

2017

Spaces of in-between-ness and unbelonging : the hotel in short stories by Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Toivanen Anna-Leena

Informa UK Limited

<info:eu-repo/semantics/article>

<info:eu-repo/semantics/acceptedVersion>

© University of the Witwatersrand

All rights reserved

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2017.1326565>

<https://erepo.uef.fi/handle/123456789/3485>

Downloaded from University of Eastern Finland's eRepository

Spaces of in-between-ness and unbelonging: The hotel in short stories by Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Abstract: In the field of postcolonial studies, the figure of the migrant has become a paradigmatised representative of globalised postcoloniality. Yet, not all “postcolonial” mobilities can be equated with migration. A case in point are the travelling African protagonists of two diasporic Nigerian short stories, Sefi Atta’s “Housekeeping” (2010) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “Transition to Glory” (2006). The short stories feature figure of the African leisure traveller, tourist, and, in particular, hotel guest. The hotel articulates different dimensions of a site that is frequently conceived, both in fiction and in theory, as a place and symbol of in-between-ness, deviance and displacement. In “Housekeeping”, the hotel serves as a setting for exploring the socio-economic differences between migrant travellers and symbolises a sense of diasporic unbelonging. In “Transition to Glory”, the hotel room is used as a setting and symbol for an adulterous relationship. It comes across as a space of deviance which is not properly inscribed either in the private/domestic or the public. While set in spaces of in-between-ness and transit, both texts articulate metaphorical senses of longing for home. By analysing the literary representation of the hotel trope, this article contributes to widening the scope of how postcolonial mobilities can be understood.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; Sefi Atta; hotel; mobility; travel; unbelonging

The figure of the migrant has become a paradigmatic representative of globalised postcoloniality. Consequently, the field of postcolonial literary studies tends to reduce the concept of mobility to one specific phenomenon: migration. However, human physical travel is a diverse phenomenon that covers a wide variety of mobilities of which migration is only one possible manifestation.

Illustrative of reductive understandings of mobility is also the way in which African mobile subjects

are not generally recognised as travellers: instead, their mobilities are conceived in terms of slave trade, intellectual movements such as Négritude, or immigration (Loingsigh 2-3). The reasons behind the omission of non-white travel and travellers from what James Clifford refers to as “the dominant discourses of travel” (33) are motivated by differences pertaining to race and class. The word “travel” itself connotes affluence, ease, and leisure, which do not correspond to the stereotypical idea of African mobile subjects as underprivileged victims.¹ Further, as Stephen Greenblatt posits, while migration is commonly represented as a “serious” form of mobility and subject of inquiry, such “less serious” forms of mobility as tourism tend to receive only scant attention in scholarly discussions (251) – postcolonial and African literary studies included. The figure of the tourist seems particularly incompatible with the often coerced mobilities of global south subjects. It can be argued that the tourist/traveller/cosmopolitan and the (im)migrant/refugee are “the reverse figures for today’s conspicuously uneven global culture” (Huggan 3). The “incompatibility” of leisure travel and tourism and the mobilities of global south or “postcolonial” subjects is conveyed, for instance, in Anthony Carrigan’s study on postcolonial tourism, in which the “postcolonial” aspect alludes to “global tourism’s neo-colonial dynamics” (3), not to tourism by “postcolonial” travellers themselves. When it comes to African literatures, in addition to a variety of portrayals of coerced mobilities of underprivileged subjects, non-coerced travellers have also found their way into African fiction. In short, the concept of the African traveller, or even that of the African tourist, for that matter, is far from an oxymoron.²

In this article, the focus is on two diasporic Nigerian short stories – Sefi Atta’s “Housekeeping” (2010) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “Transition to Glory”(2006) – that represent African or African diasporic traveller figures whose mobility cannot be equated with or reduced to migrancy: hotel guests, tourists, and leisure travellers. In the texts’ portrayal of such privileged forms of travel, the hotel is an important setting. Hotels, together with airports, motorways, or stations, are significant networks of mobility as transfer points and “places of

intermittent movement” (Sheller and Urry 213, 219). As an “important gateway space between the local and the global”, the hotel is a space of in-between-ness that also embodies “the grey zone between public and private” (Davidson 169). The hotel can also be conceived as a non-place typical of supermodernity – a space “in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense” (Augé 87). In the case of the hotel, the claim that relations no longer matter can be problematised: it is rather obvious that the hotel is a space in which relations pertaining to class, race, and gender are enacted. In this sense, the hotel captures the uneven logic of global capitalism. In effect, hotels function as “markers of social hierarchy and economic class” (van Herk 143), and as such, they are also be gendered and racialized spaces, given the nature of the global division of labour. When it comes to the hotel as a depersonalised space, it can be argued that the lack of identity also affects the hotel guests. The nexus between money, space, and time that informs the hotel business “makes it impossible for the guest to break out of his or her anonymity and be recognized as a unique human being”: it is in this sense that the hotel guest’s situation manifests the “existential estrangement” of modern man (Matthias 6-7).

The hotel has become an iconic setting for film and literature (see Allan; Bates; van Herk; Matthias), where it often plays the role of a “narrative backdrop and symbolic space” (van Herk 142). As Charlotte Bates argues, as its literal and the figurative meanings entwine, “the hotel [...] constitutes a certain *milieu*, which renders it an apt setting for representations of the restless modern mind” (71). This idea of unbelonging remains topical in postcolonial and diasporic literary contexts as well. Diasporic subjects tend to cherish a “homing desire” (Brah 190-195), and as modern “conscripts of modernity” (Scott), educated, urban postcolonial elites can be seen as hybrid inheritors of modern existential estrangement. In what follows, I analyse the meanings that Atta’s and Adichie’s short stories attach to the hotel. The texts use the hotel trope to explore issues related to diasporic unbelonging, socio-economic difference, and the interplay between the alleged stability and authenticity of the domestic/conjugal and the deviant, unstable and “false” character of an

extra-marital relationship. The texts use the hotel as a symbol for the protagonists' states of in-between-ness: the immigration limbo of a highly skilled Nigerian migrant worker in Atta's text and in Adichie's story, the illegitimate romance confined in the hotel room – a space that is neither properly private/domestic nor public. Neither of the texts romanticises the hotel as a space and symbol of transit and unbelonging. Instead, they draw attention to articulations of longing for homeliness in situations that deny the materialisation of such desires.

By analysing these texts' use of the hotel trope, this article wishes to contribute to diversifying the way in which mobility can be understood in the field of postcolonial literary studies. Atta's and Adichie's hotel stories differ from each other in terms of their contexts, settings, and the ways in which they use the hotel trope for different purposes. Atta's text can be read as an explicit comment on the questions of diaspora, belonging, and global capitalism. Adichie's "love story"³ seems less overtly political. Yet, it uses the hotel trope to discuss the problematics of the private and the public which is a central question in feminist scholarship.

Atta's hotel: a marker of difference and symbol of unbelonging

In Atta's "Housekeeping", the protagonist Abiodun Ogedengbe is a Nigerian ER doctor who lives and works in Mississippi. In the opening of the short story, she has arrived at her hotel in Atlanta. It is Memorial Day weekend, and she is in the city to attend a party thrown by her cousin. The entire story is set in the hotel, and it opens with the statement that the hotel is not the one in which the protagonist usually stays; her regular one was fully booked. The protagonist's habit of booking the same hotel points at her longing for the "illusion of the 'home away from home' " that hotels frequently promote to their customers (Matthias 42). Being obliged to opt for another establishment underlines the protagonist's displacement and unbelonging. This is emphasised by the suggestion that the choice of the hotel may have not been that successful: "the linoleum floor in the kitchenette is sticky and the microwave stained with popcorn" ("House" 24)⁴. The food stains convey the

spectral presence of former guests and undermine the idea of privacy and aspirations to feel at home. For the protagonist, the dinginess of the room itself is an issue: according to her former boyfriend, she is “obsessive-compulsive” (“House” 24) because of her habit of cleaning hotel rooms when she arrives. This feature contributes to the key event of the story: a Latina cleaner is fired as a corollary of the protagonist’s complaints about her hygiene standards. It also suggests that the protagonist may not be totally at ease with the identity of an affluent tourist: instead of making a complaint about the cleanliness of the room and to have a cleaner – probably a migrant like herself – do the job, she does it herself.

While the reason for the protagonist’s travel is leisure, her profession is strongly present throughout the story. The emphasis on her occupation becomes further foregrounded in her interactions with the hotel employees in the course of the episode during which she witnesses the Latina cleaner using the same brush for the toilet and the sink. “I’m sorry, but I’m a doctor and that is an E. coli epidemic waiting to happen” (“House” 26), the protagonist says to the receptionist on the phone to underpin her authority. As her complaint is filed by the housekeeping manager, the protagonist introduces herself as “Dr. Ogedengbe” (“House” 27). Failing to pronounce her surname, the manager addresses her back as “doctor” (“House” 27), which not only underlines the protagonist’s professional identity, but also, through the “unpronounceability” of her name, highlights her non-belonging. For the protagonist, her profession functions as an anchor that ties her to the society in which she lives: as an immigrant, her belonging is not that evident. She is made aware of her foreignness by patients who look “suspiciously at her” (“House” 26) and colleagues who mispronounce her name, shortening Abiodun to Abi. “Abi”, the narrative voice claims, “takes some time getting used to” (“House” 24). Whereas the first part of the narrative refers to the protagonist as “she” while she is alone in her hotel room, the name “Abi” starts to surface in passages in which the narrative voice describes the protagonist’s interactions with her patients and colleagues and the hotel personnel in the narrative present. “Abi” is the diasporic identity imposed

on her by Americans unwilling to take the trouble of learning how to pronounce her name. “Abi” is the name of a highly skilled professional who does not quite belong. Her unbelonging is highlighted by the state of in-between-ness to which she is confined as an immigrant who will not be able to apply for a permanent residence permit for another five years. The hotel, as a place of transit and temporary dwelling, symbolises this diasporic state of in-between-ness. In accordance with the conventional hotel lexicon, the protagonist also presents herself as “room 218” when she calls the reception desk. The identity of a hotel guest and a traveller as “room 218” can be read as liberating in all its anonymity, at least in the sense that it enables her to escape the patronising and “adaptable” identity of Abi-the-Immigrant.

Food is a recurring element in Atta’s short story. Not only is the hotel room covered with food stains, but also the smell of curry penetrates the room, preventing the exhausted protagonist from sleeping. It is the curry smell that motivates the protagonist to call the reception desk for the first time. “It might not get better” (“House” 24), states the receptionist, and asks whether she wishes to have another room. The curry smell comes from next door, a room which, according to the receptionist, is occupied by Indian long-stay guests taking an IT course. The smell of curry is overwhelming, and the protagonist “buries her head under her pillow” (“House” 24) to lessen its effect. With the stains and the smell, food becomes invested with negative meanings: it connotes dirt and nuisance entering the hotel room. Moreover, while the popcorn and ketchup stains in the hotel room allude to the omnipresence of Western fast food culture, thus underlining the non-place supermodernity character of the hotel (Augé), the curry has non-Western, “ethnic” connotations. That a Nigerian immigrant would complain about the smell of “ethnic” food in a Western hotel has an ironic twist to it, for as Jopi Nyman has pointed out, in multicultural contexts, food is often conceived as a question of identity and “a marker of difference that separates the immigrant from the host” (83). Atta’s protagonist comes across as a sort of black parody of a stereotypical,

parochial, white, middle-class traveller who suffers from the smell of “ethnic” food and who also questions the hygiene standards of migrant workers.

“Housekeeping” is entirely set in a hotel room. The text does not, for instance, mention the hotel lobby, which has traditionally been a popular stage for encounters and interactions in literary hotel stories (Matthias 55). The only explicitly public setting outside the hotel room is the corridor in a passage in which the protagonist reluctantly exits her room during the housekeeping incident. The text’s way of prioritising the hotel room as a setting conveys a certain aesthetics of privacy – privacy which, as suggested by such elements as the food stains of former guests, the penetrating curry smell from other rooms, and the cleaner’s knock on the door, is merely illusory. Atta’s text portrays the hotel room as a solitary space lacking personality, and allusions to fast food and global TV channels highlight its non-place character in which “neither identity, nor relations really make any sense; spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality” (Augé 87).

Besides symbolising the protagonist’s state of in-betweenness as a Nigerian migrant in the USA, the hotel room is also, in a more concrete manner, a place of transit between the protagonist’s home and her cousin’s Memorial Day party. As such, its most important quality is as a place for rest. Before falling asleep, the protagonist’s thoughts wander from her patients to her cousin and colleagues. The digital clock – a typical, albeit somewhat obsolete piece of impersonal hotel room decoration – on her bedside table reveals that it is 8:38 pm after her complaint about the curry smell, and when she wakes up at the cleaning lady’s knock on the door, it is 11:27 am. Most of the narrative present, then, is spent sleeping or waiting for sleep, which is in itself a state of transition. Sleeping is also a state of vulnerability during which the hotel room’s privacy is supposed to protect the guest from the world outside the hotel room door (Matthias 61). Yet, as the cleaner’s knock on the door while the protagonist is still at sleep suggests, the room fails to claim its promises as an “ultimate protective shell” (Matthias 61). At the end of the story, after the incident

with the cleaner, the protagonist returns to her bed, and the narrator says, “She has been tired since she moved to America” (“House” 27). This draws attention to the wearying effect of being a dislocated subject, doomed to immigration limbo and annoyingly familiar with “days when she wants to pack up and leave” (“House” 26). Before returning to the bed, she also tries sitting on the sofa, but “misjudges how low and hard it is” (“House” 27). The sofa’s lack of comfort symbolises the protagonist’s failure to feel herself at home in the hotel room and, symbolically, in her migrant life, and suggests that she uses sleep as a refuge from this reality defined by metaphorical homelessness. In addition to being tired, the protagonist is also angry. If sleep is a state of vulnerability that must be hidden behind the hotel room’s door, anger is equally a feeling she wants to hide. When she perceives an Indian man passing her in the corridor during the incident with the cleaner, she is worried that she may “appear angry” (“House” 26), and in the telephone conversation with the housekeeping manager, she uses the word “concerned” to “show [...] she is serious but not angry” (“House” 27). She struggles with the unpleasant feelings of tiredness and anger that betray her frustration with her migrant life and her suppressed longing for home.

While the entire story is set in the hotel room with the protagonist mainly lying on her bed in search of sleep, the alleged immobility of the setting is deceitful: different forms of mobility constantly animate the text. The narrative refers to the protagonist’s trip to Atlanta; depicts her in telephone conversations with receptionists; draws attention to her immigrant status; mentions that she would like to visit Cuba as a tourist; and contrasts this form of leisure travel to the mobility of underprivileged Nigerians “who had been known to hide in the wheel wells of planes flying from Lagos to London” (“House” 25). In short, Atta’s short story captures the mobile essence of the global era.⁵ The principal character’s present physical immobility is just a phase of transition before she joins the movement around her. Allusions to all sorts of mobilities convey the idea that the protagonist is not really isolated from the world, and they give the short story a speedy narrative pace even when the protagonist is portrayed as lying in her bed.

The story ends with the smell of bleach preventing the protagonist from sleeping. Bleach conveys the idea of a depersonalised environment, and, just as the guests before her, the protagonist's presence in the temporary abode will, or at least should, be wiped out: as Matthias puts it, "the transitory nature of a hotel stay denies the guest the option of leaving a lasting trace" (41). The smell of bleach also functions as an uneasy reminder of the protagonist's "concern" ("House" 27) about the cleaner's hygiene standards, for which the latter is fired. This key moment highlights the discrepancy between the socio-economic statuses of the two migrant workers. The Latina cleaner does not speak very good English, and the moment when the protagonist hands her a twenty-dollar bill and thanks her in Spanish, is a moment that captures the imbalanced power structures between them. The twenty-dollar bill also reveals the "capitalist foundation" that the hotel as a modern economic phenomenon tries so hard to disguise with its discourses of hospitality and homeliness (Matthias 3). This moment highlights the protagonist's position as a well-off leisure traveller instead of portraying her uniquely as a migrant worker. The protagonist's attempts to compensate the cleaner for being discharged by giving her a tip and speaking one word of her native language in an absurd, clumsy gesture that troubles the protagonist as she returns to bed after the cleaner has left. The cleaner's discharge draws attention to the way in which the hotel represents a place of transit also for migrant workers in low-skilled and low-paid jobs: they can be easily replaced. The ease with which migrant workers can be replaced underlines the hotel's character as a depersonalised space. The text highlights this feature by leaving the hotel employees unnamed: the housekeeping manager refers to the cleaner as one of "them" with her words, "We train them" ("House" 27).

Adichie's hotel room: Adulterous space between the domestic and the public

Unlike in Atta's "Housekeeping", in Adichie's "Transition to Glory", the hotel room is not the unique setting in which the events take place. The narrative present of the story does not involve

hotel stays: the hotel belongs to the protagonist's near past where it served as a scene for adulterous encounters between her and her older lover. The narrative shifts from the present to the past, portraying the young female protagonist's life in a sugar daddy/girlfriend relationship and in the tragic aftermath of the lover's fatal car accident. The passages depicting the narrative present portray the protagonist in the domestic sphere; first in her own house, then at her childhood home in Nsukka, and finally, in her late lover's house in the company of his widow.

The passages that focus on the past are set in a hotel room with the exception of the last passage, in which the lovers meet at the protagonist's place for the first and the last time. The transitory space of the hotel room, embodying "the grey zone between public and private" (Davidson 169) and "haunted by domestic illusion" (van Herk 143), is the space dedicated to the illegitimate romance. Because of its extra-marital nature, the relationship is banned both from the domestic and the public spheres. The relationship can exist in the public sphere outside the hotel room only when the lovers are travelling, as the couple's trip to London and the man's request to the protagonist to accompany him to a business trip to Ibadan suggest. In their daily lives in Lagos, the couple meets uniquely at the hotel. The man tells to his wife that he goes to a tennis club when, in reality, he meets the protagonist at the hotel – his movement between the domestic/private, the public, and the in-between space of the hotel room is captured in this pattern. As a place of in-between-ness (Sheller & Urry 219) the hotel "provision[s] [...] a lexicon of displacement" (van Herk 141) which is required and generated by an adulterous relationship: it is neither properly a domestic nor a public space. As Sarah Treadwell posits in her discussion of the image of the motel⁶ in different cultural products, "the motel complicates linear accounts of progress, family, and history" as it "collects deviancy and accommodates the domestically resistant" (215, 216). It is not, then, surprising that (budget) hotels and motels are "favorite locations for behaviors related to cultural taboos: sex, drugs, crime, and death" (van Herk 145; see also Allan 167; Treadwell 215). In

“Transition to Glory”, the hotel room clearly occupies the place of the deviant and the “domestically resistant” (Treadwell 215, 216).

Just as in Atta’s “Housekeeping”, the most important single element of the hotel room in Adichie’s story is the bed. This is obviously not for the same reasons as for Atta’s exhausted protagonist, although it should be mentioned that Adichie’s hotel scenes consist of portrayals of post-coital sleep and rest. Unlike in Atta’s short story, Adichie’s hotel room seems almost entirely disconnected from the rest of the establishment: the text never alludes to hotel workers or other guests. In one of the flashback passages, however, it is mentioned in passing that the protagonist’s lover has ordered them a meal from room service, but other than that, all elements of the hotel infrastructure are absent from the text. By practically erasing the public element of the hotel, Adichie’s text constructs the hotel room as an isolated universe of the lovers. This strategy betrays the protagonist’s desperate and essentially futile aspirations to inscribe the romance in the stability of the domestic. However, the allusion to room service draws attention to the fact that the hotel room is never simply a private/domestic space either: it merely “fakes” the domestic. As Maria Noëlle Ng writes, the “hotel guest is constantly living in the public” (94). This feature becomes obvious when one enters or leaves the hotel to check in and check out, or even in the hotel room when staff members enter to bring food ordered from roomservice or to clean the room after the stay (Ng, 95).

The protagonist seems unable to appreciate the hotel room’s deviant character. She cannot resist bringing up the domestic and the conjugal by alluding to her lover’s wife almost every time they meet. “Was it your wife?” (“Transition” 36)⁷, she asks when her lover refuses to answer his phone; “would [your] wife have wanted pigeons on her head” (“Transition” 41), she wonders when the lovers are in London and an “Indian-looking man” (“Transition” 41) at Trafalgar Square tries to convince them to buy a photograph with pigeons on the protagonist’s head; “tell me about your wife” (“Transition” 42) she requests during a dinner in a restaurant in London. This suggests

that the transitory space of the illegitimate affair that the hotel room symbolises is not satisfactory to the protagonist who, in effect, “practise[s] her first name and Agha’s last name in front of her bathroom mirror” (“Transition” 46) and longs for something that would make “all seem more real” (“Transition” 39). Adultery, in a context in which marital life for women so often equals social and economic dependency on men, can be seen as a possibility to “explor[e] a relation free from utilitarian aspects”, as Maria Olausson suggests in her analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo’s novel *Changes: A Love Story* (68). It is against this backdrop that the transitory qualities of the hotel room could be appreciated: it is a space that enables women to flee the taken-for-granted domestic roles of the wife and the mother (Ng 95). However, unlike Aidoo’s more mature, experienced, and equally adulterous female protagonist Esi, Adichie’s protagonist fails to see the adulterous relationship’s potentials – symbolised by the hotel room – for her gendered freedom, and dreams of the institutionalised and inevitably utilitarian role of the good wife instead.

The idea that the romance is impossible outside the hotel room manifests itself in a passage depicting the lovers in a post-coital scene that is not set in the hotel but at the protagonist’s house. As a manifestation of her “good wife” aspirations, the protagonist has prepared a meal for her lover, and afterwards observes him while he sleeps in her bed. When the lover wakes up, he has “a strange expression as he looked around her tiny room, at her dressing table crowded with creams, her mirror plastered with photos, her shelf lined with books” (“Transition” 46). He says, “I shouldn’t have come [...] Being here, where you live, makes me want something more. It makes me want more than I should” (“Transition” 47). Here, it is the domestic sphere as an adulterous romantic setting that becomes problematic, as it seems to impose meanings that are incongruent with the “lexicon of displacement” (van Herk 141) that the hotel setting generates. The narrative conveys the utter impossibility of turning the domestic into the scene of the adulterous romance in the abrupt ending of the relationship: the protagonist’s lover dies in a car accident right after the first time he comes to her home.

As in Atta's story, Adichie's text draws attention to a wide variety of mobilities. In the first flash back passage, the protagonist is on her way to the hotel to meet her lover. She sits in her car, stuck in a traffic jam, with her car's air conditioner broken, street hawkers circling around her car, horns blaring, and people swearing. These elements symbolise the protagonist's sense of being stuck in a romance that, due to its illegitimacy, so to speak, leads nowhere. Simultaneously, the contrast between street hawkers, thieves, and the protagonist points at the fact that the protagonist is a relatively affluent African mobile subject. The protagonist has her own car, which suggests that she is an independent woman, for, as Olausson states, "the men in control of the cars are usually also the ones who control the women's sexuality" (67). In this sense, the protagonist is unlike those Lagos women she describes standing "on roadsides [...] as if they were waiting for taxis when they were really waiting for men to give them rides – men who were stupid enough not to realise that the women wanted to save transport money and were not interested in them" ("Transition" 38). The protagonist's mobility is not dependent on anyone else; in addition to driving her car, she is also portrayed as travelling alone while catching a bus and a taxi on her way to her old hometown and to her late lover's home to meet his widow. Her relative freedom of movement is connected to her socio-economic status. In this way, Adichie's short story highlights the link between gender, class, and mobility.

In one passage, the lovers become tourists as the man invites the protagonist to a weekend trip to London. In the next flashback passage, they are sitting "on the roof of the London tour bus" ("Transition" 40). There are no allusions to visas or immigration officers at the airport present in much African fiction depicting Africans' intercontinental travel. This implies that the couple's mobility is marked by ease. The couple enjoys banal "touristy things" ("Transition" 41), and for once, they have the opportunity to express their feelings in public. Curiously enough, for the protagonist, the caring attentions of her lover come across as a "public display" ("Transition" 40-41), "as if he were acting a film" ("Transition" 42). This suggests that she experiences the tourist

trip as something inscribed in the domain of the unreal or the fake. As Matthias observes, the hotel and touristic practices often have a certain theatrical character as they provide “a relief from the everyday life” (43). In a similar vein, according to Ng, the hotel, a space “‘free’ from daily routine and commitments also introduces the illusion that one has acquired another persona” (96). The idea of acting resurfaces in the London passage in a description of the man “pretend[ing] to speak poor English to the cab driver” (“Transition” 41) and in how he now “seem[s] a different person, as if something that had fit just right back in Lagos was now a little loose” (“Transition” 42). In this way, Adichie’s protagonist conceives (romantic) subjectivities generated in in-between spaces or while travelling as theatretical, “unreal” performances.

Nevertheless, while the protagonist feels that her lover is playing a role during their trip to London, others do not seem to spot any “false” elements. The lovers come across a Ghanaian couple. The Ghanaians immediately identify them as “real West Africans” (“Transition” 42), thus differentiating them from “Londonised West Africans” (“Transition” 42) whom they seem to conceive in problematically essentialist way as culturally inauthentic Africans. The Ghanaians take it for granted that “[the protagonist] was his wife, and it didn’t help when Agha said, ‘Ozioma and I live in Lagos’” (“Transition” 42). The fact that the Ghanaian couple is “slightly drunk” (TG 42), however, diminishes the credibility of their observations, and further underlines the theatrical, carnivalesque effect that the trip casts on the adulterous relationship. For the protagonist, the tragedy of the hotel room as the scene and symbol of the illegitimate romance lies in the fact that, **in** their daily lives in Lagos, it is the only space – however “non-genuine” and transitory – in which the affair can actually exist, and that even when the romance “goes public” outside the hotel room, as during the trip to London, its “falsity” is exposed. This is in line with Matthias’s argument that the hotel is a space in which “dreams can be acted out but not taken outside the hotel’s walls into ‘real life’” (7).

Conclusion

Atta's and Adichie's short stories feature the figures of the African leisure traveller, tourist, and, above all, the hotel guest. In so doing, the texts draw attention to the diversity of African mobilities and challenge the prioritisation of migrancy over other forms of mobility. Atta's story explores the hotel as a space of transit that generates uneasy encounters. It addresses the illusory privacy of the hotel room and highlights the ways in which the hotel articulates the socio-economic differences between different travelling subjects in a global era. In "Housekeeping", the hotel is a symbol for the protagonist's state of in-between-ness as a diasporic subject. The text articulates a longing for a home in terms of an unquestionable sense of belonging that is beyond the protagonist's reach both as a hotel guest as well as a Nigerian immigrant in the USA. While Atta's hotel story is set in a diasporic context and the hotel trope is used to explore explicitly "postcolonial" issues, Adichie's "Transition to Glory" represents the hotel in less overtly political light as a setting for a sugar daddy/girlfriend relationship mostly in the character's own, local environment. Yet, the question of class privilege and the gendered dimensions of mobility are also present in the text. Here, the hotel room is a space of in-between-ness in the sense that it serves as an abode to a relationship that cannot exist either in the domestic or the public spheres.

In both texts, the hotel is invested with mainly negative meanings. Its transitory and anonymous character is associated with diasporic unbelonging and the ease with which migrant labour can be replaced in the global economy, as Atta's short story suggests. In Adichie's story, the hotel room as the setting for and the symbol of an illegitimate romance is conceived as an unsatisfactory state of transit by the protagonist, who clearly associates the domestic as the "true" scene for love. Adichie's protagonist is metaphorically homeless in a romance that can only exist in the hotel room. The two short stories, with their different hotel guests and travellers, contribute to literary imaginings of the hotel as a space of transit, in-between-ness, and metaphorical

homelessness set in different contexts of globalised postcoloniality and from the perspective of affluent, mobile Africans.

Works cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "Transition to Glory." *African Love Stories: An Anthology*. Ed. Ama Ata Aidoo. Banbury: Ayebia, 2006. 34-49.
- Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Changes: A Love Story*. London: Heinemann, 1991.
- Aidoo, Ama Ata, ed. *African Love Stories: An Anthology*. Banbury: Ayebia, 2006.
- Allan, Jonathan A. "Sex in Hotels." *Chasqui* 45.2, 2016: 167-175.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Atta, Sefi. "Housekeeping." *World Literature Today* 84.6, 2010: 24-27.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Transl. John Howe. London & New York: Verso, 1995.
- Bates, Charlotte. "Hotel Histories: Modern Tourists, Modern Nomads and the Culture of Hotel-Consciousness." *Literature & History* 12.2, 2003: 62-75.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Carrigan, Anthony. *Postcolonial Tourism: Literature, Culture, and Environment*. New York and London: Routledge, 2011.
- Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Cresswell, Tim. *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. New York & London: Routledge, 2006.
- Davidson, Robert A. "A Periphery with a View: Hotel Space and the Catalan Modern Experience." *Romance Quarterly* 53.3, 2006: 169-183.

- Greenblatt, Stephen. "A Mobility Studies Manifesto." *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. Ed. Ines Županov et al. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. 250-253.
- Herk, Aritha van. "Hotel Hades." *Mobile Narratives: Travel, Migration, and Transculturation*. Ed. Eleftheria Arapoglou, Mónica Fodor, and Jopi Nyman. New York & London: Routledge, 2014. 139-150.
- Huggan, Graham. *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2009.
- Loingsigh, Aedín Ní. *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2009.
- Matthias, Bettina. *The Hotel as Setting in Early 20th-Century German and Austrian Literature*. New York: Camden House, 2006.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Afropolitanism." *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Ed. Simon Njami. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007. 26-30.
- Ng, Maria Noëlle. "Women Out of Fleeting Place: Hotel Living in Mavis Gallant's Short Stories." *Transient Questions: New Essays on Mavis Gallant*. Ed. Kristjana Gunnars. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004. 93-110.
- Nyman, Jopi. "Cultural Contact and the Contemporary Culinary Memoir: Home, Memory and Identity in Madhur Jaffrey and Diana Abu-Jaber." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 24.4, 2009: 282-298.
- Olaussen, Maria. "'About Lovers in Accra': Urban Intimacy in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*." *Research in African Literatures* 33.2, 2002: 61-80.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2004.
- Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. "The New Mobilities Paradigm." *Environment and Planning A* 38, 2006: 207-226.

Treadwell, Sarah. "The Motel: An Image of Elsewhere." *Space and Culture* 8.2, 2005: 214-224.

Youngs, Tim. "Pushing against the Black/White Maps: African American Writings of Travel."

English Studies in Africa 53.2, 2010: 71-85.

Notes

¹ A similar pattern can be identified in the field of travel writing where, as Tim Youngs observes, African American travel texts have received only scant attention (72). One reason for this, according to Youngs, is that African American writing is often seen to "aris[e] from coercion and suffering" (72) – experiences that seem incongruent with the concept of travel.

² See also Loingsigh's book *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature*, in which she analyses literary representations of the figure of the African tourist in Bernard Dadié's *Un nègre à Paris* and Calixthe Beyala's *Maman a un amant*.

³ After its initial publication in the literary journal *One Story*, "Transition to Glory" has appeared in the anthology *African Love Stories*, edited by Ama Ata Aidoo.

⁴ Hereinafter, "House" will refer to Atta's "Housekeeping".

⁵ The era of globalisation is characterised by the increase of migration, different forms of travel, and the rise of new technologies (see Appadurai). In this sense, globalisation is marked by the escalation of mobility. Of course, mobility is not limited to contemporary globalised postcoloniality. Achille Mbembe, for example, notes that Africa's past attests to a "phenomenon of worlds in movement" and that "the cultural history of the continent can hardly be understood outside the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility and displacement" (27). What is more, it should be emphasised that mobility, as Tim Cresswell points out, "is a cultural resource [that] gets to be unevenly distributed" (178). In this way, "mobility plays in the differentiation of society" (Cresswell, 220). The unevenness of mobility and its role as a marker of difference is flagrant in the context of postcolonial mobilities.

⁶ As such, hotels and motels cannot be equated because the different role that class plays in them. Notwithstanding, Treadwell's idea of the motel as a space that "accommodates the domestically resistant" (216) is relevant and applicable to Adichie's hotel story. Moreover, Treadwell's idea that motels "collect deviancy" (215) is echoed by van Herk in her article on cultural representation of hotels (145).

⁷ Hereinafter, "Transition" will refer to "Transition to Glory".