultural diplomacy and dialogue in his novel *Call Me by my Rightful Name* set in a contemporary racial tension uprising in the United States. Approaching the novel from a New Historicist theoretical perspective, the study asserts that in a post-colonial era of racial prejudices between white and black communities, dialogue is one of the best diplomatic ways to be used to reduce cultural barriers, racial conflicts and to promote peaceful co-existence among different communities living together. Ethnicity, race and colour should serve as factors promoting cultural enrichment among nations of the world living together.

Key words: cultural diplomacy, cross-cultural conversation, hybridity, identity, race, ethnicity, cultural imperialism.

Résumé:

Cet article a pour objectif de montrer la contribution littéraire d'Isidore Okpewho à l'esthétique de la diplomatie et du dialogue culturels dans son roman *Call Me by my Rightful Name* dont le trame de l'histoire se déroule dans un contexte contemporain de tension raciale aux Etats-Unis. Abordant le roman d'une perspective méthodologique « New Historiciste », l'étude affirme que dans une ère postcoloniale où prévalent des préjugés raciales entre les communautés blanches et noires, le dialogue est l'une des meilleures voies diplomatiques à utiliser pour réduire les barrières culturelles, les conflits raciaux et de promouvoir une coexistence pacifique entre différentes communautés vivant ensemble. L'ethnicité, la race et la couleur devraient être utilisées comme facteurs de promotion culturelle au sein des nations du monde vivant ensemble.

Mots clés: diplomatie culturelle, conversation transculturelle, hybridité, identité, race, ethnicité, impérialisme culturelle.

Introduction

Criticism of the African novel has often insisted on the clash of cultures in African literature without highlighting the contribution of the African artist to cultural dialogue enhancement and peace seeking strategies in modern globalized world. Classics like Chinua Achebe (1983) and T. M. Aluko (1984) broadly discussed culture contacts and its disruptive impacts on African values in his collections of essays *Hopes and Impediments*. In "The Novelist as a Teacher", Achebe's claim is that the writer must teach his (African and Western) audiences that Africans did not hear about culture for the first time from Europeans (Chinua Achebe 1983: 86). Rand Bishop (1988) takes a different stand from Achebe to say that

What will perhaps be apparent from these attempts of Westerners to understand and evaluate African literature is that they have been based for the most part on the literary texts themselves, while only some Westerners would recognize also the need to understand the cultural context of the literature (Rand Bishop 1988: 7).

Emmanuel Obiechina (1990) rejects Achebe's and Bishop's positions by saying that the preoccupations [of African writers and critics] are to match the pressures of a rapidly changing world (Emmanuel Obiechina: 1990: v). But Obiechina does not precise from which angle cultural diplomacy becomes urgent in African literature and politics. It is Isidore Okpewho's novel *Call Me by My Rightful Name* (Isidore Okpewho: 2004) that brings a new understanding of what cultural diplomacy in a 21st century globalized world means. To grasp the quintessence of Okpewho's predication of cultural diplomacy of difference, it will be helpful to consider Ngugi wa Thiong'o's statement in *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993) that sheds light on what cultural diplomacy advocates in a globalized world. Ngugi believes that "the question of moving towards a pluralism of cultures, literatures and languages is still important today as the world becomes increasingly one (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1993: 10)." By that he means that the globalization in the 21st century world imposes on the writer the burden to be a cultural diplomat both in literature and in society. He should adopt a new methodological approach that puts to the front cross-cultural conversation, a kind of diplomatic dialogue that brings peoples of different cultures and religions together, rather than divide them. The conflicting views raised by African writers and critics give me room to explore some strategic ways of approaching cultural diplomacy and peace strategies in the African novel taking Isidore Okpewho's *Call me by my Rightful Name* as a case study. My methodological approach is New Historicism. New Historicism aims to "produce a 'poetics of culture'; reading canonical texts within, and as part of, multiple forms of writing, cutting across the distinction between fiction and nonfiction and exploring the formation of specific discourses and institutions" (Michael Payne and Jessica Rae Barbera 2010: 484). What is needed is, according to Segun Gbadegesin is "a dialogue across cultures on the values that must inform the project of cultural reformulation resting on peace and development in a world that is becoming smaller day by day (Segun Gbadegesin 2009: 32)." Such a dialogue should "bring out the commonality of shared values and reconcile the apparent differences in world outlooks of western countries and African countries (Ibidem)." My analysis will focus on two points: Firstly Isidore Okpewho's call for a transition in cultural politics: from cultural imperialism theory to cultural inclusion theory and secondly the aesthetics of cross-cultural conversation as expression of cultural diplomacy of difference.

I. From Cultural Imperialism to Cross-cultural Conversation: a Step towards Cultural Diplomacy of Difference

From New historicist perspective, Isidore Okpewho in *Call Me by my Rightful Name* debunks the ideology of cultural imperialism to construct a cultural diplomacy of difference that promotes cross-cultural conversation and enhances peaceful coexistence strategies among people of different or same ethnicity or race. Loi Toyson explains cultural imperialism as "a direct result of economic domination. It consists of the takeover of one culture by another" (Loi Toyson 2006: 425). Put differently, the language, the education system, the customs, the religion, the values and the lifestyle of the economically dominant culture increasingly replace those of the economically vulnerable culture until the latter appears to be a kind of imitation of the former. Isidore Okpewho shows through the novel *Call Me by my Rightful Name* that American cultural imperialism has been one of

the most pervasive forms of this phenomenon, as one can see American fashions, movies, music, sports and consumerism squeeze out indigenous cultural traditions all over the world. Okpewho is one of the postcolonial writers who seeks to redefine cultural debates in literature by taking position for a cultural policy of difference. The storyline of his novel makes the point that globalization in which the universe is embarked demands a redefinition of cultural rapport between Africans and other peoples of the world especially in contexts of American society prone to racism and ethnic conflicts. One of the impacts of European colonialism was the promotion of cultural imperialism, a form of cultural exploitation that propagated ideas about western cultural superiority and the necessity to extend the benefits of that culture to the “uncivilized people of the world” (J. A. Cuddon: 2013: 175). Edward Said defines cultural imperialism as the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory (Edward W. Said 1993: 7). One of the major themes of African postcolonial literature championed by writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o was the affirmation of black identity in reply to the cultural denigration of European writers. Cultural diplomacy is defined by Milton C. Cummings as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding (As quoted by Cynthia P. Schneider 2010: 1).” According to Segun Gbadegesin, when approaching cultural dialogue, emphasis must be placed on (a) serious efforts to understand the cultures and values of other peoples ; (b) the development of a compendium of values and belief systems across cultures; (c) the promotion of intercultural dialogue on the critical analysis of those values and belief systems; (d) the identification of a set common values that transcend particular cultures; and (e) utilization of this set of common values in the development of cultural diplomacy, principles and standards that all cultures can embrace (Segun Gbadegesin 2009: 32). Indeed, the foregoing points: efforts to understand the cultures and values of other people, cross-cultural conversations, and the identification of common values that transcend particular cultures have been the target of Isidore Okpewho in his critical book *The Oral Performance in Africa* (1990) and in his novel *Call Me By My Rightful Name* (2004). The novel is set in a cosmopolitan American society where black minorities (Africans) are still victims of racism on behalf of the white Americans. Okpewho uses the black identity of characters as a literary virtue to extol the cultural merits of Africans. He advocates the necessity for American characters to look at Africans’ cultural differences as source of enrichment and complementarity rather than source of conflicts. This ideology is fully advocated as cultural diplomatic ideology where Okpewho invites Westerners, ex-colonial masters to reconsider their cultural rapports with ex-colonial African subjects. Since colonization denied the African people their cultural identity and values, he has sought in these two literary productions to claim such identity and values for Africans by summoning the world to a cross-cultural conversation debate. The novelist conveys the message that “In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001: 3). When for instance the main character Otis Hampton a young African American retaliates to Norma’s racist abuses with an authoritative indignation, he is being entrusted by the writers to advocate equal treatment between African and American in a racist-prone American society: “If you are charging us with something, go right ahead. But you’ve got no right to treat us like animals” (Okpewho 2004: 9). In this statement, the speaker’s attack is against cultural debasement which leads Americans to look down upon Africans as less than humans. What he rejects through Otis’ statement is cultural imperialism which was the dominating ideology in the

colonial days, a subject of contestation between Africans and Europeans that was at the origin of the Negritude movement.

In 1975 the American media critic Herbert Schiller (quoted by J. A. Cuddon) repudiates cultural imperialism as unbecoming for nations' development:

the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system (J. A. Cuddon 2013: 175).

The Cultural imperialism of America around the world is condemned in the novel by the narrator who states: "Most Americans know, of course, that it is the duty of U.S. missions anywhere in the world to protect American lives and interests within their areas of operation" (Okpewho 2004: 96). Okpewho brings the reader to understand facts about America's cultural politics in the world, which are to preserve American interests and yet pleads for cultural dialogue to prevail.

He is of the view that a new kind of cultural politics is in the making in nowadays globalized world that calls for a new cultural diplomacy of difference. The new cultural politics of difference purports to coexist peacefully with our differences. It encourages harmonious life amidst cultural differences. According to Cornel West it consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment – especially those of marginalized Third World agents who shun degraded self-representations, articulating instead their sense of the flow of history in light of contemporary terrors, anxieties, and fears of highly capitalist cultures – with their escalating xenophobia against people of colour (Blacks) especially in American societies (Cornel West 2001: 257).

This brings J. A. Cuddon to object to the ways developed nations referred to as the First World (Europeans and Americans) expand their cultural values around the globe and impose their cultures and civilizations as the centre, for developing nations to follow as the best references (J. A. Cuddon: 2013: 175). In *Call Me by My Rightful Name*, the word 'tribe' or 'primitive' for instance evokes in the novel the cultural stereotypes and racial denigration the white inflict on the black (Okpewho 2004: 75). In other words, it is against the cultural imperialism imposed by First World nations that Okpewho levels his criticism. Cultural imperialism starts from the economic policy of powerful countries. The criticism is leveled against the First World's so called development programmes for the third world countries. Most Third World nations located in the southern hemisphere of the globe share a common history, that is, most developing nations were at one time colonized by European nations that exploited them as sources of cheap labour and valuable resources. These European nations also dismissed the cultures and traditions of the native peoples they colonized as less civilized than their own. Oftentimes they forced native peoples to learn and speak their languages (English, French, German Spanish, and so forth) and abide by their cultural norms. Racial pride led the white to look at themselves as superior to Africans and to despise Africans with their values, expediting them as primitive. Racial pride has survived colonization and, nowadays, despite the fact that the era of colonization is far passed, the ideology of cultural superiority has survived in the minds of many Europeans and Americans. These Whites do not hesitate to exhibit racial hatred, cultural superiority and discriminatory attitudes towards Africans living among them. Isidore Okpewho shows this in the novel through what Mas Nuffield says to Otis: "[...] we whites do so much better than you niggers. If he could, maybe, scrub some of that black off his skin, he could *conceivably* get closer to being a white man and, *maybe*, do better on his chord control" (Okpewho 2004: 18). Here, Mas Nuffield, a character of American citizenship is despising Otis, an African for his black skin. This attitude is racist and does not favour pacific coexistence among peoples. But the America and Europe of today are multi-ethnic and concentrate plurality of nationalities. For peace

to survive in a multiethnic community like the United States, every citizen should make an effort to accept the identity of the other. Isidore Okpewho is advocating cultural tolerance, accommodation and interpersonal understanding as key values for the survival of democracy and social peace. For democracy to survive and to be efficient, the rights of the minority groups should be preserved. Also for peace to survive it urges to see what Isidore Okpewho refers to as freedom of movement. Cultural pluralism and diversity are facts that imperialist powers have to acknowledge and accept other peoples' cultures to be expressed. What is even more important according to Isidore Okpewho's creative outlook in *Call Me by My Rightful Name* is that, cultures meet and dialogue on the basis of mutual respect in the spirit of equality and sisterhood. For instance Otis complains about the social plight of black communities in the United States by saying: "We will never be who we want to be in America, he said, because the society won't let us, no matter what promises it makes to our leaders" (Okpewho 2004: 169). Let's borrow John Storey's critical approach to say that "when political power is concentrated in the hands the majority, they tend to bully and oppress the minorities (John Storey: 2009: 24).

The popular culture of the majority has always been a concern of powerful minorities" (John Storey 2009: 24). The critic also infers that those vested with political power have always thought it necessary to police the culture of those without political power, reading it 'symptomatically' for discerning signs of political unrest; reshaping it continually through patronage and direct intervention (Ibidem). Those with power lose, for a crucial period, the means to control the culture of the subordinate classes. When they begin to recover control, it is culture itself, and not culture as a symptom or sign of something else, that becomes, really for the first time, the actual focus of concern (Ibidem).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o objects to the fact that "In short, the USA and the West control the whole area of the production and dissemination of ideas so basic to cultural determination and the shaping of outlooks on life and social struggles (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1993: 49).

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts that

Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West or West as Subject. The theory of pluralized 'subject-effects' gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge. Although the history of Europe as subject is narrativized by the law, political economy, and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has 'no geopolitical determination' (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1995: 24).

This assertion advocates the legacy of Western cultural imperialism predicated on the theory that the West is the centre and all cultures of the Third World countries especially those of Africa should be judged, modeled and reshaped in accordance with its principles. Such imperial ideology has strived to ostracize Africans from the world historical cultural debates arguing like Lord Milverton that Africa was the only race that didn't contribute anything to world history and cultural heritage (Lord Milverton quoted by K. B. C. Owubika 1982: 2). It is to demote such false allegations that the African cultural movements of Negritude and Panafricanism has struggled for the recognition of African cultural identity and heritage. It is prejudicial that centuries after the abolition of slave trade and more than fifty years after the end of colonization, Africans should still be subjects of racial discrimination in American and European societies. Africans of the diaspora strive to stop racial discrimination but achieve little. Isidore Okpewho attempts to reposition the debate around the question of how to find an adequate postcolonial cultural diplomacy that takes into account cultural pluralism and identity inclusion in a globalized world. The focus of Okpewho's analysis here is to

answer to the question: what cultural diplomacy should actors in the world politics adopt for a cross-cultural conversation that leaves room for peace among nations and mutual considerations among peoples of the globe? As a creative writer, he thinks that the Africans' cultural identities need to be acknowledged and respected by other nations and Africans should also respect others' cultures.

To address this question, Isidore Okpewho creates Pearl, a character who is president of the local chapter of a group called the daughters of Africa. In the novel, the organization sets itself the task of redeeming the "true" facts of Africa's history and culture from the "tarnishment" of white prejudice, giving firm support to the call by Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) for a return of Negroes to Africa (Okpewho 2004: 19). In other words, it is panafrikanism ideals that Okpewho is trying to highlight in this excerpt. Through the character Pearl, the novelist resumes the ideas of Garvey Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA): If Europe is for Europeans then Africa shall be for black peoples of the world. Africa for Africans was Garvey's main idea. Though Garvey's movement failed, he did as much as anyone to draw the attention of the world, and in particular Africans to the problems of Africa (Michael Crowder 1990: 169). Pearl seeks to gather Black communities around the noble principles of unity, community, mutual understanding to dismantle European imperialist expansionist ideas and work for cultural renaissance (Okpewho: 2004: 96). Ngugi wa Thiong'o states that neocolonialism

is partly due to the success of the cultural aspect of modern imperialism. Cultural control today has blunted perceptions and more so the feelings about those perceptions. Cultural control? But we are no longer in the days of the French policies of assimilation or of the British educational policies of creating a compliant native middle class (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1993: 49).

At a time when ethno-religious conflicts pervades the social atmospheres of many African countries and when racism against Blacks still hovers in the cultural practices of some American states, it is urgent to promote cultural dialogue and peace strategies through literary texts.

Isidore Okpewho in an essay "The Study of Performance" (1990) has advocated a kind of "ethnopoetics" "transcendent of ordinary course of events", an allusion to cultural diplomacy (Okpewho 1990: 5-6). It becomes necessary to stress that Okpewho has used diction to display thematic concerns for the promotion of a new type of cultural dialogue that sees cultural differences, race and ethnicity in peoples as sources of enrichment, not of conflicts and divisions. If theoretically, inter-racial colonialism has ended, intra-racial cultural conflicts are still of date. Cultural diplomacy from the perspective of Okpewho intends to bring people of different nations and peoples of the same nations to come to dialogue on the basis of mutual respect and equality of rights. The novelist says this through a letter Otis Akinbowale Hampton to Awo Akinwunmi:

[...] in the many conversations we held ..., we touched very little on the condition of black people in America. This was because I was anxious to absorb as much of our people's culture as I could, considering the urgency of my mission. But you are surely aware that our people have been subjected to unimaginable injustice ever since they were forcibly brought here many centuries ago. Some changes have been made to the laws of this land, changes designed to guarantee that our people suffer no more such injustices. Yet these changes have been rendered powerless by those who continue to treat us as both different from and inferior to themselves (Okpewho 2004: 256).

In this extract, Okpewho through the character Otis is explaining the necessity of change in the American cultural diplomacy by showing how racial discrimination and cultural denigration of Africans in America have survived throughout the years. His suggests that it is high time these

discrimination and prejudices ended to give way to inclusion, dialogue and equal treatment. He advocates the necessity for Africans to fight for cross-cultural conversation. That position is expressed by the same character, Otis: "But today, our people are determined to stand up and fight to ensure they have as much right as anyone to live here, and to guarantee that the contributions they made to the growth of this nation and to the world are recognized" (Okpewho 2004: 256). For Isidore Okpewho, there must be a change in the cultural practices of Americans toward other races, other peoples and other communities living inside and outside America. The United States of America claiming to be the first democratic nation in the world, it seems inadmissible that all citizens do not enjoy equal treatments. This has been the African writers' struggle along the years of colonialism and post-colonialism.

II. A Cultural Diplomacy of Difference in a Globalized World: Okpewho's Legacy

From New Historicist perspective, Isidore Okpewho builds a philosophy of cross-cultural conversation, a cultural diplomacy of difference where Otis and Norma, two characters of different race, ethnicity, culture, religion and educational backgrounds [Otis is Yoruba while Norma is American] come together to agree on the essentials of human values: mutual respects and understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Given that, due to the realities of globalization, the world is engaged in a dynamics of intercultural penetration, the modern man/woman is a culturally hybrid and cannot live in autarchy. Isidore Okpewho by creating a melting pot society in the novel is advocating the necessity for peoples of different colours, cultures and practices to live together, and yet preserve each his/her identity. Simon Malpas argues that New criticism, in its broadest sense, focuses on the formal production of meaning in a text and, through processes of close reading that investigate the text's use of imagery, metaphor, symbol and tone to produce accounts of a work as a richly textured but coherent organic unity, tends to conceive of literature as something best understood separately from its social or political context, and even from the context of everyday language and identity (Simon Malpas: 2006: 60). In this perspective, the novel's title *Call Me By My Rightful Name* is an apt metaphor appealing to cultural denigration cancellation. Put simply, to call Africans by their rightful name means that Europeans and Americans should give African people their rightful place in the concert of nations. Both Africans of diaspora and those living on the continent should be given their deserved respect and dignity. If one should call his fellow by his/her rightful name, it means people should respect and preserve one another's identities. Westerners should stop looking down upon Africans and their values as subaltern, primitive and backwards. Every nation is a culturally hybrid. Cultural hybridity to which every people is product is the fact of society and history in that slave trade, colonization, neocolonialism, imperialism and modern school education and migration phenomena have forced peoples to mix and cohabit, thus borrowing values and practices from one another. It becomes imperious that people learn to live in symbiosis; learn to accept one another and tolerate one another's practices. One of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory, hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization.

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin

Hybridity has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural 'exchange'. This use of the term has been widely criticized, since it usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating assimilationist policies by masking or 'whitewashing' cultural differences. The idea of hybridity also underlies other attempts to stress the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process in expressions of

syncreticity, cultural synergy and transculturation. The criticism of the term referred to above stems from the perception that theories that stress mutuality necessarily downplay oppositionality, and increase continuing post-colonial dependence (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 2007: 108).

He has Otis one of the characters in the novel assert “Have we [not] been wrong all along applying Western rationalist paradigms to cases occurring in cultures or systems different from our own?” (Okpewho 2004: 133). This statement is made in a context where African writers, their works and immigrants in American and European societies are still victims of racial prejudices. For instance Africans, since the hey days of colonialism till the present have been facing derogatory treatments from racist Americans and Europeans who never stop repeating that “Africa is a land of darkness and the devil” (Okpewho 2004: 80). The writer’s creative vision is that African writers, critics and intellectuals should militate against such cultural denigrations that have survived across the centuries. This message is conveyed through Akinwunmi, an African intellectual character who posits: “Whatever may have happened in the past, please let it not happen to our people again. That is all I have to say (Okpewho 2004: 149). In other words, the world is in a dynamics of mutations, migrations and people move from place to place with their identities, values and beliefs. The contemporary world is hybrid, and this calls for a redefinition of cultural space, nationalism and nationhood within the ambit of modern cultural and technological dynamics of change.

The rapid change into which the world is engaged imposes on individuals the urge to migrate to seek and possibly find solutions to their problems. Migratory fluxes are part and parcel of human culture. As such, the transplantations of peoples and their values seems unavoidable in human experience. This concurs to saying that the cultural integration of one community into the value system of another community also seems necessary if it is considered from the angle of modern world dynamics of change. This translates into the phenomenon of transnationalism, a phenomenon that Isidore Okpewho is well aware of in *Call Me By My Rightful Name*. Before turning to the novelist’s perception of the phenomenon of transnationalism and transculturalism, which calls for a strategic cultural diplomacy, let’s try to understand the concept of transnational identity. Transnational identity in the novel under study is the spatial and cultural border crossings that characters like Otis, Hampton, and Fishbein are experiencing by migrating from Yorubaland to Boston or vice versa, and in the process have embraced new values that reshape their identities. These characters are no longer totally Africans, nor Americans in their cultural outlook. They are cultural hybrids. They are Afro-Americans who care little about their past, but live with the imperatives of the present time: “And they know little about their history or the dynamics of power relations that qualify their outlooks on matters of the kind they have just heard” (Okpewho 2004: 141).

Isidore Okpewho’s art endorses a cultural diplomatic policy that leaves room for dialogue, tolerance, inclusion, and symbiosis. The cultural tenets he develops in *Call Me By My Rightful Name* dovetail Ngugi wa Thiong’o observation that: “Looking at the world today, one sees many countries, nations, peoples, customs, languages, and a multiplicity of apparently unsolvable conflicts and problems. But in reality, the world is becoming one. Human beings who live in space circle the earth within only a few hours (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1993: 12).” Put in other words, the world today responds to the call of complementarities in pluralism and diversity; people should speak the language of inclusion to the detriment of exclusion. As a matter of fact, each people’s cultural heritage should be preserved and protected. To arrive at this model society it urges that people learn to respect each other’s cultures, to definitely end with the cultural denigrations of

colonial days. The novelist constructs this ideology through characters' language, behaviours, actions and reactions. For instance, Okpewho has Norma, Otis' girlfriend, a white character, travel to Africa to check facts and debunk the stereotypes and false ideas nurtured by some European writers' accounts which are false and which continue to give rise to contestation about the cultural denigrations inflicted on Africans by the less informed Europeans and Americans.

Cultural stereotypes about Africa should be banished if the world should make progress. Referring to Nigeria as "...the pagan country where the devil himself lives with all his angels (Okpewho: 2004: 80) is a dangerous stereotype and denigration. To make the point, the reader perceives Norma, Otis girl-friend reacts with astounding surprise at the realization that Africa is just like Europe and America. Her reaction informs the reader about a new perceptive outlook of an intellectual who embarks on a new discovery of the world's rich cultural diversity that expand across space and time.

Where are all those people we've always been told live on trees? 'Believe me Mrs. Hampton, I saw nothing but the most beautiful, beautiful people in the world. People who look just like you and me. Living normal lives on the most beautiful part of this world God ever created (Okpewho 2004: 74)

In another instance, he has the narrator utter the importance of geographical mutations and the flux of population. Cultural theorists of globalization like Isidore Okpewho see the pressures that inspire the reshaping of one's identity with the needs of time and social realities as originating from a global economy that hinge on border crossing, transnational mutations of people in a highly technological world. Voyages for cultural discovery and intellectual information become for the character Norma a double necessity to be connected to the world's cultural dynamics:

He said he'd gone out there because he wanted to see things for himself and not spend his life believing what so many people have been saying about the place. He showed a few pictures of places he'd visited there, people he'd met and spoken with. Writers. Artists. Modern hospitals. Skyscrapers. All kinds of things you'd find here in Boston or New York. He also met some African kings (Okpewho 2004: 74).

Cheryl McEwan endorses Isidore Okpewho's views on cultural transmutation, border crossing and hybridity which the contemporary African intellectual lives in. McEwan posits that "Theories of international migration tend to suggest that migrants cross borders, bringing their culture with them, and become relatively less or more assimilated to prevailing cultural norms of the new territory – they are either sojourners or settlers (Cheryl McEwan 2004: 503)." He continues to add that "Recently, however, theorists have attempted to link globalization to local transformations and struggles against modernity and marketization, instigating a reengagement with culture and transnationalism, often under the heading of "transnationalism from below" (Ibidem). It is my contention that Africa should work toward cultural rebirth. African cultural renaissance should be a kind of home coming that reinvigorates African values. Such values include good morality, solidarity, communal fellowship, brotherhood and mutual respect. In is in the postulation of this ideology that Charles Nnolim asserts that

African writers must face the future by developing an international theme, by engaging in futuristic literature, by looking forward to the fulfillment of 'African dream'. The African dream was partially achieved in the 20th century...the rehabilitation of our humanity through the negritude aesthetic. We should look forward and project a forward looking utopia for Africa, not the backward looking utopia of the 20th century that merely healed our psychic wounds. A forward looking utopia for African writers should project a truly independent Africa politically stable, able to feed her starving peoples, standing side by side with Europe and the west, possessing enough coercive force to earn her respect in the international arena,

and become the last refuge for the oppressed all over the world. This is the challenge of the 21st century for African writers (Charles Nnolim 2006: 5).

I would like to stay in the logic of Charles Nnolim to assert that Isidore Okpewho uses art to promote panafrican ideals about African cultural renaissance, unity and solidarity and black identity. Isidore Okpewho thinks that it is not safe for African development to seek to resemble Europe or America in terms of cultural identity or cultural parity. Judging from the novel's standards, there is so much morality decay in Western societies today, so widely spreading around the globe that many countries are being infected. I am referring to homosexuality, lesbianism, transexualism, drug addiction, high rate of criminality and terrorism. In seeking to resemble *per se* Europe or the United States of America, Africa will engage in a bottomless pit of moral degradation. The world of characters like Kehinde also referred to as Otis and his parents in the novel is presented as a social metaphor of anomy, an environment of confused fantasies. Boston is the metaphor of dystopia, and a symbol of the road to be taken to in bid to claim space in mainstream America. At one point, globalization is for the delirious character Kehinde a process marked by instability and disjuncture in the United States if he loses touch with his cultural roots. This is testified by his disorienting and illusionary sporadic outbreaks of Yoruba Oriki chanting:

“Honour leaves the home, honour returns to the home. What matters how long it takes? You will find me in an abundance of blessing... Wow, so, this is Africa (CMBMRN: 105)

Orumila says, to enter a room, you should stoop at the entrance. Ifa, my question is: what god would guide his devotee across the seas and not abandon him? (Okpewho 2004: 96)

What Isidore has the character Kehinde say here emanates from his cultural lore. It is a recitation of the Yoruba oral poetry, the Oriki, in which he expresses his concerns about exile. He opposes home and exile, the former being the expression of peace of mind and the latter spiritual unrest, mental agitation and moral discomfort. It is in the cultural belief system of most African communities that one should travel abroad to acquire wealth only to come and build his/her hometown. The failure of homecoming may be synonymous of cultural dereliction and uprooting. That is why, after years of adventure in the United State, the character Kehinde has lost touch with his hometown, and this is the cause of his mental unrest and spiritual delirium. According to Douglas M. Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham

Culture is produced and consumed within social life. Hence, particular cultural artifacts and practices must be situated within the social relations of production and reception in which culture is produced, distributed, and consumed in order to be properly understood and interpreted. Contextualizing cultural forms and audiences in historically specific situations helps illuminate how cultural artifacts reflect or reproduce concrete social relations and conditions – or oppose and attempt to transform them (Douglas M. Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham 2006: xxi).

During the capitalist era, values of individualism, profit, competition, and the market became dominant, articulating the ideology of the emergent bourgeois class which was consolidating its class power. Today, in our high-tech and global capitalism, ideas that promote globalization, digital technologies, and an unrestrained market society are becoming the prevailing ideas – conceptions that further the interests of the governing elites in the global economy.

If the stance of Karl Marx (quoted by Robert C. Tucker) that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: that is to say, the class which is the ruling material force of society” it “is at the same time its ruling intellectual force (Robert C. Tucker 1978: 96).” Then we better perceive the logic of Isidore Okpewho that art should promote cultural dialogue; it should

disseminate ideas of bringing peoples of same and different cultures together. In the past, says Karl Marx, “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it.” In the present days, opines Isidore Okpewho, every culture and civilization has its rightful place in the concert of world civilization

Seeing cultural identity as reflecting either the nation of origin or the host nation, it is more appropriate to see it as transnational. The growing complexity of transnational communities is reflected in a rising concern with identity rather than with culture per se. Research on transnationalism generally reveals that large numbers of people now live in social worlds that are stretched between, or dually located in, physical places and communities in two or more nation-states. Hannerz describes the diverse “habitats of meaning” that are not territorially restricted and where multiple identities are constructed. Each habitat or locality represents: a range of identity-conditioning factors: these include histories and stereotypes of local belonging and exclusion, geographies of cultural difference and class/ethnic segregation. In connection to this critical stance, Ngugi wa Thiong’o explains that:

The entire economic and political control is effectively facilitated by the cultural factor. In any case, economic and political control inevitably leads to cultural dominance and this in turn deepens that control. The maintenance, management, manipulation, and mobilization of the entire system of education, language and language use, literature, religion, the media, have always ensured for the oppressor nation power over the transmission of a certain ideology, set of values, outlook, attitudes, feelings etc, and hence power over the whole area of consciousness. This in turn leads to the control of the individual and collective self-image of the dominated nation and classes as well as their image of the dominating nations and classes (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1993: 51).

This proviso advanced by Ngugi that socio-political control of African and other third world countries by Western countries is justifiable from the perspective of African history, since Africans were imposed European languages, education and “civilization” through the economic exploitation and political imperialism. This concurs to explain Isidore Okpewho’s ideological stand that African nations should make tabula rasa of the past and share with the world what Olugbenga Adesida and Arunma Oteh call “alternative visions of the future development from a globalized perspective” (Olugbenga Adesida and Arunma Oteh 2001: 10).

According to Cheryl McEwan

Transnationalism brings about the displacement of culture and identity from the nation, forcing (as discussed) a reevaluation of ideas about culture and identity but also enabling a denaturalization of nation as the hegemonic form of organizing space. As Kearney (1995) argues, transnational migrants move into and create transnational spaces that may have the potential to liberate nationals within them who are able to escape in part strong state hegemony. However, he also notes that deterritorialized nation-states may extend their hegemony beyond their national boundaries. The political consequences of transnational phenomena are potentially far-reaching, since transmigration raises questions about the nature of citizenship and citizenship rights. Global flows and cross-border networks represented by transnational migrant communities challenge assumptions that the nation-state acts as a container of social, economic, cultural and political processes (Cheryl McEwan 2004: 503-504).

In the light of critic Cheryl McEwan's assertion above, it can be said that the literary dimension of Isidore Okpewho's cultural diplomacy theory is predicated on the recognition of the social phenomena of migration, border-crossing, cultural hybridism as new processes of shaping identity and citizenship. As Faist (quoted by Cheryl McEwan) argues, however, the implications of transnationalization for citizenship and culture have not been systematically explored in African literature (Cheryl McEwan 2004: 504). Where the latter seeks to assimilate immigrants on the basis of a unitary national and political culture, acculturation will normally take place, with adaptation of values and behavior to the nation-state's core. Where the receiving country supports ethnic pluralism on the basis of multicultural citizenship and recognition of cultural differences, cultural retention will occur, with practices maintained in a new context and collective identities transplanted from the emigration country (Ibidem). However, where the receiving country encourages border-crossing expansion of social space based on dual citizenship, transnational syncretism will occur, with a diffusion of culture and emergence of new types of cultural identities (Ibidem). This form of transnational citizenship does not deny the existence or relevance of borders and nation-states, but simply recognizes the increasing possibility of membership in two states.

Isidore Okpewho by charging the fictional America's cultural imperialism with the responsibility of Africa' backwardness has also shown what challenges the African cultural politics of difference should take up. Such challenges are essentially three: the intellectual challenge, and the political one.

The intellectual challenge envisions in the novel the ambitious legacy of the Age of African cultural renaissance in a new rapport with America and Western countries, a new way of shaping the modern world. Precious ideals like the dignity of persons, property security, the popular accountability on democracy can be echoed around the world by Africans (Cornel West 1993: 258). Unlike European imperialism, African renaissance is a socio-political project where the precious ideals of economic and technological breakthrough loom large within the crucible of the golden Age of Africa. The intellectual challenge of Africa's development in Isidore Okpewho' ideology reduces the discrepancy between sterling rhetoric and lived reality. In the new cultural diplomacy of difference, the intellectual challenge also rests in how the novelist proposes a new conception of culture, a secular humanistic one that, in the words of Cornel West "can play an integrative role in cementing and stabilizing an emerging bourgeois civil society and imperial state (Cornel West 1993: 259)." To conceptualize his visions of the building of Africa, Okpewho has Otis say: "The more I thought about that picture, the more the meaning of the whole initiation resolved itself for me in light with my confrontation with Crab." (Okpewho 2004: 229). The picture Otis is referring to is that of Africa rebuilt in consonance with his dream.

The political challenge of African diplomacy of difference consists of forging solid and reliable alliances between Africans and Americans on the one hand, and between her and Western countries on the other, guided by moral and political visions of greater democracy, and individual freedom in communities, states and transnational entities. It is what Cornel West refers to as "rainbow coalition" of Africans in a broader African family. The vision is giant due to the tremendous energy, vision, and courage of its leader and followers:

We must take a close look at the political side of our commitment to this village, something we have taken too lightly thus far. I am not saying this village is no longer the home of our ancestors. But we can no longer afford to be content with a romantic attachment to our roots, when some people here have shown, with very clear signs, that they have reservations about our presence. Again, I am not certain what decisions we need to make. But we must open our eyes wide and assess the evidence before us (Okpewho 2004: 243).

Okpewho's creative vision discusses also culture from the perspective of Chery Mcewan for who, socio-economic breakthrough is adjacent on degrees and types of collective mobilisation, access to and nature of resources, and perceptions and regulations surrounding rights and duties (Chery Mcewan 2004: 504). Adding to that the Mcewan says "Together, these create what have been variously termed "transnational social fields", "transnational social spaces", or "translocalities" (Ibidem). These concepts encapsulate a complex set of conditions that affect the construction, negotiation and contestation of cultural and social identities, and of individuals' places of attachment and sense of belonging. To succeed in the new challenge of cultural diplomacy, Isidore Okpewho warns his readers that the task will not be easy, but a consistent will to change can serve as stamina to carve a way out:

Now, how could a white man, whose ancestors did untold havoc to Africa, bringing millions of Hampton's kind as slaves here, be treated so well by the same Africans the white man despoiled? Could they have lost their memory, or is there something wrong with black people like Hampton, here in America, who just won't forget the wrongs of the past? (Okpewho 2004: 63)

For Isidore Okpewho, the time has come for African writers, critics and artists to envision a cultural diplomacy of difference that will enlarge the scope of their vision, flex their approaches widely and reposition the debates, analyses and praxis in new African world dynamics. The aim of that cultural diplomacy of difference is to recast, redefine and revise the notions of identity, modernity, mainstream, margins, difference and otherness. By so doing literature in general and African literature in particular will have reached what Cornel West terms "a new stage in the perennial struggle for freedom and dignity (Cornel West 1993: 267)." African writers will thus promote a prospective and prophetic vision with a sense of possibility and potential.

To prevent past and present mistakes related to cultural denigration from happening in the future, Karen Hughes an American cultural diplomacy scholar proposes that

[...] the way to prevail in this battle is through the power of our ideals; for they speak to all of us, every people in every land on every continent... People the world over want to be able to speak their minds, choose their leaders and worship freely. People the world over want to be treated with dignity and respect. People everywhere want to feel safe in their homes... (Karen Hughes 2007: 38)

In his approach to a successful cultural diplomacy Karen Hughes suggests four strategic pillars which he calls the four "E'S": engagement, exchanges, education and empowerment. Engagement for the writer like Isidore Okpewho means commitment to one's creative vision of a better society where life can be lived in a different way with the spirit of tolerance in a context of cultural diversities and pluralism. Exchanges call for fruitful sharing of ideas and values that are conducive to mutual enrichment. Education refers to the inculcation of intellectual, moral and professional skills that prepare the individual for an active contribution to his/her society's development. By empowerment here I mean endowing or vesting people with the capacity to positively impact his environment for a positive change. In the search for benefic cultural dialogue among the nations of the world, "An adequate response to the challenge of transcultural bioethics should reject the arrogance of cultural imperialism, which absolutizes the dominant values of any cultural tradition, be it Western, Eastern, Northern, or Southern.

Conclusion

In this article, I have highlighted two main ideas: firstly, Isidore Okpewho constructs in *Call Me by my Rightful Name* a philosophy of cultural diplomacy of difference where characters of different race, ethnicity, culture, religion and educational backgrounds reject the mainstream tendency of racism to come together to agree on the essentials of human values: mutual respect and understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Secondly, given the realities of globalization, the world is engaged in a dynamics of intercultural penetration, as a result, the modern man/woman is a culturally hybrid and cannot live in autarchy. The intellectual challenge envisions in the novel the ambitious legacy of the age of African renaissance period with a new cultural diplomacy, inviting inclusion, conversation, mutual respect among nations of the globe and shaping the modern world for many cultures to bloom.

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