

A Place of their Own: A Comparative Study of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

This paper examines the contexts in which African women writers of different generations write in order to track the evolution of women's writing in terms of the issues they write about, how they write, and for whom they write. It engages feminist critical theories, particularly some of the controversies about what is African, African-American and Western feminisms. Ama Ata Aidoo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, two major African women writers who represent the 'old guard' and the 'new order' are scrutinized for the ways they individually and collectively push the borders of what is considered 'acceptable' behavior to produce changes in the dynamics of power between the genders. The complex ways in which women acquire a sense of self and agency in relation to intersecting discourses and power relations in the specific locations of their respective novels is interrogated. In so doing, the discussion focuses on marriage, marital infidelity, women's individuality and matters of personal choice as they arise in Aidoo's *Changes* and Adichie's *Americanah*.

Keywords: Feminism, Audience, Context, Blogging, Americanah

Introduction

We have seen enough writing by African women to enable us to track their progression in terms of what they write about in fiction, how they write, who they write for and in this instance, their feminist vision. Here, we compare the novels of Ama Ata Aidoo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, two writers who represent two different generations- the first set of West African women writers the old guard”, and the present generation who will be referred to as the “new order”. Constraints of space will limit this comparative study to how the generational gap impinges on their feminist

perspectives which in turn indictates their chosen themes, characterizations, as well as the audience for whom they appear to write.

Much of the earlier writing by West African women concentrated on specific themes particularly on women's exploitation and subordination in traditional patriarchal contexts, but lately, they have been making forays into the lives of women in postcolonial Africa. Recent writings especially of the last two decades appear to deal more intricately with social constructions of gender and their wide- ranging effects on the psyche and choices available to women and less with impact of the colonial experience. Generally, current trends in literature show more clearly a feminine presence. This is a departure from what the literary critic Femi Ojo-Ade once described as an African literature that “is a male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art” (African Literature Today No. 13). Certainly before the 1980s, a quick glance at early lists of West African literature reveal a predominance of male writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sembene Ousmane, Mungo Beti and so on. The female writers rarely made an appearance even though West African women writers started making their contributions as far back as the 1960s such as Efua Sutherland's *Foriwa* (1962), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Dilemma of Ghost* (1965), Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Mabel Segun's *My Father's Daughter* (1965), Adaora Lily Ulas's *Many Things You No Understand* (1970) and Buchi Emechita's *In the Ditch* (1972). These were the women pioneers who had to fight for recognition of their creative contributions.

Categorized as belonging to the “old guard” of African writers by Ojo-Ade, Ama Ata Aidoo has undoubtedly had a long, varied, and prolific literary career during which she published a number of plays(*The Dilemma of a Ghost*,1965; *Anowa*, 1970), poems (*Birds and Other Poems*, 1989; *An Angry Letter in January and other Poems*, 1992; *After the Ceremonies :New and Selected Poems*,2017), short stories(*No Sweetness Here*,1969; *The Eagle and the Chickens and Other Stories*, 1986; *Diplomatic Pounds and other Stories*, 2012) and significant works of prose fiction (*Our Sister Killjoy*, 1977;*Changes: A Love Story*,1991) as well as a number of critical essays. Aidoo is respected by other well-established female writers such as Buchi Emecheta who calls herself Aidoo's “new sister” and by the still relatively unknown fellow Ghanaian writer Ama Darko who describes her as her 'as her literary mother'. She similarly gained the respect of African American writer, Alice Walker, who

writes glowingly on the cover of Aidoo's Ghanaian edition of *Changes* that "Aidoo has reaffirmed my faith in the power of the written word to teach, to empower and to encourage". On her part, Aidoo in an interview with Frias (2003), paid homage to other women writers particularly in her teaching career:

I will tell you the women I've always been teaching. I've definitely been teaching Mariama Ba (*So Long a Letter*), Bessie Head (*A Question of Power*), Buchi Emecheta (*Joys of Motherhood*)-which is a must-and, although she is not by nationality an African, I've always taught Marise Conde (*Segú*). In drama, I wouldn't even move one inch without teaching Efua Sutherland, especially *The Marriage of Anansewa*. I always teach Nawal El Saadawi and there are a whole lot of other women. My reading list is longer than this, but these are the writers I will always include.

As with other African women writers, Aidoo's recurrent topics are "marriage, motherhood, women's emotional struggles, women's education, their political and economic marginalization and their resistance to oppression", (Stratton, 1994: 175). Also according to Abena Busia (1989), Aidoo challenges, deconstructs, and subverts the traditional "voicelessness of the black women trope" (90).

On the other hand, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie born in Nigeria in 1977 is a younger but a prolific writer of novels, short stories and nonfiction who has claimed a space for herself in the literary arena. Before *Americanah* (2013) was published, attention was already being paid to her as 'the most prominent of a procession of critically acclaimed young Anglophone authors that is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature' (*Times Literary Supplement*). Her writing career started while still at graduate school in the United States when in 2003 she was awarded the O. Henry Prize for the short story "The American Embassy". This was followed by her critically acclaimed first novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best First Book (2005). *You in America* was published in 2006 and in 2007 she won the Orange Prize for Fiction for her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) set in the Nigerian civil war. Then came *That Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) a collection of short stories and *Imitation* (2015)

which was followed by another novel set in the USA, *We Should all be Feminists* (2014) a book length essay in which she defines what feminism is in the 21st century and rallies readers to envision a better, more equal world while encouraging them to take action in order to make that vision a reality.

It is generally agreed that Achebe was a trail-blazer, a master craftsman who pioneered the art of writing fiction in Africa and it appears that Adichie considers herself one his literary descendants. In several interviews, she talks of Achebe as her main literary influence who impacted not so much on her style as on her writing philosophy. She claims that it was reading him that "emboldened" her and gave her "permission" to write about things she knows well (The New York Times, 2017 <https://www.pw.org>). Indeed, it is reported that after writing *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she sought the approval of two people before all others, her father who had lived through the war and that of Chinua Achebe. After reading the novel, Achebe wrote "we do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers'." This was the praise that she valued above all others. Such is the high regard in which she holds Achebe that in an essay "Elegy on Hearing of the Passing of Professor Chinua Achebe" she asks "Who is now going to be our reference of pride?" Certainly the boldness with which she writes on certain matters such war, the assertiveness of her characters, her love for her birth country and a readiness to explore new literary forms are very much characteristic of Achebe.

Literary critics categorise Adichie as belonging to the 'third generation' of Nigerian writers alongside Ben Okri, Teju Cole, Seffi Ata, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Helen Oyeyemi (Hewett, 2005). This generation appears less preoccupied with the anti-colonial struggle and political issues of the older generation and more with 'nomadism, exile, displacement, and deracination' (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005:16). Like many of her female contemporaries Adichie deals with stories of gendered power relations, of love and loss, post-colonial identity, civil war, and the immigrant experience. However, in many interviews since her emergence as a writer, very rarely does she mention other women writers as being significant in her efforts to become a writer. Only once in passing does she mention Flora Nwapa as an additional influence. Yet her stories of how patriarchal and societal norms conspire to prevent women from achieving their full potential hark back to the concerns of early West African women

writers. Her geographical and historical contexts may be different, some of Adichie's fiction is drawn from her diaspora experiences but this is similar to Aidoo in *Our Sister Killjoy*. Regardless of age, both Adichie and Aidoo share a preference for certain themes such as women confronting societal prejudices, women's struggles to balance the demands of culture with modernity, women's desire for autonomy and independence in their daily lives. Both writers represent female sexuality as a site of struggle and resistance particularly when women grapple with unhappy marriages, the tensions of polygamy, and in some cases, making the difficult decision to leave their spouses.

Love Stories Old and New

Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) deal with representations women and are both described by their writers as love stories. The novels share similar ideological views on women's issues. They radiate a certain warmth and provoke thought about the multilayered lives of women and the relationships in which they are involved. Other themes in the novels include family, marriage, separation, betrayal, migration, race, academic and career ambitions. A close scrutiny of the narratives shows that both appear to be engaged in 'experiments of social reconstruction' (Wilentz, 2003).

In *Changes*, Aidoo creates a tale of three female characters who reflect gender issues faced by Ghanaian women. The novel focuses on their different visions of life and the challenges they face in an apparently patriarchal society. It is worth noting that rarely do we find in West African fiction, literary representations of female characters such as the central figure in *Changes*. The novel begins with Esi a university educated married career woman driving her own car and fighting verbal aggressions from taxi-drivers. Later, she complains to a friend that in her office, she finds herself performing secretarial functions in spite of her position as a manager in the Department of Urban Statistics. In contravention of cultural expectations, Esi desires to find personal fulfillment beyond the domestic roles of wife and mother. Hence, she works as hard as her male colleagues attending all meetings and conferences because her career is an important part of her sense of self. But the extra time she gives to her job necessitates leaving her daughter in the care of her mother-in-law which then leads her to consider family planning against her husband Oko's wishes.

In a variety of ways, in both private and public life, Esi struggles against male assumptions of natural superiority and their inbred sense of entitlement. Refusing to compromise on the course her life should take, she divorces her husband after he assaults her, what she terms "marital rape" and voluntarily enters into a polygamous relationship with a Muslim business man, Ali Kondey, where she has to contend with being the second wife. Unlike her first husband who constantly calls on her time and attention, Ali is preoccupied with his first wife and other affairs and demands little of it resulting in Esi feeling neglected. Strained relations between them eventually leads to the breakdown of this second marriage and "they soon separate and became just good friends who find it convenient once in a while to fall into bed and make love".

Esi's character serves as a metaphor for the need for women to be more assertive and self-sufficient and not to feel obliged to apologize for their brains and whatever financial independence they are able to acquire. This is similar to the way the protagonist of Aidoo's earlier play *Anowa* (1970) rejected an arranged marriage, chose her own husband and actively pursued financial success with him. Childless, she was able to remove herself from the constraints of the domestic space but ends up paying a high price for her resistance to cultural norms. The radical decisions made by the women in the fiction of Aidoo and Adichie often result in mental and physical distress but with great courage they remain resolute and still stand by them.

It is significant that in *Changes* the issue of polygamy is raised from the point of view of three educated Africans as it results in an interpretation of identities, behaviors, and relationships in ways that transcend the usual stereotypical categorizations of characters as conservatives or progressives. To a lesser degree, Aidoo gives voice to the second wife, Fusena, a Muslim woman who although college-educated overseas chooses to conform to the roles delineated for her by religious prescriptions. She bows to cultural dictates even at the expense of her own happiness when she accommodates Ali's marriage to Esi. While saddened by Ali's choice of a career woman after she had herself sacrificed her dreams of further education, she nonetheless regards her polygamous marriage as important and by the end of novel it is clear that in spite of his romantic escapades, Ali still considers Fusena and her children his family and their place his home: "I must be going home, I have to go home".

On the other hand, Opokuya, Esi's close friend appears to balance

better both her professional life as a nurse and her domestic duties as a wife and mother but not without some difficulties. Hers is a relatively happy marriage although at some point, her husband secretly propositions Esi to have an extramarital affair with him. Opokuya's main problem is her frustration with her husband's refusal to understand the importance her having a car that will ease the numerous daily tasks she has to perform for the smooth running of the family. He deliberately ignores her many attempts to get his support thus demonstrating his indifference to female aspirations. Unlike Esi, when she is then made redundant at her place of work while her male colleagues were retained, Opokuya is resigned about the difficulties she encounters both at work and at home: "We can't have it all, not if you are a woman".

More subtly than Adichie, Aidoo questions this acceptance of an unfavorable status quo and depicts Esi as strong in making personal decisions regardless of the consequences. By so doing, women are encouraged to take firm actions in tackling their problems rather than adopt the passive role of being victims of circumstances. Interestingly, Esi's battles for a more equitable position in society are opposed by other women. In response to her confession that she has divorced her husband because she felt gratitude to him instead of love, her grandmother Nana is quick to admonish her:

And who told you that feeling grateful to a man is not enough reason to marry him? My lady, the world would die of surprise if every woman openly confessed the true reason why she married a certain man (4).

Nana insists that whatever the circumstances, a woman is expected to obey her husband and that she should be happy that he demands her attention:

But Esi tell me, doesn't a woman's time belong to her man? ... Who is a good man if not the one who eats his wife completely and pushes her down with a gulp of alcohol? (190).

Here Aidoo successfully juxtaposes the perceptions and world view of the older woman against that of the modern generation. As far as Nana is concerned, 'a wedding constitutes a funeral of self' because a man has complete right over his wife after marriage and therefore she cannot

understand Esi's attempt to overturn traditional ways by divorcing her husband after he commits "marital rape".

Aidoo capably portrays "African woman's tensions, frustrations and contradictions...." Thus in answer to Esi Sutherland's view that she "studiously avoids telling success stories in gender relations", Aidoo replies that it is not something she deliberately avoids at all. If anything, in *Changes*, she makes a conscious effort to represent Ali as an attractive figure but the reality is that gender relationships are not always a success.

In giving us *Changes: A Love Story*, Aidoo reminds us of the self-delusions of love in its romantic aspects. The problematics of behavior and identity within a context of social change where the old certainties are no longer reliable guides are effectively portrayed. The crisis Esi faces which is framed as a "Love story" speaks of the crisis of African women in general because of their femininity. Their voices speak out on marital violence, education, motherhood, desires and loneliness in society as the plot of the novel is propelled by the use to which the protagonist put her privileges thereby highlighting both the promise as well as the problems of an economically empowered African woman.

Petersen (2001) therefore describes *Changes* as a "Provocation that works between and against the various positions of African and Western feminisms in order to explore modern day African female identity". Accordingly, there is a deliberate attempt to break out of predictable configurations of solutions to problems faced by women as the narrative challenges the usual discourses about the roles of power and context in the agency of African women. Instead, Aidoo places the modern educated woman at the centre of the novel providing her with a space in which to speak and be heard on intimate personal issues. Furthermore, she neither defends nor rejects polygamy but employs it as a device with which to interrogate the identities of her protagonists. Neither does she offer divorce as the solution, because in spite of her radical decision to leave her husband, Esi is not depicted as being happy on her own.

Aidoo's outspoken views on male domination and privileges in Africa sometimes earns her antagonistic responses from male critics illustrating the rigidity of social positions regarding women as both writers and as characters. For instance, a male African critic asserts that "Aidoo's *Changes* misses a very significant point by not focusing on the challenge of single parenthood and the attendant socio-economic burden it places on women in modern African society" (Ojo-Ade, 1983). This point of view

is expressed in spite of the fact that Esi is a highly placed well paid professional. Such a suggestion is possible because male critics are more comfortable with representations of women where motherhood is symbolized as patience, resignation, labour, self-denial and suffering all of which are considered positive virtues by which women are judged.

In writing *Americanah*, Adichie claims that she wants Western readers to know that African writers do not only write about Africa's problems but are also concerned with diverse issues that affect their personal lives. This is part of “the complex interactions and influences” of postcolonial fiction where the target audience impacts on the writer and vice versa (Kolawole, 2000: 115). In critical receptions of *Americanah*, Adichie finds that the love element is undervalued:

Don't we all write about love? All literature is about love. When men do it, it's a political comment on human relations. When women do it, it is just a love story. I want to push back at the idea that love stories are not important. To use a love story to talk about other things. But in the end, it is just a love story (*The Guardian*, 2007).

In an interview in *The Telegraph* (2013), Adichie explains, “We live in an age where, if you write a love story, it has to be ironic or have a twist. But I just wanted to write an old-fashioned romance.” In *Americanah*, there is a rare combination of empathy and audacity in a love story that also works successfully as an acute social commentary that is highlighted by moments of irony. In it, Adichie writes in vivid detail about two young people who fall in love but are separated for a number of years when they choose to move to different continents in search of better lives. The narrative is about their leaving home but it is also about returning to that home and to the person with whom they feel an affinity. At the same time, it dwells on the intersections of class and race, the subtle tensions between white and black Americans and Nigerian immigrants as well as between newly arrived and established immigrants all the while exploring the effects of loneliness on the individual. The novel is deeply insightful on the subject of gender relations especially about the politics of “feminine” subjects such as fashion and hair as Adichie deliberately devotes much space to descriptions of hair styles, straight versus afro, cornrows, braids, shiny straight weaves, box braids, comb overs, natural afros, corkscrews, coils,

russet waves and TWAs (Teeny Weeny Afros), irons and relaxers.

The reader is introduced to the feisty main character, Ifemelu, through whose eyes events are filtered. Intelligent, stubborn and outspoken, she falls in love with a fellow school mate Obinze Maduewesi. Movingly, Adichie describes Ifemelu's reaction to this first love: 'She rested her head against his and felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size'. However, Ifemelu moves to America to attend university, wins a fellowship at Princeton and inspired by her difficulty adjusting to life there, starts a popular blog about race. The novel begins as Ifemelu prepares to leave America and memories of Obinze, her first love, and the other major protagonist almost overcome her. A gentle, thoughtful and intelligent young Nigerian man who is raised by his mother, a professor, it is Obinze who first starts to obsess about going to live in America. But after graduating university, through illegal means, he moves to England where he tries to become a citizen. He is eventually deported and upon his return to Nigeria becomes rich selling real estate and marries the exceptionally beautiful Kosi with whom he has a child. Very domestic and bound to traditional gender roles and expectations; Kosi is a foil to Ifemelu's character. While she tries to be a good wife, she has little in common with Obinze who has never forgotten his love for Ifemelu. The narrative of the novel is divided between the two main characters' separate sojourns in foreign lands, their trials and tribulations until they find their way back home to Nigeria.

A Place of Their Own

Adichie is determined to bust the 'cinderella myth' and to change the traditional expectations of her fellow Nigerian women. A self-proclaimed “fierce and happy feminist” she intends to spread the message of gender equality because “For many women, success is still linked to what a man can add to your life. I often tell my female friends that it's important for women to find themselves. It's important, because when women in Nigeria say feminism is something in the West and not relevant to me, I can show them that Africa is full of women who challenge the norm” (*TEDx*, 2012). This is similar to Aidoo's insistence that she did not learn her notions of feminism from outside Africa but from her Akan side, a Ghanaian ethnic group which openly favors women to the extent that a mother of four sons still considers herself “infertile” if she has no daughters.

Like Adichie, Aidoo believes that her portrayal of African women is simply a reflection of what she has seen: “I got this incredible birds-eye view of what happens in that society and I definitely knew that being a woman is enormously important in Akan society” (Wilson-Tagoe, 2002: 48). Yet, it is interesting to note that although acknowledged in Europe and the USA as the foremost African feminist, Aidoo somewhat resents the 'feminist' label because she had for long been immersed in gender issues-both at a personal, political and literary levels and owning it does not make any difference. There is a certain negativity associated with the word 'feminist' that she is not immune to perhaps because it is sometimes equated to lesbianism. Therefore, she adamantly rejects the strict marking out of boundaries between what is African and African American Feminism. Hence in response to Nmolin's article “The House Divided: Feminism in African Literature”, where he states that the African feminist literary scene is not whole because there are feminist, womanists, accommodationists, reactionaries, gynandrists and so on, Aidoo's asks: “what are we all trying to get at? If we are all trying to get at the development of society's awareness about the position of women in this world-and what to do about it, how to get women to develop-that's the important issue. If this is what we are about then, frankly, it is not relevant at all whether we are feminists, or womanists, or fundamentalists”.

Unlike Aidoo's old fashioned reserve, Adichie on the other hand is more outspoken about her feminist inclinations. But while unapologetic about her stance, she eloquently explains in her famous 2012 TEDx talk “... that word feminist is so heavy with baggage, negative baggage: You hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, you don't wear make-up, you don't shave, you're always angry.” But rather than to be afraid of the word “feminist”, she encourages everyone embrace it. Elaborating further on the subject she says:

We spend too much time teaching girls to worry about what boys think of them. But the reverse is not the case. We raise our girls to see each other as competition - not for jobs or accomplishments, which in my opinion would be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We do a great disservice to the boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of our boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way.....but by far the worst thing we do to males-by making

them feel they have to be hard- is that we leave them with very fragile egos.

Citing the norms society accepts as well as the sexual politics that continues to cause an imbalance between genders, Adichie ends her talk by calling for “A fairer world. A world of happier men and women who are truer to themselves.” In the novel, Ifemelu is described by others as too stubborn or too resistant when she voiced her ideas in class or, as Kayode said to Obinze “she is too much trouble” because she “can argue ...and never agrees” (730).

In spite of the mistaken notion that feminism is entirely about women's rights, for Adichie, the true goal of feminism is gender equality where both men and women are freed from the restrictions patriarchal society has placed on them. *Americanah* is a perfect example of this as Ifemelu's journey to self-empowerment is replicated in a similar struggle that men must go through trapped as they are within the patriarchal roles that society prescribes for them. Obinze's story is parallel to that of Ifemelu. He is already familiar with the idea of feminist women through his mother and has a vague notion of the power women can hold but still seems fairly comfortable in relating with them. Instead of merely seeing Ifemelu as beautiful woman, he sees her as a human being. However, not entirely free of the masterful role society expects of him, There is an occasion when he forces his himself on Ifemelu in spite of her protests. Then, he is described as consuming everything around him with a 'childish naivety'. Indeed, most of the men in *Americanah* are described as childish at some point.

A streak of unrelenting determination to puncture pretensions runs through Ifemelu in *Americanah* as in Adichie herself. Both are scathing on the subject of white self-confidence, the ease of deep-seated privilege accorded by race or gender as demonstrated by the husband of the woman she babysits for, 'brimming with his awareness of his own charm.' Then her relationship with Curt, a wealthy upper class white American who she dates for a long time but who is overly sensitive about the many racist prejudices that are directed at her is scrutinized unflinchingly. She breaks off with him because of his 'infantile quality....that she finds admirable and repulsive'. In an interview, Adichie speaks of her surprise at the number of black women who have accused Ifemelu of a lack of gratitude for throwing away a relationship with such a good man. When she later dates Blain, an

African-American professor at Yale, Ifemelu is herself criticized for not being angry enough 'because she was African, not African American'. In fact, it is only when Ifemelu comes to America that it occurs to her to think about race at all: "I only became black when I came to America". This realization and all that it implies leads her to experience bouts of deep depression as she is plagued by a sense of alienation.

Of Writing and Audiences

When the reader first meets Ifemelu, she is on her way to have her hair braided before moving from Princeton to back to Lagos. On the short train trip to the salon, she muses about how previously she would have started a conversation with her fellow passenger for her anonymous blog on race in the US "*Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (*Americanah*, 2014:4). As the novel progresses, the narrative that is in direct authorial voice and in blog posts, moves back and forth in time covering Ifemelu's and Obinze's teenage years and their time in America and the United Kingdom respectively. Ifemelu's experience of sexual abuse as well as her relationships with Curt and Blaine are detailed in this manner as is information about Obinze's stay in Britain as an illegal and his life in Nigeria as a businessman in Lagos. By making the main protagonist a blogger, the novel serves as a vehicle for social commentary.

Hence blog writing features prominently in the novel but it is embedded as a separate space in the narrative as it attempts to work outside creative writing to be a place where social realities of race can be discussed without being subjected to the demands of character and action. Yet, the separation between blogging and fiction in is not as clearly defined as Adichie's remarks: "I wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction." Indeed, as the novel progresses, its social commentary moves back and forth from the blog to the novel and vice versa, "contaminating fiction with the drive for elaboration expressed by blogging but also infusing blog entries with the emotional entanglements of creative writing" (Guarracino, 2013).

The first blog coincides with Ifemelu's breakup with Curt, an occasion of acute self-awareness and it continues to highlight such moments which are further elaborated in the other blogs. However, the "raw and true" emotional quality of blogging as Dean observes, is questioned more and more as both the blogging and the novel progress. In

an exchange with Blaine, Ifemelu claims: "I don't want to explain, I want to observe". There is a presumption of being able to give objective accounts of what happens to her. But Blaine disagrees because what emerges in a blog post about depression for example is an elaboration of experiences that have been shaped by the comments of her readers: "Remember people are not reading you as entertainment; they're reading you as cultural commentary. That's a real responsibility". Significantly, at this point the blog entries start to appear typographically separated by the main body of the text: 'she began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people's stories for something she could use. The more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false'. The blog writing comes to an abrupt end at the final chapter of Part 4 when Ifemelu hears news of her nephew's attempted suicide. At this point, the blogs temporarily disappears and the narrative switches from Ifemelu's perspective to Obinze's.

Stylistically, the back and forth from novel to blog is useful in that it introduces an immediate "audience", an active element in the creation of the text. Blog readers are relevant presence and allow for interesting insights into the process of writing in the presence of a continuous feedback. While they may not intentionally be part of reflections on writing in the digital age as being a collaborative art form, such considerations are unavoidable especially when the blog becomes a source of revenue for the writer (Castells, 2009). As Dean (2010: 63) asserts, "Feelings can be profitable". Dean further highlights that the blog creates as a community where the writer and her readers can express themselves, share feelings, reach out and reach back to each other. However, 'Eventually for Ifemelu, this shift creates the unsettling feeling of being dispossessed of her own writing: 'e-mails came from readers who wanted to support the blog. Support. That word made the blog even more apart from her, a separate thing that could thrive or not, sometimes without her and sometimes with her (*Americanah*, 375). Ifemelu's attempt to distance herself from the consequences of her labour leads to even deeper feelings of subordination and annihilation: 'Now that she was asked to speak at roundtables and panels, on public radio and community radio, always identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog. She had become her blog' (*Americanah*, 330). Thus the blog becomes more and more a shared space where the blogger has only limited agency.

Adichie's evident capacity to look at the wider public sphere in her

fiction and to ask questions about choices that individuals make is further demonstrated by the international celebrity that she has now become. That 2012 speech about feminism at the TEDx conference in London gained more fame when it was later referred to by the popular singer Beyoncé on her single 'Flawless' leading many who would not ordinarily read a postcolonial text to *Americanah*. The structure of novel points to the possibilities of the role of technology in writing and especially on the world impact of postcolonial writing. African writers are increasingly taking center stage as global interest in them flourishes and as they become more sought after by publishers. As the world becomes more interconnected because of technology, alternative voices that help people make sense of it are emerging from a kind of "democratization of culture". In Adichie, the postcolonial writer has emerged as a conspicuous *persona* in contemporary media and literary discourse (Guarracino: 2013).

While there is a certain predatory attitude towards the world that is fuelled by blogging, Peterson (2001) examines *Changes* in relation to the traditional Akan dilemma tale, arguing that Aidoo debates "Modern African problems using adaptations of African oral literature". Aidoo certainly employs an oral style of storytelling in most her writing. She tells stories of a particular kind and with a particular intent and sees herself as bearing witness to African social experiences (Griswold 2000). In *Changes*, this is seen through the character of Nana especially in her comparison of Esi with a street-hawker which though incongruous, successfully draws attention to the relative positions of Ali and Esi within the discourse of romance and the society. The effect of this technique which Aidoo has likened to the use of song interspersed within an oral epic recitation, enhances the narrative. For her, writing fiction is very much the contemporary analogy to telling tales by moonlight in the village and she has remained faithful to it which is far removed from the world of the internet that Adichie is comfortable in.

Audiences Near and Far

According to Dalley (2013) new writers like Adichie are beginning to raise the question of 'what it means for literature to belong to a generation, and to a nation' (2013: 17). Indeed, a number of writers who belong to the 'growing corpus of third generation Nigerian literature do not only operate on a national level with its attendant constraints' where there exists only a few Nigerian publishers and yet with a potential readership of millions, but

at a global one (Griswold 2000: 4). In *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry*, Sandra Ponzanesi (2014:68) establishes a link between postcolonial studies and the cultural industry. In particular, she underlines the role of prizes in creating celebrities and bestowing literary worth. For instance, the Orange Prize 'with its system of long and short lists has certainly helped to increase the visibility of female writers and to scout new postcolonial talents such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie'. Certainly, most new writers like Adichie appear to be aware of the processes they are participating in and relate to market forces with a contrapuntal attitude that both endorses and critiques their works thereby embracing a dichotomy between postcolonialism as anticolonial critical practice and postcoloniality as the marketability of exoticism in commercial as well as academic terms (Huggan, 2001, p. 6). Consequently, *Americanah* and similar works call for what Sarah Brouillette (2007, p. 21) defines as the need for a responsible reading of postcolonial texts.

Adichie has acquired celebrity status as an opinion maker on matters of gender, race and the diaspora experience with her 'viral' public appearances online. This may be considered an advantage because as a writer who is no longer hidden away from sight, she can wrest a space for herself within and outside the traditional boundaries of postcolonial literary discourse. Reading that used to be a solitary activity has found a way into in the age of technological communication where it can be a shared experience. The novel has then become a product that acquires meaning as it finds its way to more and more readers. The writer takes on the role of the storyteller albeit a cosmopolitan one, what Spivak terms the 'native informant' one who elaborates 'Africa' for Western understanding and consumption.

Conclusion

Across generations, women writers like Aidoo and Adichie provide insights into postcolonial elaborations of individual and collective identities as they explore the complex ways in which women acquire a sense of self and agency in relation to prevailing discourses and power relations. It is a mark of their artistic competence that they are able to make optimistic forecasts on the possibilities open to women as well as offer searching appraisals of the limits of such potential. Both *Changes* and *Americanah* demonstrate that education expands choices for Africa women economically while enabling them to view their lives from

different perspectives. Through the protagonists of the novels, it is apparent that the social and psychological spaces in gender relations that can be characterized as 'free' are still largely uncharted. Indeed some of the freedoms women seek complicate their condition. But in representing such complexities, the reader is given insights into a future world of gender relations where the management of women's desires and successes will be considered important for society.

In many ways, Aidoo and Adichie have traversed the same path. Both have travelled widely, have personally experienced diaspora encounters, and still choose to return home to the source of their creativity. Hence, their protagonists undergo physical and emotional journeys that are traumatic but that are always instructive. They wrest control of their bodies and minds and though somewhat psychologically disillusioned and emotionally exhausted, they nevertheless strive to start new lives which in the end is liberating. Asked about her current view of women's writing in reference to an article "To Be an African Woman Writer" that Aidoo wrote in 1975, she sums it up "people still have the same attitudes about women and about men-including women's attitudes about women-but you still have the feeling that it is changing, and other people are talking and dealing with it". For the two writers here, feminism is therefore an ongoing project both in fiction and in life, a process undertaken on a daily basis by millions of women of all ages regardless of class, ethnic or racial backgrounds. For Aidoo and Adichie, it is constantly being reviewed and renewed as through the art of novel as they spin themselves into being as women and as writers and together, have earned a place their own in the field of literature.

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