

TRANSITIONAL SHIFTS IN IDENTITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SHORT STORIES IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *BETTER NEVER THAN LATE*

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Abstract

This paper, explores the concept of shifts in identity within the context of Chika Unigwe's *Better Never than Late*. With the recent trend in migration, African writers are burdened with the responsibility of documenting the realities of migrants in diaspora. Previous studies have captured the disillusioned state of migrants. There exist some gaps in this discourse of shifts in identity in the course of migration. The study addresses the evolution of identities, struggle for agency, and negotiation of identities in a multicultural space. Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity is used in analysing the text. The selected narratives from a short story collection, vividly portray the evolution of characters' identities, as they navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by multicultural relationships and the postcolonial world. Hence, the narrative highlights the formation of hybrid identities, the impact of colonialism, and the struggle for agency and autonomy in a foreign land. The findings reveal that identity is not static but is continually influenced by historical, cultural, and personal elements as the characters' experiences in the stories exemplify the dynamic nature of identity, reflecting the interplay of historical, cultural, and individual factors responsible in shifting and shaping migrants' identities in diaspora.

Keywords; Hybridity, Identity, Migration, Multicultural, Transition

Introduction

Identity plays a pivotal role in the study of migration, as it defines an individual's sense of self and belonging. This multifaceted concept encompasses personal beliefs in connection to various social groups, such as religious, ethnic, or racial affiliations. Abrams and Hogg (2010) in *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*, propose identity as an individual's perception of how they are seen by others, both within their own group and by those outside it. Migration, however, introduces a profound shift in identity, shifting the focus from who an individual is to where they fit and what roles they will undertake in a new

society. Consequently, migrants' identities undergo transformation in response to the dynamic contexts of their new environments, giving rise to new forms of cultural identities. In their host countries, migrants often encounter alienation and isolation as they face the harsh reality of exclusion and rejection, which may starkly contrast their initial perceptions of the receiving country as superior to their country of origin.

This experience of exclusion leaves migrants feeling disconnected from their own history and image. In response, they embark on a psychosocial journey referred to as the acculturation process. Berry (2003), classifies acculturation into four levels: assimilation,

integration, separation, and marginalization. In our discussion, we focus on integration, which entails maintaining one's original culture while actively engaging with the receiving society. This approach can lead to positive adaptation if the host culture embraces cultural diversity through openness and inclusion, a concept known as "sociocultural integration." Sociocultural integration encompasses an individual's ability to navigate daily events and demands in the new land, including language acquisition, forming interpersonal relationships, and participating in various aspects of the new society, such as friendships, businesses, and marriages. Acculturation serves as a bridge between the migrant's culture of origin and the culture of the new society, yet it can also result in emotional turmoil known as "acculturative stress" when migrants struggle to achieve this integration. Acculturative stress often stems from negative integration experiences, including stereotyping, discrimination, and rejection by the host society. These psychological challenges may lead to identity confusion, stress, depression, and culture shock among acculturating migrants. Discrimination and rejection, as described by João (2009), in *Immigrant Associations, Integration, and Identity*, act as significant barriers, manifesting as institutional, structural, societal, or individual challenges. These barriers may involve unequal citizenship rights, structural inequalities in various public spheres, racism, discrimination, and social distance. Cultural differences related to the migrant's culture of origin, religion, racial perceptions, and language can also impede integration. The host society's willingness to embrace these differences and acknowledge the contributions of migrants is crucial for their successful integration, as these barriers can obstruct the process, leading to unexpected depressive feelings and disillusionment with the host country.

Cultural identity is a critical concept for understanding acculturation in the context of migration. Gomzina (2012) in her thesis, *Multi-layered Cultural Identity and the Perception of the Self* argues that identity, whether cultural, social, ethnic or personal, helps people understand who they are. Self-identity is concerned with "how one

sees themselves" (p.6). Culture and self-identity are closely related. As Gomzina (2012) explains, "Culture is one of the major factors influencing a person's perception of their own identity" (p.7). It is, therefore, important to pay close attention to people's culture when studying an individual's identity. Hence, Cultural identity encompasses an individual's characteristics and knowledge, encompassing attitudes, behaviours, history, nationality, gender, language, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. Religious beliefs, in particular, hold significance in preserving an individual's cultural identity and providing a sense of belonging, even in a foreign land. Losing one's moral and religious values can lead to a sense of "cultural bereavement." In the context of migration, cultural identity is shaped by the cultural norms of the migrant's background and the new environment they become a part of. Interactions between migrants and the host society can lead to assimilation, rejection, integration, or deculturation. Rejection involves the individual or their group distancing themselves from the larger society, while deculturation results in a loss of cultural identity, leading to alienation, acculturative stress, and feelings of failure and low self-esteem.

Theoretical Framework

Post colonialism and its prominent theorists have contributed to a great extent to migration literature by identifying a framework of features and principles either thematically or stylistically for it. The inherent characteristic of this literature, namely its primary focus on the marginal group of every society here the migrant brings it under the shadow of the postcolonial theory. Moslund (2010) justifies the above association through this statement: "post colonialism is, admittedly, an important element of the overall image of the twentieth century as the age of wandering"(p.11).

The two major proponents of postcolonial theory are Edward Said and Homi Bhabha who besides others, have made a lot of contributions to shape the migration literature principles. The most significant characteristic of this study is taken from Bhabha's "hybridity" which emphasizes the fact that the migrant individual is appreciated, in the present world, not by his clinging to his pre-given

ethnic morals and cultural traditions, but by "the power of tradition to be re-described through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority" (Bhabha, 1994, p.2). Thus human identity, the ways migrant characters cope with their new life places, the uncertainties and insecurities they suffer from and the communication problems are regarded as the major themes of migration works. Here, the important matter to note is that the happy memories of the lost home land and the nostalgia the migrant characters experience for their past life are of very less emphasis in the migration literature. The characters endlessly struggle to recreate themselves through its encounters with cultural complexities and discriminating experience of being among the minorities. As such, its identity goes beyond the memories of past and reaches a sort of maturity.

Negotiating Identities in Diasporic Spaces in "Transfiguration of Rapu"

The short story "Transfiguration of Rapu" through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly in relation to the transitional shift in identity, explores the impact of colonialism and imperialism on societies, cultures, and identities. This story provides a nuanced exploration of how characters grapple with their identities in the context of migration and multicultural relationship. In the story, we see this theme through the character of Gwachi, who has a Nigerian identity but has been living in Europe. He is torn between his Nigerian heritage and the Western culture he is immersed in. This creates a sense of identity crisis as he attempts to reconcile these two worlds.

The story also reflects the postcolonial theme of migration and displacement. Gwachi's movement from Nigeria to Europe represents the migration of people from formerly colonized regions to colonizers' countries in search of better opportunities. This migration often results in a sense of displacement and alienation, which is evident in Gwachi's struggles that is captured in the tale of the "Ogwashi man" a cautionary tale about "the covetous nature of human beings" (Unigwe, 2019, p.4), which circulates among the Nigerian community in Turnhout:

The Ogwashi man had been paid a huge amount to marry a certain Ogwashi woman whose husband was already in the country but who could not bring her in because he was legally married to a Belgian woman. The man—very much like Gwachi—missed his "real" wife so much he did not want to wait until he had got his papers and divorced his white wife to bring her in himself. But the Ogwashi man not only took the money, he also took the wife—even going back to Ogwashi to pay her dowry once the husband in Belgium had had his dowry returned. (Unigwe, 2019, p.3)

As suggested in the excerpt, the Nigerian migrant in the tale can be linked in many respects to Gwachi: both initially migrate to Europe without their Nigerian wives, both marry European women to obtain legal papers, both have their Nigerian wives become engaged in a marriage of convenience, and both eventually lose their European wife and their Nigerian wife. Although, some details differ between these two stories for instance, Rapu does not remain in Nigeria, nor is she "stolen away" by her "fake" husband Shylock, the tale of the Ogwashi man could also be seen in a different perspective. In a metafictional perspective, this could mean that, like the story of the Ogwashi man, the short story itself can be read as a cautionary tale, a tale that highlights the risks that one takes when using people and playing on multiple sides. This emphasis on the risks of marrying into Ogwashi Ukwu is a town located in Delta State, southern Nigeria. Citizenship creates an interesting contrast to the usual vision of marriage as an easy backdoor and free-for-all card making it possible for myriads of people to magically become European citizens.

Furthermore, Postcolonial theory often emphasizes the concept of hybrid identities, which emerge as individuals negotiate between their native cultures and the dominant culture of their new environment. In the story, the characters exemplify hybrid identities. Gwachi, for instance, is Nigerian but has adopted European ways of life to some extent, especially in his relationship with Hilde. Rapu, on the other hand, embodies the

complexity of hybrid identity as she straddles two worlds, being a Nigerian living in Europe and involved in a relationship with Gwachi. The story touches upon the legacy of colonialism through the characters' experiences. It is implied that Gwachi left Nigeria due to the harsh economic conditions and sought a better life in Europe, a common theme in postcolonial narratives. The story highlights the ongoing impact of colonialism on the economic and social realities of individuals and nations, as Nigerians like Gwachi seek opportunities in former colonial powers.

The story revolves around the complex marriages between Gwachi, Hilde, and Rapu. These marriages serve as a microcosm for the broader postcolonial experience. Gwachi's marriage to Hilde represents the allure of the West, while his relationship with Rapu reflects his connection to his Nigerian roots. However, Rapu's presence in Belgium is reduced to a commercial purpose as she is contracted into marrying a man named Shylock. Which is not only humiliating but has turned her into a commercial object. Gwachi in the excerpt below complains of the financial stress on him "Twenty thousand euros! And we are from the same village, the man is my kporakpo [village-man]! He loves money too much, when am I going to pay all that off?" "You make it sound like you're paying off a car," Prosperous said, irritated."(Unigwe,2019, p.3) the process in which she is brought to Europe strips her of her humanity as she is forced to leave with a total stranger so as to allow Gwachi her husband continue the process of becoming a Belgian citizen through his paper wife Hilde. This process makes Rapu's situation even more distressing as it drives her into constant uncertainty: "How long still?" Rapu asked every night when he dropped her off at Shylock's. 'Not long now', came the standard reply" (Unigwe, 2019, p.4). Gwachi is a man characterized by indecision, and this inability to commit deeply affects Rapu, for whom a future in Belgium with her husband becomes something more and more intangible, to the point that she regrets following him in Europe: "I don't know. Maybe I should ha... ha... have remained in Nigeria" (Unigwe, 2019, p.9). Due to the way in which Rapu is dehumanized and deprived of agency, it can be argued that her marriage with Gwachi partly fits

the story of an oppressive migrant relationship. On the contrary, Rapu's decision to enter into a polygamous marriage with Gwachi symbolizes her willingness to adapt to his Westernized lifestyle while maintaining her cultural identity. The title, "Transfiguration of Rapu", suggests a significant transformation. Like many characters in the collection, she changes significantly as her story progresses. At first, she is depicted as a relatively flat character, with her shyness and insecurity being her main and only character traits: "She sat down on the edge of the sofa, as if she were ready to flee at the slightest sound" (Unigwe, 2019, p.1). However, Rapu is progressively shown to transform into a more confident, more rounded character, who starts to prioritize her own happiness and whose life does not appear to solely depend on Gwachi anymore. Rapu's decision to leave Gwachi and her subsequent relationship with another man signify her evolving identity and her pursuit of personal happiness.

Her eyes had lost their startled look and acquired a certain calm. When she spoke, she no longer wrung her hands or cracked her knuckles. She settled into Prosperous' sofa as if she owned the place. She asked for music so she could dance. She no longer mentioned Hilde or her pregnancy. "Her eyes are opening," Prosperous said to Agu. She liked this woman. (Unigwe, 2019, p.10)

This transformation reflects the idea that postcolonial subjects are not static; they adapt and change in response to their experiences and the changing world around them. This transitional shift is primarily seen in the character of Rapu as she navigates the complexities of her identity in a multicultural and postcolonial context. Rapu's identity undergoes a transition: At the beginning of the story, Rapu's identity is rooted in her Nigerian heritage. She is introduced as Gwachi's Nigerian wife and is portrayed as a newcomer to Europe. Her identity is strongly connected to her cultural background, including her stutter, which symbolizes her struggle with language and her position as an immigrant. As Rapu settles into her life in Europe, she begins to adapt to the new cultural environment. She learns to communicate more effectively in the European context, although

she still retains elements of her Nigerian identity. This adaptation represents the formation of a hybrid identity, where she incorporates elements of both her native culture and her new surroundings.

However, Rapu's identity experiences conflict when she realizes that Gwachi is not fully committed to her and is also involved with Hilde. This conflict forces Rapu to re-evaluate her identity and her place in Gwachi's life. She undergoes a personal transformation and decides to pursue her own happiness and independence, which includes entering into a relationship with another man. Rapu's decision to shift her identity in the short story can be attributed to several factors and motivations: firstly, Rapu's marriage to Gwachi is portrayed as uncertain, unsatisfying and unfulfilling. Gwachi is emotionally distant and divided between Rapu and Hilde, his German wife. This lack of emotional connection and commitment in her marriage likely makes Rapu feel unloved and undervalued, prompting her to seek happiness elsewhere.

Secondly, Rapu may have felt constrained in her role as a wife, especially in a polygamous marriage. Her decision to shift her identity could be driven by a desire for autonomy and independence. She wants to make her own choices and decisions about her life, rather than being dependent on Gwachi's choices.

Thirdly, Rapu's relationship with another man represents an opportunity for her to fulfill her personal desires and needs, which may have been neglected in her marriage to Gwachi. Her new relationship allows her to experience love and happiness on her own terms. Rapu may have seen her marriage with Gwachi as an unhappy situation due to the emotional distance and uncertainty surrounding it. Her decision to shift her identity and pursue a relationship with another man could be a means of escaping this unhappiness and seeking a more fulfilling life.

By shifting her identity and making decisions that prioritize her own happiness, Rapu reclaims agency over her life. This agency allows her to assert her independence and make choices that reflect her own desires and needs, rather than being subject to the decisions of others.

Finally, the multicultural context of the story may have also influenced Rapu's decision. Being exposed to different cultural norms and values, including ideas about personal autonomy and independence, may have encouraged her to shift her identity and make choices that align more with her personal beliefs.

However, Rapu's decision to shift her identity in the story is also driven by a combination of factors, including an unhappy marriage, a desire for autonomy, the fulfillment of personal desires, the need to escape an unhappy situation, and the influence of the multicultural context. Her actions represent a quest for personal happiness and agency in a complex and challenging environment. The most significant shift in Rapu's identity occurs when she decides to leave Gwachi and make choices for her own future. This decision reflects her autonomy, which may not have been as pronounced at the story's outset. She shifts from being defined solely as Gwachi's wife to becoming an individual who makes choices based on her own desires and needs. Rapu's actions in pursuing her own happiness and making choices for her future demonstrates her reclaiming of her identity. According to Okonofua (2013) in his article, "I Am Blacker Than You: Theorizing Conflict Between African Immigrants and African Americans in the United States" observes that the idea of blackness gives African immigrants living in America the pressure of wanting to change their image and identity. The foregoing shows how she is no longer passive but actively reshapes her life, indicating a shift from a more traditional and submissive role to a more self-determined one.

The transitional shift in identity in the short story "Transfiguration of Rapu" is primarily exemplified through Rapu's journey. Her identity evolves from being defined by her Nigerian heritage and her role as Gwachi's wife to becoming an individual who adapts to her multicultural environment, confronts her own desires, and takes control of her future. This transformation reflects the complexities and nuances of identity in a postcolonial and

multicultural context, where individuals must navigate multiple cultural influences and make choices that shapes their sense of self. The author's use of Language is a crucial aspect of identity in postcolonial literature. Rapu's stutter is symbolic of her struggle with language, which can be seen as a metaphor for her overall experience as a postcolonial subject. Her stutter represents the difficulty of communication in a multicultural context and the power dynamics that exist between colonizers and colonized.

In conclusion, "Transfiguration of Rapu" offers a nuanced exploration of transitional shifts in identity within the context of the postcolonial theory. The characters' complex relationships, cultural clashes, and personal transformations exemplify the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals living in multicultural and postcolonial settings. The story underscores the idea that identity is not fixed but is shaped by historical, cultural, and individual factors, and it invites readers to reflect on the dynamic nature of identity in a postcolonial world.

Migration and its Consequences in "Becoming Prosperous"

"Becoming Prosperous" is a short story that revolves around Prosperous, a Nigerian woman who has relocated to Belgium with her husband, Agu, due to violence and unrest in their home country. The story delves into the challenges they face while adapting to their new life in Belgium and the strains it puts on their relationship. Prosperous reflects on their initial dreams of success in Belgium, which have now been replaced by low-paying jobs and unfulfilled aspirations. She decides to take action by enrolling in Dutch language lessons to improve her job prospects. Throughout the story, there are flashbacks to the violence and chaos they experienced during the riots in Nigeria, which led to the loss of their home and livelihood. The story also highlights the changing dynamics in Prosperous and Agu's relationship, with Agu becoming more domineering and expecting Prosperous to take on traditional domestic roles. There are occasional conflicts, both verbal and physical, reflecting the frustrations and tensions in their

relationship. Despite the challenges, Prosperous holds onto her dreams of a better future. She envisions herself pursuing various courses to acquire new skills and find a fulfilling career. The story ends with Prosperous asserting her determination to take control of her life and pursue her goals, indicating her resilience and willingness to change her circumstances.

The couple, Prosperous and Agu, migrated primarily due to the volatile and dangerous situation in their home country, Nigeria. The story mentions that they experienced riots and violence, which resulted in the loss of their home and Agu's supermarket in Jos the capital of Plateau state. This violence likely stemmed from ethnic or religious conflicts, political instability, or other forms of unrest that have periodically plagued the city of Jos. Consequently, the violence and chaos in Nigeria likely made it unsafe for Prosperous and Agu to continue living there. The loss of their property and the danger to their lives were compelling reasons to seek refuge in a more stable and secure environment. The loss of Agu's supermarket significantly impacted their financial situation. Moving to Belgium, they might have hoped for better economic opportunities and the chance to rebuild their lives. Witnessing violence and losing their property was a traumatic experience for the couple and they saw that migrating to a new country would be a way to distance themselves from those traumatic memories and start anew. But on the contrary, they experience a complex challenge as regards their marriage. In Nigeria, the couple used to stand on a much more equal footing.

In "Becoming Prosperous", the title character is led to reflect on her old life through many flashbacks set in her home country. She contemplates, "It was a different life. She and Agu were equals. Here, surrounded by the odour of their losses, he feels the need to assert himself as a 'man'" (Unigwe, 2019, p.39). Despite Nigeria, and Igbo land in particular, being highly patriarchal both characters are successful in an unrestrained way in their home country; they are both free to pursue their goals

as they please. It is only when the couple migrates to Belgium that Agu becomes self-conscious about tasks such as cleaning or cooking. In Nigeria, “[h]e would not have thought it insulting to be asked to do ‘a woman’s job’” (Unigwe, 2019, p.35). Unigwe herself is familiar with this phenomenon of Nigerian men reverting to patriarchal values after migrating. According to the author, this issue can be linked to class and economic status. Indeed, when leaving Nigeria, Agu and Prosperous have to abandon their middle-to-higher-class lifestyle and replace it with a lower-class one. This becomes a source of conflict, as Agu refuses to take part in household tasks and delegates everything to his wife. On the other hand, having to play the role of housekeeper makes Prosperous resentful towards her husband, for whom she sacrificed her life and career in Nigeria: “The Agu for whom she moved to Belgium, where was he now?” (Unigwe, 2019, p.43). The idea that Agu and Prosperous’ relationship is not initially governed by patriarchal rules is important regarding the present analysis. Indeed, it highlights the fact that inequality and abuse are not inherent to the couple. Instead, it is presented as the result of adversity and concessions.

We are further exposed to the deliberate shift by the protagonist from a traditional marital life to a more modern life as Prosperous is shown to fight back. The first instance of this that comes to mind is her telling Agu to “[f]uck off” (Unigwe, 2019, p.47) at the end of her cathartic introspection. Indeed, “Becoming Prosperous” makes it clear that its protagonist wants to turn her life around, that “she feels an impatience to begin another journey” (Unigwe, 2019, p.45), and her snapping at her husband is a telling sign that this new journey is about to begin. That being said, the end of the short story is not the only instance in which Prosperous is seen to fight back. For example, during their arguments, when Agu hits her, she hits back, and, right after, when he apologizes, she does not: “She never says anything. She never says she is sorry for hitting back. She never absolves him” (Unigwe, 2019, p.44). In addition to this,

Prosperous is also revealed to use contraception against her husband’s wishes:

“Are you on the pill?” he asks. Each time she says no. The only response he wants to hear. The room is not big enough, the space is too limited, for any other answer. This place has not only shrunk her but has made her a convincing liar. In that way she has changed, too. (Unigwe, 2019, p.40)

Prosperous’ subtle acts of resistance, such as refusing to forgive her husband or refusing him the children that he desperately wants “he prayed for children” (Unigwe, 2019, p.53) can be seen as a way for her to regain a certain form of control within the constraints of her marriage. Furthermore, Prosperous mentions that they had high expectations and ambitions when they moved to Belgium. They likely believed that their education and skills could lead to successful careers in a more stable and developed country, which might not have been possible in Nigeria’s uncertain environment. Prosperous and Agu migrated from Nigeria to Belgium primarily to escape the violence, seek safety and security, find economic opportunities, and pursue a better future for themselves, all of which are common reasons for people to leave their home countries in search of a more stable and promising life abroad. There is however a transitional shift in the identities of Prosperous and Agu as they migrate from Nigeria to Belgium, exposes them to a new cultural environment. They are faced with the challenge of navigating Belgian culture, language, and societal norms. In doing so, they adopt some aspects of Belgian culture while retaining elements of their Nigerian identity. This blending of cultures results in a form of cultural hybridity. Again, Learning Dutch, the predominant language in Belgium, is a crucial step for their integration. As they acquire proficiency in Dutch, it becomes a part of their linguistic identity. However, they continue to speak their native language, reflecting a linguistic hybridity where they negotiate between their mother tongue and the language of their host country.

In a bid to adapt, the couple's economic and social status undergoes a transformation as well. In Nigeria, they had relatively stable careers

and a certain social standing but in Belgium, they are forced to take on low-paying jobs and adapt to a different socio-economic landscape. They are both trapped in menial jobs Prosperous being a cleaner and Agu working night shifts in a bread factory. Right away, they seem to conform to the stereotype that migrants are always uneducated and unskilled workers. Nevertheless, their employment situation also entails that the pair is anything but lazy. Indeed, Prosperous and Agu are both depicted as hard workers and frugal people, who, despite their efforts, seem only to be able to afford the bare minimum for a living:

The thought of either of them suggesting a dinner date was almost laughable. Every penny had to be counted and preserved. Back home in Nigeria, they had gone out a few times a month to a fancy Chinese place. . . . But here, going out was a frivolity they could not afford. (Unigwe, 2019, p. 82)

This shift in their social and economic positions reflects a form of hybridity where they negotiate between their past and present circumstances. The couple now inhabit a hybrid identity as migrants. They straddle two worlds, belonging to both Nigeria and Belgium, yet fully belonging to neither. This sense of in-betweenness is a key aspect of Bhabha's concept of hybridity. They are neither entirely Nigerian nor entirely Belgian, and this liminal identity shapes their experiences and self-perception. Their identity formation is an ongoing process. They may grapple with questions of belonging, integration, and identity, often feeling like outsiders in both countries. This state of perpetual negotiation and adaptation exemplifies the hybridity of their identities.

Interestingly, the story does not explicitly explore whether Prosperous and Agu ultimately find a sense of belonging after negotiating a hybrid identity in Belgium. However, there are indications in the narrative that suggest their journey towards belonging is a complex and ongoing process, as the couple are shown grappling with the challenges of adapting to Belgian culture, language, and societal norms. They have not completely assimilated into their new environment, as evidenced by Agu's reluctance to engage with certain people due to

their differences. This suggests that they may still feel like outsiders to some extent. Language plays a significant role in their sense of belonging. Their inability to speak Dutch, fully affects their integration into the Belgian society. The couple learn that their degrees mean nothing, except if they are able to learn and speak Dutch something to which they react to with absolute disbelief:

At one of the job centres, the young man they saw asked them, Do you speak any Nederlands? Nee? Frans? Nee? They could not hope to get the kind of jobs they were after, working in a bank or teaching, if they spoke neither Dutch nor French. Ideally, he said, they would need both. Some German and some English would be useful too. Whenever she retells the story, Prosperous always ends with the same line: "Haba! All those languages and a teaching degree to be able to teach mathematics to a bunch of kids!" (Unigwe, 2019, p. 32)

Admittedly, the language barrier can be particularly complex in Belgium. Nevertheless, Agu and Prosperous' predicament is also a telling example of how Western countries do "not value foreign degrees as highly as native ones. This gap between the two characters' initial expectations and the reality of their new life in Belgium has devastating effects on their morale as well as their relationship. Their low-paying jobs and limited social network in Belgium also impact their sense of belonging. The narrative suggests that they may not have fully integrated into the Belgian social and economic fabric. We also witnessed Prosperous and Agu's identity struggles, as mentioned in the story, which indicate that they are still negotiating their sense of self in their new environment. Agu's desire for babies and Prosperous' desire to pursue language lessons and a new career path demonstrates their ongoing search for purpose and identity. In other words, while Agu's character is centred on bitterness and fatality, Prosperous refuses to consider herself defeated. Her entire character is based on her rejecting the inevitability of her position, not only regarding her marriage, but

also her professional situation two aspects of her life that are linked with one another. As she washes vegetables in the kitchen, she ponders:

I should have taken language lessons, gone for that teaching degree, refused to settle for this . . . Instead, we let ourselves be defeated by the thought of going back to school, sitting through lessons to learn not one but at least two new languages. Which is perfectly understandable. No. It's not. In fact, why can't I do it now? (Unigwe, 2019, p. 33)

This internal dialogue perfectly highlights how conflicted Prosperous feels since arriving in Belgium. She constantly oscillates between acceptance and discontent, and this hesitation could have been much longer, were it not for hearing of her university friend's success: "If Ifeatu could chase her dreams, why can she not? They were both ambitious as undergraduates" (Unigwe, 2019, p. 46). The contrast that "Becoming Prosperous" establishes between the two women is particularly important in that matter. Indeed, it is stated in the flashback sequences that both were ambitious and had promising careers ahead of them, yet one is running for governor in Nigeria, while the other is cleaning houses in Belgium. This discrepancy not only serves as a trigger to

prompt Prosperous to turn her life around, but it also presents Belgium as a "dream killer", a country that spurns the aspirations of its foreign-born newcomers, no matter how hard or ambitious they work.

In conclusion, the narrative provides a nuanced examination of identity transitions through the lens of postcolonial theory. It delves into the intricate relationships, cultural conflicts, and personal evolutions of its characters, reflecting the challenges and opportunities encountered in multicultural and postcolonial contexts. The story emphasizes that identity is not static but is continually influenced by historical, cultural, and personal elements. It encourages readers to contemplate identity's fluid and evolving nature within a postcolonial framework. "Transfiguration of Rapu" and "Becoming Prosperous" poignantly highlight the complex challenges faced by migrants in the diaspora. Both Prosperous and Agu are on a journey to forge a hybrid identity in Belgium. However, the narratives leave it ambiguous as to whether they have fully achieved a sense of belonging. Their experiences underscore that the process of adaptation and integration is ongoing. They are likely to continue confronting issues of identity, culture, language, and belonging as they navigate their new lives in Belgium.

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