

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

**20TH AND 21ST CENTURY LITERARY VOICES ON
COLONIALISM AND BEYOND: THE CASE OF
ADICHIE AND ACHEBE**



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project work is the result of an original research conducted by Portia Dede Opare, with student number 10342782, under the supervision of Prof. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Dr. Mercy Akrofi-Ansah, and that apart from other works which are duly acknowledged, this work has neither in whole nor in part been submitted for a degree either in this university or elsewhere.



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ABSTRACT

Colonialism and its aftermath remain a perennial theme of modern African literature. This theme has attracted a lot of comments from literary critics: there have been concerns that African literature has sacrificed art for politics, that it has remained imaginatively timid and dull. African literature of the 21st century is expected to have a new face, a new face it will have, perhaps, by putting behind her the dark past of colonialism, racism and marginalization so that she can be more imaginatively aggressive and expansive. Yet the theme of colonialism remains, sitting side by side with the new concerns that 21st century African writers address in their works. This thesis seeks to examine the perennial theme of colonialism in 20th and 21st century African literature. I examine the peculiar approaches that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie adopts in writing stories about colonialism and beyond, comparing her works to Chinua Achebe in a bid to identify where they converge and diverge in telling the African story. I also examine how the concepts of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and interstitial postcoloniality impact the commitment a writer takes in telling stories of colonialism and beyond. The study argues finally that the bold new approaches that Adichie has adopted in telling postcolonial stories are as a result of the heritage of Achebe as a forerunner in African literature, and more importantly because of her expansion of her work through extra-territorialism and cross-cultural initiations (Bhabha, 1994.)

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Teachers – at kindergarten level, as well as university level – form a noble army accomplishing daily feats, never praised, never decorated. An army forever on the move, forever vigilant. An army without drums, without gleaming uniforms. This army, thwarting traps and snares, everywhere plants the flag of knowledge and morality.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In 2009, the world-acclaimed Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED talk titled “*The Danger of a Single Story*.” Her talk highlighted the potential harms that are inflicted when complex peoples, cultures, religions and societies are represented with simple stereotypes. Adichie referred to such stereotypes as *a single story*. The continent and people of Africa are no strangers to single narratives. It is not an unusual sight for documentaries and news agencies like Reuters, BCC, CNN and some other American and European owned broadcasting networks to capitalize on the hungry, war-beaten, pitiable poor African. Thus, for a long time African people have been portrayed as “...one thing, as *only* one thing, over and over again” (Adichie,2009.) It is this picture of Africa that affects the types of stories that Adichie has committed her career to telling. Her commitment is as a result of how gravely she perceives the impact single stories have on the humanity of all people, not just African people. So, in response, Adichie has chosen to tell stories that resist the temptation to rob people of their dignity. She chooses instead to tell stories that highlight the common humanity of people in spite of their backgrounds. She writes carefully so she will avoid perpetrating that danger of single stories, always holding in mind that real people are an aggregate of stories and experiences; and to fully engage with who they are and what they represent, there is the need to engage with all their experiences.

Adichie’s famous speech is an echo of voices from the past, and her commitment to telling the true story of African people mirrors the commitment of some African writers before her. One such voice is the voice of Chinua Achebe, a writer committed to countering Europe’s single narrative

about Africa. In 1975, thirty-four years before Adichie's TED Talk, Achebe gave a speech titled *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. The speech was part of the second Chancellor's Lecture given at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In the speech, Achebe responded to the single story that had been told about Africa as a land without art, history, literature or language. In his speech, he called this narrative dehumanizing, and the kind of story motivated by the "the desire...in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (Achebe, 1977, p.1.) According to Achebe (1989), Europe's single story about Africa was necessary to the glimmer of their own glory as she needed the foil of a dark, dark continent, against which her own glories, both real and fabricated, would shine bright.

Even though Achebe and Adichie are separated by a gulf of some three decades, some striking similarities exist between their works. For starters, both writers are internationally acclaimed; their works appeal to a large and a varied audience. One important similarity that can be noticed in their works is how they both commit efforts to addressing colonialism and its aftermath in their writing. They have especially paid attention to the stories that colonial discourse has produced about Africa, and committed themselves to addressing these stories. Both writers seem aware that African literature is essentially connected to the historical need to respond to colonial discourse. It was Achebe who first argued that,

“at the root of all these strange and untidy thoughts (about what an African novel is, addition mine) lies a monumental historical fact, Europe – a presence which has obsessed us from Equiano to Ekwensi...in our own time a preoccupation with Europe has seemed almost equally inevitable despite the passage of nearly 200 years. In the colonial period

and its aftermath, we are preoccupied with Europe in the form of protest... (Achebe, 1989, p.94.)

Adichie's works in the 21st century shows that the preoccupation with Europe by Achebe and his contemporaries still lingers on in the works of some 21st century writers of African literature.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

African literature of the 20th century heralded the writing of stories that were committed to confronting the portrayal of Africa as a place without history, culture, hope and humanity. Most of the works from this era were stories that showcased the rich history and humanity of Africans. In this era, African literature served as a forum for "addressing and redressing issues of education and mis-education in and about Africa" (Emenyonu, 2016, p.xi.) In spite of the important feats that the literature of the 20th century achieved, some scholars have criticized it for its preoccupation, and sometimes glamorization, of the past. Scholars like Nnolim (2006) have called the artistic canvas of 20th century African literature "small; imaginatively timid and narrow" (Nnolim, 2006, p.4.) He views the literary canvas of this era imaginatively as deficient because of its preoccupation with the goal of re-establishing the African personality and regaining the glorious past colonialism snatched away. This preoccupation, coupled with the defensive nature of the works, results in a brand of works that are narrow, insular and "imaginatively timid" (Nnolim, 2006, p.4.)

In departing from the timidity of this era, the African writer of the 21st century, these scholars argue, ought to put the dark sad past of colonialism, racism and marginalization behind them and be more "imaginatively aggressive and expansive"(Nnolim, 2006, p.4.) This aggression may include stepping outside the bounds of their national stories and invading other continents and cultures, tapping into these cultures for newer richer stories (Nnolim, 2006.) It may also involve

adopting a global outlook to their work and exploring bolder genres like science fiction and futuristic novels. Last but not least, there were some hopes that 21st African literature will “envision a new Africa that has achieved parity with Europe and America” (Nnolim, 2006, p.7) through a deliberate widening of its canvas.

In the last two decades, African literature has begun to explore new dimensions. News stories emerge that are not as focused on writing back to Europe; readership also has expanded to include many non-African audiences. Akin Adesokan (2012) reports of trends from Europe and North America which show that the works of writers from postcolonial spaces continue to find interested global readers. While contemporary African writers still address postcolonial concerns in their works, there are other thematic concerns and stylistic approaches they adopt which are quite different from the generation before them. This is especially so for contemporary African writers who live outside the African continent. Notable amongst these writers are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe, Helen Oyeyemi, Teju Cole, NoViolet Bulawayo, Olufemi Terry, Aminata Forna, Kabello Sello Duiker, and Allain Mabanckou. Even though these writers are African, they have attained international acclaim for their work, remaining on top of international bestseller lists, especially in Europe and America. In their works, common themes include migration, dislocation and the search of identity, and the account of being the ‘other’ under the Western gaze. While the theme of postcolonialism is not totally absent from some of these works of literature, writers are beginning to explore newer themes and interests, especially those themes that result from their being part of an increasingly globalized world.

Both the thematic concerns addressed by early modern African literature, and the emerging dimensions of contemporary African literature motivate the examination first, of how different writers have appropriated their narratives throughout the years in reaction to the hegemony of the

West, and to the West's portrayal of the continent. In doing this, the paper will take a critical look at works that have directly tackled the issue of colonialism, racism and misrepresentation. The selected works will be the works of Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It is worth noting that this work agrees with a popular Igbo proverb which is favoured by Chinua Achebe, that "wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it." As such, the work seeks first of all to examine the similar themes that the authors express, and to secondly examine the impact that Achebe's works have had on the works of contemporary writers like Adichie. The work will take into account the changing roles that Achebe's seminal *Things Fall Apart* has assumed in the canon of African Literature by looking at how Adichie and other writers have picked up the stories he began to tell and re-told them in their own style. Additionally, the work will attempt to investigate the new directions that contemporary postcolonial writers like Adichie are exploring in telling the African story.

1.3 Research Objectives

The paper has the following specific objectives. It seeks to

1. Examine the main literary trends in addressing matters arising out of the colonial experience.
2. Interrogate the critical objections that have been raised against the thematic concerns that address issues on colonialism and its aftermath
3. Interrogate the perennial thematic concern of colonialism and its aftermath, identifying the different and new approaches that have been adopted by Achebe and Adichie in addressing the issue of colonialism.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What has been the trend in African Literature in addressing issues regarding the colonial experience?
2. What are the general characteristics of African literature, fifty years and beyond?
3. What critical objections have been raised to the common theme of colonialism and its aftermath by African writers?
4. What approaches does Achebe adopt in telling the African narrative?
5. How different is Adichie's approach in addressing matters arising out of colonialism and its aftermath?
6. What are the new approaches that have been adopted in changing the narrative around Africa?

1.5 Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative approach for the data collection and evaluation. The primary works used in the study are Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and his *No Longer at Ease*. On Adichie's side, her *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist manifesto in Fifteen suggestions* and *Americanah* form the basis of the analysis of the work. The choice to use these four works by the selected authors was arrived at in consideration of two main factors. First, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has for a very long time passed as the posterchild of Modern African Literature. As an artist, Achebe is seen almost unanimously by readers and critics as the trailblazer of modern African Literature. Studying the trends of modern African Literature certainly does not begin with his work, but the epoch of his writing is worthy of significant attention if one wants to examine African

literature in connection to postcolonialism. Of Achebe's works, *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* are most suited for a postcolonial analysis as they directly address the ills of colonialism. Additionally, the date of publication of both novels are appropriately proximate to the end of colonial regimes in Nigeria, and therefore carries fresh memories of life under colonialism. The second reason for selecting the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's are because of the continental and international attention the writer has garnered in recent years. In my subjective opinion, she demands to be seen and to be read; her works call for critical analysis. What does she offer African literature? What is she saying? Her *Half of a Yellow Sun* was selected because it tells the story of individuals encountering the destruction of a postcolonial state by the ravages of war and ethnicity. *Americanah* was chosen because it can be viewed as hybrid literature; the type of African literature that shifts its focus from the bounds of nationality. Lastly, Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* allows for an evaluation of what I believe to be new themes and concerns in African literature.

Complementing these primary materials is a selection of critical essays from Achebe's *Hopes and Impediments* and his *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. Additionally, interviews, TED Talks, and YouTube videos involving interactions with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie were helpful in the study. Some key concepts that the paper investigates were the concept of the nation, the concept of the African story, identity and 'Africanness'.

Postcolonialism was the key theoretical framework used in the organization of the various ideas in this study. Postcolonialism "is a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects" (Quayson, 2000, p.2.) It is a significant theoretical framework because modern African literature is intricately connected to the aftermath of colonialism (i.e., the postcolonial), as will be fully explained in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Themes such as

slavery, migration, suppression, resistance, difference, race, gender, place and the responses to the discourses of imperial Europe are all recurrent themes in modern African literature, and these are also themes that post colonialism involves itself with. In discussing the theory of post colonialism, particular emphasis was laid on Biodun Jeyifo's concepts of postcoloniality of normativity and proleptic designation, and interstitial or liminal postcoloniality. Both concepts were used by Jeyifo to group different kinds of postcolonial writers depending on the degree of their commitment to their race, culture and nation-state. This distinction is an important one because it allows for a careful investigation of the different ways in which writers approach postcolonial issues. The concepts clarify the type of postcolonial concerns that appeals to each writer, and the commitment each writer brings to their works as they address the theme of colonialism and its aftermath. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Kwame Anthony Appiah's Cosmopolitanism are other concepts that the study explores.

As indicated earlier, the choice of Achebe and Adichie's works as analytical material is in recognition of the direct commitment each writer has made to telling distinctly African stories that explore the complexity of the continent and its people. It is also in recognition of the clear political lines both writers have drawn for themselves in addressing the hegemony of the West. Adichie's works also allow for a critical assessment of the new changes that have taken place in African literature over the years. Both writers are useful choices because each has explored the African experience with concepts, theories and ideas that can be critically discussed, evaluated and analyzed. Often, their creative works are backed up by critical essays and speeches they have produced in explanation to their works. Lastly, both Achebe and Adichie offer a vision of a politically and socially reconstructed Africa, giving hope to their readers of a new order that is better, richer and united.

1.6 Organization of the Work

The work is divided into five main chapters; the first chapter provides a background to the research and introduces the statement of problem, as well as the aims of the study. It also outlines the methodology of the work and states the significance of the study. The second chapter concentrates on the trends in African literature of the 20th and 21st century, paying particular attention to the general characteristics of African literature in both eras. This chapter looks at how literature reflects the state of a society, addressing the socio-political state in which literary works were produced. The chapter also investigates European literary criticism of post-colonial literature, looking at the somewhat prejudiced position of literary critics with regards to African literature. Chapter three is a review of relevant literature on critical and theoretical issues on the question of colonialism and post colonialism in literature. The chapter also reviews the concepts of hybridity and cosmopolitanism and their intersection with African literature. In chapter four, the paper examines the works of Achebe and Adichie, paying particular attention to the issues and themes that are of interest to each writer. The chapter then compares the works of both authors, taking a look at such matters as the themes, issues and approaches that the writers coincide and diverge on, and at the influence Achebe may have had on Adichie. Finally, the last chapter (five) makes observations, discusses relevant issues that came to light in the course of the work and concludes with some recommendations for further study.

1.7 Significance of the work

Postcolonial African literature has played a significant role in “the general process of cultural and political affirmation” (Quayson, 2000, p.14.) Yet often, the role African literature has played in political and cultural affirmation is understated. But writers in the past have used essays, plays, stories, and poems, to speak to the continent on the necessity of embracing its authentic self and

putting behind her the deformed and incomplete stories that the West had previously told. Through literature, writers have worked to help Africans gain a proper image of themselves. This paper seeks to throw more light on the varied and different ways in which newer voices in African literature are contributing to changing the narrative around the continent. It does this by looking at the works of two postcolonial writers, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. A growing body of works have compared the works of Achebe and Adichie. Most of the comparisons have been on the similarities of their works, and the way in which Adichie both adapts and revises Achebe's themes, politics and styles. Tunca et al (2008), Hewett (2005) and Wenske (2016) have studied Adichie's feminist revision of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Ugochukwu (2011) has compared the thematic concerns each writer addresses in their accounts of the Biafra war in *Girls at War* (Achebe) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Adichie.) A significant contribution this study hopes to make to the body of works on African literature is to examine the specific ways in which African literature has addressed the perennial theme of colonialism and its aftermath over the years. Colonialism is not an overstated concept in discussions about Africa as many argue; its effects have evolved with time and still shows itself in so many ways in the lives of contemporary Africans. This study hopes to throw some light on the many changing ways that African people are affected by the colonial experience. And it is hoped that examining postcolonial literature from early post-independence side by side to postcolonial literature of the 21st century will yield some insight.

The contribution of a writer like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to retelling Africa's story is an interesting area to investigate because of the presence and influence her works has in the West. By virtue of her presence and influence in these metropolises, she has an edge of being an "indigenous or native narrative internal to the West's national identity" (Bhabha, 1994, p.6.) She can critique

the prejudices of the West from the interior of the West; she has a large audience of non-African readers who are finally coming to understand where they might have misrepresented African people and the continent. An understanding of how her works address issues of African identity and representation is an opportunity for students of African Literature, critics and Africans as a whole to understand complex issues of identity in the hybrid, postmodern world we live in now. From such an understanding, we can all make the world a better place by insisting on avoiding single narratives and stereotypes of other people. The work will also be a step towards more research into 21st century African literature and the contributions such writers are making in shaping the image of Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

TRENDS IN MODERN AFRICAN LITERATURE

2.1 Africa and Writing

Modern African literature is a type of African literature that is often expressed in a European language and not in indigenous African languages (Irele, 1971.) The term modern distinguishes this kind of literature from *traditional* African literature. Traditional African literature is that form of literature which exists in indigenous African languages and is closely related to the traditional society and its cultures. Modern African literature, especially in its written form, is currently the most predominant type of literature on the continent. Because of its popularity, it is easy for some people to assume that creative writing itself began with European colonialism. In fact, some colonial discourse did teach that Africa had no history, art or literature before colonialism. But before the inception of modern African literature, there were traditional literatures in different forms, be it in the oral form or the written.

Ricard (2007) argues that African people on the continent had left their marks in the annals of history even before the popularization of formal education. They left graphic marks of their history, religion and literature on stones, masks, pyramids, manuscripts and sculptures. Richard (2007) makes a case that these pictographs qualified as writing, because they fulfilled the essential function of writing, which is to record information and enable its retrieval (Ricard, 2007.) African people recorded information on stones, manuscripts and in pyramids for retrieval. Thus, Africa's literary history began before colonialism and was by no means the consequence of it. Ricard (2007) points out that as a matter of fact, literacy and the production of literary works in the manner of what was popular in Europe is just the third wave of writing in Africa. Prior to that, Africa had encountered two different waves of literacy. The first wave of writing took place in Ethiopia from the 4th century; this wave witnessed the production of a form of hymnal poetry known as the *qene*

(Gérard, 2007.) The *qene* was produced in the Ge'ez dialect of Ethiopia. In the 10th century, Amhara overtook Ge'ez as the most dominant dialect in Ethiopia, and between the 10th century and the 15th century; significant literary works like odes for political and military rulers and war songs were recorded in Amharic (Gérard, 2007.)

The second wave of literacy came from Arabia as part of the expansion of Islam. Even though Islam had been in contact with African peoples through trade, the Arabic language started to make significant inroads into the continent from the 15th century (Gerard, 2007.) The Eastern part of the African coast had been in contact with Muslim merchants from as far back as the 14th century. The most remarkable result of this contact of Arabic with the indigenous languages of Eastern Africa was the creation of Swahili. Swahili is a hybrid language of Arabic and indigenous eastern African languages. Swahili literature that was produced in this era includes epics, some of which are religious in nature, and war accounts. The 13th and 15th centuries in Africa also witnessed the spread of epics such as the Epic of Sundiata. The earliest version of the Epic of Sundiata can be traced to 1235BC (Newell, 2006.)

While texts on the continent were being produced in Arabic, Swahili or Amharic, Africans who had been removed from the continent because of slavery were engaging in writing in European languages in the new lands they had been transported to. In 1787, Quobna Ottobah Cuguanu published *his Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*. Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* was written in 1789 (Newell, 2006.) Back on the continent, the second wave of literacy through the language of Arabic still remained the sole medium of literacy until the 18th century when Europe became the dominant power structure in Africa. In the 18th century, European presence on the continent introduced the third wave of literacy, and authors began to publish in English, French and Portuguese.

2.2 The Beginnings of Modern African Literature

Literature in Africa witnessed a boom in activity during the era of colonialism. One of the ways in which colonialism shaped African literature was through the promotion of literacy. Literacy was one of the most attractive aspects of colonialism; colonial subjects in Africa, regardless of their ambivalent or hostile sentiments to colonialism were convinced by the power of literacy. To them, literacy opened doors to the poor and oppressed and made them an important part of the elite in their society (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007.) The colonial administration, especially British administration, gave some genuine attention to the development of native languages in their colonies (Gérard, 2007.) Their investment in literacy was met with open arms. Initially, some African colonies were introduced to reading as a means of promoting the spread of Christianity. There was the publication and translation of religious texts like the Bible, hymnals and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Darthorne, 1975.) With time, the publication of religious texts made room for the publication of popular literature that had an entertaining and engaging twist, appealing to a larger section of the public. By the 19th century, some of the earliest mission press houses had been established on the continent. Initially, indigenous popular literatures generally had deep religious overtones, but overtime, they became increasingly modernized for the purposes of Adult Education, and journalism (Darthorne, 1975.) Some of the notable indigenous literatures that were published on the continent during the colonial era are D.O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*, (*The Brave Hunter in The Forest of Four Hundred Gods*), Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* (published in 1933), Ephraim Amu's *Twenty-Five African Songs* in the Twi Language (published in 1932), R. Gaddiel Acquah's *Oguaa Aban* (published in 1939) and Francis Kwasi Fiawoo's *The Fifth Landing Stage* (Darthorne, 1975.)

As formal education became widespread, and with many African students getting educated national and international universities, some works began to be published by African writers in European languages. Some of the earliest forms of literature written in European languages are Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound*, published in 1911 and R.E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence*, which was published in 1943. In 1958, Chinua Achebe published his seminal work *Things Fall Apart*. *Things Fall Apart* holds a central place in the oeuvre of modern African Literature; often when people speak of African Literature, the example that comes to mind, and the prototype they hold in their mind's eye, is *Things Fall Apart*. Many critics view *Things Fall Apart* as the beginning of modern African literature. After it was published, the novel almost immediately became recognized as a foundational text in the canon of African literature (Newell, 2006.) Modern African Literature continued to blossom in the post-independent era. Examples of other important works to have come out of the continent include Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir*, Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*(1964), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Dilemma of A Ghost*(1965), Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*(1966), Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*(1967), Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*(1968), Kofi Awoonor's *The Earth My Brother*(1972) Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*(1975), Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*(1975), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*(1977), Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike*(1979), Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*(1980), Ama Darko's *The House Maid* and Kofi Awoonor's *Praise Song For the Land*(2002.)

2.3 Modern African Literature and the Problem of Criticism

At its inception, modern African literature was not the concrete and specific body of work which we today distinctly point to and refer to as modern African literature. In its beginnings, it was an

utterly new and different kind of literature which puzzled literary critics. Modern African literature was born in the crucible of colonialism (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007.) The cultural, social and political institutions that colonialism had created were peculiar, and thus it was no surprise that it created a literature that was as peculiar as the postcolonial condition into which it was born. Additionally, modern African literature was new; new in the sense of being relatively recent in comparison to established literatures like English literature or Russian literature. The production of modern African literature, a literature that was still evolving, developed side by side with its literary criticisms. Perhaps it was because of its newness, which meant that the evolving work was undergoing criticism at the same time, which led to the difficulties critics had in categorizing, analyzing and critiquing modern African literature in its early years.

The issues which posed challenges to the criticism of modern African Literature were varied. Firstly, modern African Literature was widely nuanced and extremely heterogeneous; works differed from region to region, nation to nation, language to language and from writer to writer. Differences and complexities not only existed amongst works from different regions and nations, but differences could exist between works from the same nation and region. For instance, a predominant marker of works from Eastern and Western Africa were its African element, that is, its close links with African culture, philosophy and identity (Jones et al, 1994). On the other hand, the predominant marker in South African tradition of writing was Apartheid. Both sets of work were African literature, yet there was no unifying theme by which they could be analyzed, and critics could not observe a distinguishable trend for making conclusive claims on the nature of modern African literature.

Secondly, the literature had risen out of African tradition, but at the same time it was expressed predominantly in European languages like French, English and Portuguese. Some critics did not

know what to make of this: were they to view the works as an extension of European literature? Were they to analyze it by a different, African approach, and if yes, what approach would that be?

Thirdly, even though the literature had been birthed from African society and thus reflected that environment, the works had within it some mannerisms, artifacts and moral values that were at times removed from the roots of African tradition, and therefore unlike it in many ways (Jones et al, 1994.) The problem of language, as well as modern African literature's relationship to the European literary tradition, especially created a complex situation for critics. They were observing at firsthand an ever-present paradox of a literature that was doubly related to two distinct cultures and imaginative traditions, with each culture and tradition having its own distinct history and ways of interpreting the world (Irele, 1971.) This paradox often tempted critics, many of whom were European, to use unrealistic and heavy standards in the analysis of African literature (Irele, 1971.) Such critics failed to see that the new literature belonged to the European tradition only in form and in language and that in spite of this affinity, modern African literature stood outside the European tradition by its references, characterization, and peculiar use of language. In addition, they lacked the necessary understanding of African worldviews, language and philosophy to enable them to adequately mediate between the consciousness of the author, what he sought to communicate to his audience and the response of the author's larger audience of readers (Irele, 1971.) By their inability to see the distinct nature of the new literature, they could not fully perceive the entire range of what had gone into the creation of African literature. They could not appreciate the directions that the work was taking, the aims that it sought to achieve; they remained almost unaware to the external, social and political issues which were outside the work itself but had played an important role to shaping the imaginative process of the work. Pioneering authors were often criticized for not matching up to Western standards of 'good' literature. These harsh

criticisms were mostly because the critical approach and concepts used were not only alien to African patterns of storytelling and literature, but were at times well above the standard that the writer himself was offering (Irele, 1971.) For instance, R.E. Obeng's *Eighteen Pence*, one of the earliest works to be written in English by an African, was criticized for its flaws in plot and characterization. The book's main character, Akrofi, has been described by critics like Darthorne (1975) as unrealistic, stiff, insensitive, prudish and sanctimonious. Another book, Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, was for a long time overlooked by some critics and readers because of the claim that the work had no place in the annals of creative literature. Tutuola's style of translating Yoruba mythology imaginatively in his novel was misunderstood by many of his critics, who found his work 'too prodigious and trivial'. In Nigeria, local audience could not appreciate Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* because they thought his proficiency in English too basic, and his subject matter too akin to everyday stories told by grandmothers around fires Darthorne (1975.)

The application of European standards to the criticism of African literature led to a lot of debates on who qualified to critique African literature in early 1950s. Scholars like Irele, Achebe and Isevbaye argued for the need of a criticism that takes into consideration “the whole imaginative tradition in Africa” (Heywood, 1971, p.17.) Achebe particularly urged European critics to “cultivate the habit of humility” (Achebe, 1989, p.73) when critiquing modern African literature. In his view, humility was a necessary tool because of the limited experience that non-African critics had about the African world. In his thoughts on how the problem could be solved, Abiola Irele (1971) proposed what he termed ‘sociological approach’ for the criticisms of modern African literature, an approach that would be sensitive and cognizant of everything within the African society that had gone into the creation of the imaginative work. Irele (1971) believed that the sociological approach would be an adequate approach because it contained within it a special

orientation that allowed it to deal with the paradox of a literature that belonged to two different cultures and traditions. It would also be capable of adjusting the principles of literary criticism that was present in Western tradition to the peculiar modes of sensibility and expression within African literature. Irele's (1971) sociological approach to literature, and his proposal for a criticism that was aware of the distinctiveness in African literature was not a call to extremism, exclusivity and a narrow room for who qualified to critique African literature using what approach. He was not, he argued, overstating the case for an African understanding of modern Africa literature. Instead, his objective was to bring attention to the need to see African literature for what it truly was, with its paradoxes, heterogeneity and complexities, so that it could be judged on its own merit, and its essence truly understood.

In spite of its heterogeneity, complexities and its earlier challenges with finding an adequate critical approach, a major approach that many critics used in analyzing African literature was the role that tradition, culture and politics play as external forces in impacting the imaginative works African writers produce (Irele,1971.) In an editorial piece for the journal in *African Literature Today* in 1994, Eldred Jones predicted a change in direction for literary criticism in modern African literature. The change in direction, he said, would involve a shifting away from the mannerisms and physical outplays of traditional African culture. He noted that this change will happen as writers become more urban and modern, experiencing new and extra-national realities. He believed that this change would be necessary because of the danger African literary criticisms had courted in with its rigid association with what he referred to as a "mummified traditional ethic" (Jones et al, 1994, p.5.) Jones's foresight became an observable trend in modern African literature sooner than he might have thought. In the last two decades, African literary criticisms have

discussed newer concerns than the mannerisms and physical outplays of culture, nationality and tradition. This new trend will be examined later on in this paper.

2.4 Issues in Early Modern African Literature

Literature is a record of a society's mores, values, history, aesthetics and ambitions. Even though literature is not an exact record of factuality, it has a potent ability to create stories that resemble reality (Achebe, 1989.) It can be a society's way of explaining reality and making meaning of it. Because of the important relationship between literature and the society, it could be said that literary focus can shift to address those issues that are important to a particular society at a given point in time. Thus, modern African literature from its early days, spanning from the early 1940s to the 1970s, does address different issues than say what African literature from the first decade of the 21st century will address. A cursory glance through literary journals from the 1950s down to the 1970s will reveal that writers and literary critics from that era were concerned about a different set of issues than what writers and critics from the 21st century are concerned about today. Of course, concerns in the 1963 may very well be a pressing concern in 2007, but there still remain a difference in the issues that were taken up by each era.

Perhaps, these differences in concerns and commitments may be the result of the conditions under which writers wrote. Perhaps the difference exists because there is often a connection between the writer, his background and his subject matter (Soyinka, 1967.) Early modern African literature, as compared to the contemporary, was in proximity to colonialism and anti-colonial struggle. These two conditions necessitated a certain level of commitment. There was a mood of militancy in the atmosphere, and writers were sensitive to this mood (Soyinka, 1976.) Choosing to modify their definition of what it meant to be a writer, many writers in this era made themselves a part of the state machinery that would shape their destinies and that of their families and friends. According

to Emenyonu (2006), African Literature in the 20th century had a specific role to play in the society. First, it served as a forum for addressing and redressing issues of education, mis-education, misrepresentation, and distortions about Africa and Africans by Westerners and by those under the influence of Western narratives. Secondly, African literature helped in the restoration of African identity and dignity. Third, African literature addressed the excesses of the neo-colonial state and gave a voice to citizens.

In this section of the research, I will examine some of the major issues that writers and critics concerned themselves with in the early years of the formation of African literature. The works of noted writers and literary critics will be examined in an attempt to establish a trend about the issues that were central to African literature some 40 or 50 years ago.

2.4.1 The Question of Language and Modern African Literature

Language, and the African writer, was a major concern in early criticisms on modern African literature. African literature had a peculiar case: even though it was the product of African writers who had a first, indigenous language, the major languages in which the works were produced were European – mainly English, French and Portuguese. African writers wrote in English because of the historical accident of colonialism (Irele, 1971.) Many writers had to work hard to achieve proficiency in European languages, just so they could write in it. In the face of writing in a European language was the reality that a majority of the Africans at the time did not speak or fluently understand the languages modern African literature was written in. What then was the problem with an illiterate audience and a literature written in European language? The problem was the separation between the author, his work and his society. Writing in European languages restricted the audience of modern African literature to the very small demography of Africans who had been to college. Apart from education, this group was also an esoteric group because of their

European orientation, which had socialized them into European literatures and culture (Wali, 1963.)

Many critics and writers questioned the issue of language in African literature with regard to authenticity and audience. The debate on the problem of language had two broad factions; there were those who believed, and advocated that African literature ought to be written in African languages. Some were vociferous about their advocacy, while others chose to write their works in African languages because they were convinced that was the best way to deal with the issue of language, authenticity and audience. On the other side of the debate were writers and scholars who were of the position that African literature could be written in European languages. The main argument of the pro-indigenous African literature critics and authors was that European languages did not have to be the inevitable medium for writing African literature. Their major concern was for African authors to be encouraged to write in their indigenous language, the language they already 'think and feel' in. Writing in European language, they argued, was misdirected, and a barrier to the advancement of African literature and culture (Wali, 1963.) Notable amongst such critics and authors were Obi Wali, Chinweazu Ibekwe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. While Chinweazu et al were of the view that writing in European languages amounted to cultural servitude and a denial of the validity of African culture, Obi Wali (1963) thought that it was better for African writers to think, feel and express themselves in their own indigenous languages. Obi Wali (1963) disagreed with the argument for transliteration, which had been put forward by sections in support of writing in European languages. He maintained that transliteration was unwise and unacceptable because the original, indigenous thoughts of the writer were the 'real stuff of literature and the imagination' (Wali, 1963) not the second-hand thoughts that had been transliterated from the indigenous language into the European. Obi Wali (1963) was certain that any attempt to

transliterate into English or French would result in the kind of literature that was lacking in “blood and stamina”, which had “no means of self-enrichment” (Wali, 1963, p.13.) Wali (1963) believed that African literature was going to see its dead end, characterized by sterility and meaninglessness if authors continued to write in European language.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o is another writer and critic who was central to the debate on language and the African writer. An author who previously wrote his major works in English, Ngugi had a turnaround in 1967 and chose to write and publish in Gikuyu, a Kenyan language. Ngugi believes that writing in his mother tongue is his way of living above imperialism, and affirming that African languages weren’t something inferior and backward to be embarrassed about. His decision to write in his indigenous language was a war against European education, which in his opinion sought to create in African people a hatred for their own people and their own culture. In writing in Gikuyu, wa Thiong’o hoped that he would do for African literature what Milton, Shakespeare and Blake had done for English literature.

Not every African author or critic believed that writing in European languages would lead to the dead end of literature. Authors like Nadine Gordimer, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe believed that writers who chose to express themselves in European languages could “enrich their idioms and imagination by drawing from their own traditional sources” (Achebe, 1975, p.87.) Achebe distinguished African literature into two broad categories based on the language in which it was produced: ethnic literatures and national literatures. Ethnic literatures were esoteric and exclusive, because it was only to be understood by members of the Akan, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba or Fon people for which it was written. If modern African literature was going to appeal to a national audience, and carry the experiences of the ethnic group, the family, the town, the village and the nation, then it would be better that it was written in a national language. By virtue of history, most

African national languages, until they are changed by the collective action of the citizenry, were European languages. Achebe argued that because of this situation it only made sense that national literatures be written in national languages. Modern African literature was the product of colonialism and nationalism, systems that were bedmates with the language of Europe, and therefore was more adequately conveyed in English, or French, or Portuguese. Achebe's argument was that European languages had succeeded in unifying many peoples who had hitherto gone their several ways (Achebe, 1975, p.57) under the common umbrella of the nation-state. If language had succeeded in unifying people, then it was not too much to expect that that language, used in literature, could unify readers and broaden their experiences.

Achebe's view was not a restrictive prescription to all African writers; in fact, he did admit his admiration for authors who wrote in indigenous languages, while being careful to emphasize that writers who chose to write in English were not unpatriotic. Instead, they were opening their works up to be read by a wider audience both within their nations and outside it because writing in a European language which is a world language brings benefits an indigenous language couldn't bring. Obi Wali (1963) was almost certain that African writers writing in European languages would result in sterility. Chinua Achebe saw instead a "voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experiences in a world-wide language... fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (Achebe, 1997, p.347.)

The debate over language became less polarized over the years. Many writers recognized that they risked obscurity by writing in African languages. As a result, writing in English became more common. In more recent years, African literature has witnessed innovation in language. Many writers are increasingly experimenting with language in their writings, confidently bringing into their works linguistic material from their cultures and by doing so stamping their background on

the European languages they have adopted. Examples of such linguistic experimentations include the use of pidgin and creolized languages, often accompanied by efforts by authors to bypass and deviate from Standard English. These experimentations are done through the manipulation of verbal rhythms, rich imagery, and syntactic structures. Through this innovative use of language, writers have been able to speak to as many African readers as possible while contributing to the ways in which language is continually renewed and maintained.

2.4.2 The African Personality

Early modern African literature was concerned about the African personality, identity, dignity and the past. Thus, a significant number of works addressed the glories of the past; the past was written about with the aim of undoing the many years of misrepresentation, denigration and distortions that had been fabricated about African people. The need to undertake such acts in literature was because of the personal experiences that some pioneering authors of African literature had had with colonialism and colonial erasure. Some authors had had encounters with the West where they had been told that apart from a long night of barbarism and emptiness, they had no history or civilization. In response to these claims, such writers set about the task of ‘redress...of teaching that there is nothing disgraceful about the African ...helping ...the society regain belief in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement...to counter racism with...anti-racist racism’ (Achebe 1989, p.44-45.)

Such themes in modern African literature were quite prevalent for some time, until a few authors and critics started a discussion on the possibility of writing other stories which were as African, but without the now-predictable themes of African authenticity. These discussions did not go down well with some factions on the literary scene. Obi Wali (1963) for instance accused Ezekiel Mphahlele, Wole Soyinka, and Christopher Okigbo of deriding and disregarding African literature

that was committed to speaking about Négritude and the African personality. Prior to his accusations, Wole Soyinka had argued that African literature was bigger than a defense of the African past and personality. Making reference to the popular ideology Négritude Soyinka had commented that no tiger had to go around proclaiming its tigritude. If tigers did not have to proclaim their tigritude, then, Soyinka argued, African writers did not have to proclaim their self-worth to the world in their literature. Soyinka's comment resulted in a lot of controversy on the African literary scene. It became necessary for him to defend himself at a conference in Berlin, where he explained more clearly what he meant by his comments:

The point is that I said..."a tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces.' In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: I am a tiger.' The distinction which I was making is a purely poetic creativity. I was trying to distinguish between propaganda and true poetic creativity. I was saying in other words that what one expected from poetry was an intrinsic poetic quality, not mere name-dropping"(Omoyele, 1997, p.4)

Soyinka's response was to show that he was not deriding Ne'gritude as Wali accused him of; instead, he was seeking to overcome the predictable dialectic of white versus black should not be the constant theme in the works. He did not think every African literary work should be an apologetic about the nobility and dignity of Blackness. He was advocating for actual creativity and literariness, not propaganda. A noted African writer and critic who commented on the debate writing in defense of the African personality was Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Ngugi saw a need to write about the past, but in seeing this need he also saw the dangers of writing the past. He was aware that some writers were so totally involved in dealing with the past that they could not bring the same degree of total involvement in dealing with the present and its issues and concerns. He urged writers to simultaneously swim, struggle and define their past while looking forward into what is

in their future. He also urged them not to “become too fascinated by their gaze at the present ruins of yesterday and forget the present” (Heywood, 1971, p.8.) African literary expression over the years has mostly been free of these concerns.

In the last three decades, literary criticisms have commented on the broad scope of subject matter and themes in modern African writing. Writers now write about a variety of issues, and are not so much committed to writing to defend the African personality and its history. Perhaps, African writers no more need to scream so loudly about their Africanness, because the generation before has done enough screaming for them, enabling them to write more freely on other issues besides identity and dignity.

2.4.3 What Should African Writers Write About?

In the era of decolonization and independence, African writers were mainly concerned about how they could use their art to help their society. The writer was expected to be concerned about his society and to commit his creative energies to its service. Thus, one of the central features of modern African literature was its commitment to politics. In 1969, Chinua Achebe gave a speech at the University of Texas at Austin. He made these statements about African literature and commitment: “I believe it's impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest” (Ogungbesan, 1974, p.47.) African literature’s tendency to address distinctly African, national and social issues attracted criticisms. Writers were criticized for neglecting universal and global issues. Some literary critics pointed to the effect that the African writer’s obsession with his society’s politics was having on his craft, namely, that the development of individual characters and imaginative plots was being sacrificed on the altar of politics and social commentary. The view was that African literature did not “create masterpieces in the fastidious Western sense of the word” (Wästberg, 1974, p.135) because of its

commitment to its national politics. African literature, the argument went, did not capitalize on its aesthetics or artistic form.

In responding to these criticisms, some African writers and critics argued that the problem was not what African writers could write or did write about. The problem, they argued, was some “special types of criticism which have been designed for us by people whose knowledge of us is very limited” (Achebe, 1989, p.71.) If such critics understood the politics, culture, language and ambitions of African literary expression, there wouldn't be much to say about the writer's subject matter and theme. In his *Thoughts on The African Novel*, Chinua Achebe defended the right and freedom of African writers to write about the dissatisfaction and problems they see in their society if they felt it necessary so to do. The writer did not have to double check with the rest of the globe to see if his subject matter was in line with their concerns before writing.

2.5 Trends in African Literature

The bulk of modern African literature just before and not long after independence often addressed issues of the plight of Africans under European domination; such works protested the existing relationships between indigenes and the colonial settlers or administration. The works also called for African people to have a united voice against oppression and to rise up to the task of determining their own destinies. These works also committed to asserting the validity and authenticity of African systems of belief, values and concepts (Jones et al, 1994.) Examples are Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

After independence, the focus shifted to expressions on the new dangers of independence. The works spoke to the excesses of abuse, manipulation, intimidation and looting that the newly inducted African governing elite were engaging themselves in. The hopes many African nations had that exploitation would end colonial domination was not to be so. The political leaders who

had protested colonialism and demanded its end became the inheritors of colonial power, continuing to perpetuate exploitation and injustice. In response to this situation, African literature in the era after political independence was targeted at the new political elite. Before this era, writers had more or less been in support of political agitators; in fact most writers were one and the same as political agitators. But after independence and the rule of exploitation and corruption, African writers were no more in support of the ruling elite. This shift made it possible for literary critics to observe the change in trend in modern African literature, even though the change was not a sudden dramatic break from the norm (Jones, 1996.)

Not long after, the disillusionment of independence produced a type of expression that critics refer to as the literature of disillusionment. The era of disillusionment was followed by a new set of novels and works that angrily exhumed the rotten political regimes which were acting like “cancers infecting in turn all levels of the society which they gangrene” (Kesteloot, 1996, p.6.) Often these novels closed their stories with “madness, death or stupor”, a trait critics referred to as ‘The African Absurd.’ An example is Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Aside their main aim of decrying the rot in politics, these novels had a metaphysical angle which often questioned the state of humanity and the degree of its deterioration. What was interesting about this era was how it differed from the earlier works. In these works, the presence of Europe was not the main theme in the deterioration of the continent and its humanity. The focus was on the excesses of greed, the contamination of pollution and malevolent industries, and the increase in crime. African writers in this era of absurdity no longer accused anyone for the continent’s struggle with injustice, purposelessness and lawlessness.

Significant trends in African literature since independence includes the increasing number of women writers and their focus on telling distinct stories about women, family, social arrangements

about gender and the fight for equality. Not all women writers have produced works about women; writers such as Aminata Sow Fall, Khady Sylla and Awa Keita have written about the politics and society in general. Another change in focus in African literature is the topic of war. Writers from Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe have written about their society's encounter with political and ethnic agitations which have results in wars.

The final trend, which is the most contemporary, that will be discussed in this paper is the literary works of those writers Kesteloot describes as having the aim of "underlining the absence of structure and the essentially formless character of the world they present in their works" (Kesteloot, 1996, p.5.) These writers, largely situated in the 21st century, will be the subject of investigation in the subsequent subheading.

2.6 The 21st Century: Experimental Writing and the Changing Face of Modern African Literature

Writers of modern African literature who have published works after 1980 down to the present day (2019) are sometimes referred to as third generational writers. Third generation writers are differentiated from first and second generational writers by the criterion of age and thematic interest. A literary generation can be defined in several ways. One of the ways is by age or date of publication: writers who belong to a common literary generation more or less fall within a "loosely determined age bracket" or loosely determined date of publication (Adesanmi and Dunton, 2005, p.13.) Alternatively, writers of a generation may adhere to similar ideologies and thematic concerns. This adherence is because more often than not, their works have been shaped by identifiable socio-political events or commonly shared experiences. A literary generation does not always signify a complete breakaway from the generations that precedes or follows it. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that contemporary writers of the third generation do in fact share

themes with authors from other generations. For instance, the first, second and third generations all share a common concern for poverty, exploitation and for the human condition.

In both style and thematic interest, African literature in the 21st century has some marked differences from literature of earlier eras. The differences that exist between the first generation of authors and today's authors are sometimes subtle, and at other times astonishingly different (Osofisan, 1996) constituting a violent breakaway with the goals of the generation that preceded it (Osofisan, 1996.) For one thing, the theme of the presence of Europe and its impact on the cultures, politics and peoples of Africa is becoming increasingly rare in today's modern African novel (Kesteloot, 1996.) Similarly, third generational African writers have departed from the pattern of early modern African literature, in that the family and the village has ceased to be "an authority of reference and the refuge of the socially displaced" (Kesteloot, 1996, p.7) Also, the discourse of national identity and the authenticity of African culture and being is not so much the pivot of these works because the ideology of Negritude is no longer an inspiration. In the place of nationalism, contemporary writers have adopted more "developed hybrid literary styles", writing more about global and interstitial issues like "migration, existential anguish, and cultural intermingling" (Newell, 2006, p.183.) Politically, third generational African writers are moderate or reserved, if not silent (Kesteloot, 1996.) Their works are not as morally inclined as those of earlier years, probably due to what Kesteloot (1996) identifies as a derision of both traditional and rationalist ethics. It is important to note that even though the focus of contemporary African literature is no more as insular as it used to be sixty years ago, the continent is not totally abandoned by its authors (Newell, 2006.) Authors still address the fracture of postcolonialism by employing the use of "local acts of compassion and humanity" (Newell, 2006, p.184) as a way of addressing the broader, global issue of human relations and compassion.

Aside their political moderation and neutrality with regard to nationality and ethnicity, another characteristic of third generational African literature is that it very rarely is a committed literature (Kesteloot, 1996.) A committed literature was the kind of literature written by authors who saw themselves as the voices of the society; their works were militant, prophetic and educational: committed authors believed themselves beholden to their societies. Contemporary African literature is freeing itself, Kesteloot (1996) argues, from the former constraints of the expectations of committed literature. Writers no more identify as moralists, teachers, mouthpieces and catalysts of the people. Why is the writer freeing himself of these expectations? They are doing this to make room for the exploration of more personal themes, and also to be enable them pursue a more intensive search for style. The structure of earlier works of literature bore a close semblance to oral narrative: the narrative was often linear, with the narration unfolding in a continuous chronology. In contemporary African literature, authors have overturned the constraints of chronological narration, and the story “makes leaps forward and backwards in time as well as in space.” Other stylistic differences include “narrative indeterminacy..., nonrealism, linguistic experimentation.... fragmentation of subjectivity” (Newell, 2006, p.184.) This trend can be observed in Taiye Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, just to mention a few. Authors structure their work in such a manner that they are able to shift action into the past, swing back into the present and project the future. Essentially, there is a break in the normative, linear form of writing.

Last but not least, it can be noticed that contemporary African writer of the 21st century do not write from a ‘center.’ There is the absence of a common idea of tradition and morality, and this absence presents them with a more expansive creative space and fluidity in their narratives (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2005.) With the departure from the need by writers to write about the

nobility of African history and the African past, the setting in third generational African stories have shifted as well. The settings in most new novels are largely urban, and according to Adesanmi and Dunton (2005), the ambience is often ‘euromodernist.’ More stories now focus on creative engagements within the city. These urban stories that explore the city and its life may be a result of the socio-economic change of urbanization and unequal development, a reality that most third generation writers are familiar with.

As the traditions of the first and second generation give way to the innovations of the third generation, some significant achievements of the third generation can be observed. The third generation, Adesokan (2012) argues, have chalked some success in overcoming the problem of “nationalist contentions and pretensions” (Adesokan, 2012, p.15.) The universal appeal of the third generation opens their works up to be read by different people from different backgrounds. Another thing that can be noticed is the courage with which the third generation boldly addresses the subject of homosexuality, sexual abuse and sexual liberation, which were otherwise silent subjects in modern African literature. Other subjects that the earlier generations either “ignored, misrepresented or anathematized” (Adesokan, 2012, p.15) such as gender inequality, marginality and cultural alienation are also addressed in the works of the third generation

Finally, contemporary African literature has embraced popular culture by making good use of music albums, spoken word contests, films and an active online presence. Many contemporary authors interact with their audience on social media Apps and through blogging. Through the interactions of some third-generation authors with their audience on social media, sections of the society who are often overlooked by the formal, literary circles have become an active part of the world literary space.

2.7 Factors Affecting the Change in Themes in Modern African Literature

Literary works are impacted by socio-cultural conditions, and the socio-cultural conditions that affected 20th century writers are not the same set of conditions that affect the works of 21st writers. A significant condition that currently shapes literary production in the 21st century is globalization. Currently, the bulk of contemporary African writers lives and works in American and European communities. Location, experiences of migration, exile, and displacement have had some impacts on their writing, be it style or thematic concerns. Living as Africans in the interstices of the world, third generational authors come to view issues like racism and sexism in a manner that is different from the generations before. Newell (2006) suggests that the identities of some contemporary writers have been “melted down and poured into a weld of ‘inter-subjectivity’ which is global in reach and polymorphous in shape” (Newell, 2006, p.186.) The peculiarity of their identities and their interactions with language in different registers, form and dialect has pushed them to experiment more with language, explore different subject matters and challenge the ideas of what ‘good writing’ should be (Newell, 2006.)

Another factor that is closely connected to the first is that of improvements in internet access and the impact it has on literature. The internet transports what would otherwise have been a local or national issue unto the global scene. Currently, African writers are blogging about *#BlackLivesMatter* and about Syria, issues which otherwise would have remained international and out of the immediate concern of the African writer. Globalization and the internet have also opened up new avenues for the exploration of different types of writing. These avenues promote the exploration of art forms such as flash fiction, blogs, vlogs of spoken-word performances, amongst others Flash fiction and blogging are examples of new types of African literature that have been become popular as a result of the internet. Lastly, social media has affected the works

of third generational writers because it has opened them up and given them a bigger reach in terms of audience. Through their interactions on Twitter and Facebook, writers encounter other people who may be going through a similar experience, an experience that could someday become a self-reflection, and then a story. Through social media, writers have developed relationships and allegiances to communities that are “bound together by shared interests and emotional investments rather than shared spaces” (Green-Simms, 2013) of nationality and ethnicity.

2.8 Criticisms of Contemporary Modern African Literature: The Question of Audience

In an article written by Akin Adesokan in 2012, the author investigated the nature and paradoxes of contemporary African literature with regards to readership and audience. His focus was mainly on the factors that contribute to making new African writing so attractive to Northern American and European readerships. He suggests that the attraction is as a result of the “complex relationship between English as a global language, the neoliberal commodity form and the less tractable entity called ‘cultural capital’ (Adesokan, 2012, p.2.) Critical to these three conditions is the role postcoloniality plays in making contemporary literature popular and sought after by audiences outside the continent. In his view, Western audiences and critics find postcoloniality a marketable and attractive topic in novels. This attraction is because of the tendency of authors to produce exotic and marketable versions of realities in their societies to appeal to metropolitan audiences. He calls this tendency strategic exoticism. Strategic exoticism often paints Africa as a “site of perennial emergencies” such as conflicts, sexism, hunger, droughts and corruption could be attractive to particular metropolitan audiences. Adesokan (2012) lists such works as *Purple Hibiscus*, *Allah is not Obligated*, *Beasts of No Nation*, *Song for Night* and *Johny Mad-Dog* as such examples of books that packages stories that show Africa off as a place where unpleasant events warranting humanitarian assistance and compassion takes place.

Adesokan (2012) argues further that the strategic ‘exoticism’ by contemporary African writers gives rise to another problem: the commoditization of the novel. When a novel is commoditized, the market is transformed into the audience. People read the book because it appeals to their tastes and public image. Ideally, it is a good thing if the audience becomes the market, because the audience becoming the market is an indication that the novel is a cultural commodity which appeals to a specific audience, who then become the market. But in the case of the new literatures, the otherness of Africa, and the view of it as a site of perennial emergency and humanitarian need appeals to an existing market who then become the audience. The conclusion Adesokan (2012) reaches from the interplay of the market, audience and postcoloniality in the works of the new generation of African writers is that “contemporary African writing remains fraught with a paradox” and is the “productive foreignness of a sensibility that is estranged from its own interests” (Adesokan, 2012, p.1.)

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Modern African Literature as Postcolonial

Literary theory is the systematic account of the nature of literature and of the methods that are used in analyzing it (Culler, 2007.) The methods of analyzing literature have often come from the field of literature itself, but since the 1960s (Culler, 2007), a body of unbounded group of writings from outside the field of literary studies have been co-opted by literary critics to explain the nature of literature and to analyze it. Literary critics find these extra-literary writings important to their work because they offer useful and critical analyses of language, of the mind, of history and of culture (Culler, 2007.) Additionally, they offer new and persuasive accounts of textual and cultural issues (Culler, 2007.) Some of the fields that literary critics source theoretical material from include linguistics, science, political science, gender studies, anthropology, art, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social and intellectual history, economics and sociology (Culler, 2007.)

Theory is important to literature; first, theory is useful in disputing ‘common sense’ or popularly held notions regarding meaning, writing, literature and experience (Culler, 2007.) Through the use of theories, critics are able to overlook commonly held notions about texts and writing and adopt a more critical approach to issues. They can, for instance, see more clearly what the meaning of a text is and arrive at logical conclusions on what the speaker ‘had in mind’ as he produced his work (Culler, 2007.) Theory also has the practical effect of showing critics that writing is an expression, and that if they look carefully behind that expression, they can find an experience or a state of affairs that informs works of literature. Essentially, theory helps critics to analyze and think better on the meaning of texts. Examples of theories that have been used in the analysis of literature are

Structuralism, Poststructuralism, Marxism, Feminism, Historical and Biographical Criticism, New Criticism, Formalism, Post-colonialism, New Historicism, Deconstruction and Reader-response Criticism. Many of these theories were borrowed from other disciplines and applied to literary analysis. In this chapter, one such literary criticism, the theory of Postcolonialism, will be the center of discussion. Modern African Literature has often been described as postcolonial literature, and the theory will, in my opinion, be an adequate theoretical framework for analyzing the works of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

3.2 What is Postcolonialism?

Postcolonialism is used in various fields to describe different conditions. It has been used as a revisionist reading strategy (Tiffin & Lawson, 2002); it has been used as a descriptor of the conditions and changes that inevitably result from colonialism (Quayson, 2000) and it has also been used to mean “an oppositional form” of reading and comprehending literary, political and cultural works (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.16.) Bertens (2002, p.200) explains postcolonialism as a theory that “focuses on the cultural displacements and its consequences for personal and communal identities that inevitably followed colonial conquest and rule.” His explanation first supposes that there have been displacements in the social, cultural, political states of ex-colonial societies. Especially important are the displacements that have taken place in the personal identities of people, significantly altering their communal identities. As a result of these displacement and changes, there is a need to analyze how these societies have responded to the changes that they have witnessed, and postcolonialism offers a distinctively non-European perspective for analyzing these changes. Bertens’ (2002) view of postcolonialism is similar to Simon During’s. During (1987, p.10) defines postcolonialism as a “the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by Universalist or

Eurocentric concepts and images.” During (1987), like Bertens (2002), assumes that the process of colonialism has had far-reaching effects on the colonized, and identifies the need to understand these changes through the lens of a theory that is not Eurocentric or Universalist. It can be surmised from Bertens (2003) and During (1997) that postcolonialism is the discourse that investigates these displacements and seeks to understand the defenses that have been instituted by colonized people in response to the displacement of colonialism.

As a critical theory in literary studies, postcolonialism has a primary objective of refashioning Western discourses and narratives (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994.) A postcolonial literary study seeks to come up with non-Western modes of discourse, and to present these modes as a viable approach to challenging the narratives, discourse and perspectives of the West concerning colonized societies (Quayson, 2000.) Why, one would ask, is there a need at all to challenge Western narratives and perspectives? It is needful because postcolonialism assumes that colonialism, imperialism and hegemony was promoted and sustained by the manipulation, production and dissemination of discourse (Tiffin & Lawson, 2002.) History, creative literature, journals, anthropology and philosophy were either massaged or fabricated to justify and sustain colonialism. Colonized peoples and spaces were flooded with imaginative stories, newspaper accounts, histories and archeological reports that were “always already written by” the power structures of colonialism (Tiffin & Lawson, 2002, p.3.) The colonial machinery was at the helm of the textualization and transmission of stories, and they directed narratives in the manner that suited their interests. Postcolonialism essentially believes that the teller of a story matters, and it matters because the nature of the story depends on the intentions of the storyteller. The storyteller has all the power to decide who is villain and who is hero, and because of the power of the narrator to determine the nature of a story, postcolonial theorists formulate a discourse that will challenge the

perspective of the West, so that they can give a voice to colonized people, who have for so long been silenced. Postcolonial theory takes into consideration erasures, distortions and exaggerations in dominant Western narratives so that it can re-fashion text by making full use of the “power that resides in discourse and textuality” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.11.) Postcolonial writers, theorists and critics believe that just as texts have power to paint distorted pictures of people according to the desires of the narrator, other sets of narrators can make use of the same medium of text to resist those distortions, and to keenly contest for representation and the opportunity to tell their own stories.

What else is Postcolonialism, and what else does it concern itself with? Postcolonialism engages with the past experience of colonialism and the bearings these experiences may have on the present. The effects of colonialism may be visible on a local level, or it may global in scope. The tentacles of postcolonial range from local issues like corruption in politics, oppression and cultural inferiority to global issues like race, slavery, suppression and resistance against suppression, migration, difference, class, gender and place (Quayson, 2000.)

It must be noted that postcolonialism as a theory is not homogenous (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994.) The theory is a melting pot of experiences, and it has responded to growing concerns over the years for the inclusion of the experiences of racial minorities who have also had their own distinct interactions with imperialism of all forms, not just colonialism. In spite of its heterogeneity, postcolonialism always has the constant themes of historical transition, sociocultural location and an epochal configuration (Quayson, 2000.)

3.3 Postcolonialism: The Origins

Postcolonialism is viewed both as a condition and a description of the discourses which theorize and discuss the conditions of postcoloniality (Rice & Waugh, 2001.) The conditions of

postcolonialism can be observed from as far back the Roman Empire's conquest of Britain and its land space. Thus, the postcolonial as a condition is not contemporary; it goes way beyond Europe's scramble for the landmasses of Africa. It is postcolonialism as a description of a discourse, however, that is quite contemporary. While some critics situate the origin of postcolonialism as a critical theory within the era of decolonization (Quayson, 2000) others (Rice & Waugh, 2001; Bertens, 2002) suggest that it was first articulated as a political theory and literary criticism by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*.

In his *Orientalism*, Said investigated Foucault's theory of Poststructuralism as well as Antonio Gramsci's expositions on hegemony in an attempt to explain Europe's construction of the Orient (which is an image of the Asia) through imaginative representations, seemingly factual descriptions and knowledge claims about the history and culture Asia (Rice & Waugh, 2001.) Europe's fabricated image of the Orient was hinged on Europe's perception of this space through the lens of colonialism and imperialism. As such, the Orient was constructed by Europe to stabilize, magnify and affirm its imperialist power and 'superiority.' A '*them*' was created, and this '*them*' was used to affirm the us of Europe (Rice & Waugh, 2001.) Through his analysis of Europe's construction of the Orient, Said then identified the need for cultural representation and a counter-theory which would "strengthen as well as analyze the discursive process of resistance to colonialist perspectives" (Rice & Waugh, 2001.) Postcolonialism is that counter-theory to colonialist perspectives; it is the theory that seeks to fill those spaces of erasure in Western narratives. Said (2012) laid emphasis on the need for postcolonial discourse even in contemporary times. Postcolonialism is important in contemporary discourse because of what he referred to as the "imperial cycle" (Said, 2012) of Western narratives. This imperial cycle was the capacity of imperialism to replicates itself and change forms, so that it can still control the peripheries from

the center. Postcolonial discourse, Said argued, was “senseless to repress, and useful and interesting to understand” (Said, 2012.)

Postcolonialism has many outstanding theoreticians. They include India’s Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, author of *Can The Subaltern Speak*, Homi K. Bhabha, R. Siva Kumar, Derek Gregory, Edward Braithwaite, Wilson Harris, Chinua Achebe, Simon Gikandi, Ato Quayson, Bill Ashcroft, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and many others. One of the significant contributors to the formulation of postcolonialism is Frantz Fanon, the Martiniquais psychiatrist and philosopher. Some of his critical works include *The Wretched of The Earth* and *White and Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon’s works investigated the impacts of colonialism on the psyche of the colonized, arriving at the conclusion that colonialism’s systematic denial of all attributes of humanity to the colonized was destructive to their mental health and self-esteem. Fanon recommended a violent resistance to colonial subjugation, believing that it was a necessary mental catharsis which would get rid of the sense of dehumanization the colonized felt and restore their sense of worth and dignity. Fanon’s essay *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* was a critical work for postcolonial studies as it investigates the relationship between colonialism, human exploitation and subjugation and imperialism.

3.4 Aims of Postcolonialism in Literature

One of the predominant aims of postcolonial discourse is to defend the dignity and identity of societies that have been destabilized by colonialism and imperialism (Jeyifo, 1990.) Postcolonial African literature, especially those written in the first 50 years of the 20th century was committed to helping colonized peoples “regain its belief in” themselves so that they could “put away the complexes of denigration and self-abasement” that colonialism had inflicted on their psyches (Achebe, 1989, p.44.) Postcolonial writers like Chinua Achebe described this aim as his “deepest

aspiration” (Achebe, 1989, p.44) for his country and his people. He called this aspiration a revolution, indicating the pressing need he felt in using his works to help his readers achieve confidence in their humanity once again, and to put behind them feelings of worthlessness and inferiority. Through his postcolonial work *Things Fall Apart*, his readers saw that their ancestors were not grunting cannibals at the bank of the Niger, but that they came from valiant men like Okonkwo, and from creative men who designed intricately delicate art for the pleasure of their communities.

A second aim of postcolonialism is to inscribe the emptiness (Ryan, 1994.) Postcolonial writers seek to write stories to fill those spaces that have been deliberately erased by colonial narratives. According to Ryan (1994), colonial discourse is notable for its history of erasure. Using the examples of cartography by Ryan (1994), we can compare the erasure by Western cartographers to the erasure that happens in literature. In some colonial maps, Ryan (1994) notes that cartographers often represented unknown lands, peoples and cultures with a blank space. The representation of the unknown as blank did not mean that these people did not exist; it meant however that European ignorance and arrogance wiped them out instead. These lands and people were wiped out, so that the space could be prepared for the establishment of a new European order that will be touted as superior and civilized. Postcolonialism cares about erasures, and thus commits its efforts to inscribing the empty spaces and to fight the war of textual control with textuality (Tiffin & Lawson, 2002.) An example of erasures in literature and scholarship is the absence of the full accounts of the origins, history and stories of African Americans in the history of the United States (Hill, 1998.) Some of the works of noted author Toni Morrison have addressed such erasures, as her stories are an account of slavery, from the perspective of the slave. *Beloved* and *A Mercy* are examples of such stories that were erased by colonial and imperialist discourse.

Last but not least, the postcolonial author, according to Sharrad (in Tiffin & Lawson, 1994), aims to ‘speak the unspeakable’ by committing themselves to de-scribing stories that were previously silent on issues of race, abuse, oppression and dehumanization. Such theorists believe that within stories, books, dialogue and discourse lay gaps of eloquent silence which have “ambiguous power” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.216.) Postcolonial writers who re-write stories to fill the silence of the unspeakable use a revisionist strategy in their analysis of classical texts, like Sharrad (1994) did for Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. Explaining Dickens’ culpability in leaving stories unspoken, Sharrad points out that while Dickens often bemoaned the ills of the British society, its corruption, greed and destruction of their homeland, he was astonishingly silent on Britain’s slavery laws and colonial policies. In fact, in the three instances in his works where he mentioned the West Indies – the hub of slavery at the time – Dickens was silent on the issue of race. How could this silence be explained? Sharrad argues the unspeakable was the wheel around which a convenient but oppressive social regime revolved, and so to speak was to wreak havoc on the security of the society. The slave could not have a voice, because his voice would destabilize the society’s attempts to turn a blind eye to his humanity. Therefore, his affairs were unspeakable, songs were sung, treaties signed and books written, and yet his story remained unspoken. The radical aim of postcolonialism is to deconstruct the silence so that readers can clearly see the complex relationships that exist between the margins and center, past and present, black and whites (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994.) Postcolonial literature pulls back the blinds on these gaps in classical and popular literature, to reveal those hidden dialogue that do exist so that ‘the unspeakable’ will be allowed a space in which it can speak.

3.5 Criticism of Post-colonial theory

Like all other theories and discourse, postcolonial theory has had its critics. This section will highlight some of the criticisms that have been raised against the theory of postcolonialism. One of the most enduring and common criticisms that is raised against postcolonialism is the criticism that the theory reinforces differences between the West and the East. How does this reinforcement happen? It happens, according to this criticism, because of the objection postcolonialism has to Universalism. Universalism posits that all human beings share common needs and interests regardless of their cultural, economic and historical differences. Postcolonialism opposes this view, considering it Eurocentric and inadequate for fully comprehending practices, experiences and realities in non-European societies (Dhawan, 2018.) It is this objection by postcolonial theorists that critics have a problem with. They believe that postcolonialism's objection makes an exotic creation of the non-European world, portraying it as vastly different from the rest of the world and the rest of human experience. One of the most significant rejections of the theory of universalism has come from Chinua Achebe. He rejects it because of his claim that universalism renounces his vision and perspective, a vision he describes as "necessarily local and particular" (Achebe, 1989, p.96.) He calls it dangerous and totally unacceptable (Achebe, 1989) for postcolonial people to cross-check their perspectives with some 'universal' perspectives, or the human condition, before their perspective would be considered as valid. Two of his major essays addressed the issue of universalism, and in each of them he reminds postcolonial writers of their deadly obligation (Achebe, 1989) to use their considerable talents in the service of a particular people and a particular race by putting to death all "universalistic pretentions" (Achebe, 1989, p.96) so that they can use their talents and their energies in telling the distinct stories of their people. Achebe's position is quite similar to that of the critic Eldred Jones. Jones suggests that postcolonial writers do not have to check to see if their concerns are universal (Jones et al, 1994.)

True, sometimes their works may address the human condition, but even when this happens, it may only be incidental and not a deliberate attempt to sound universal in order to be authentic (Jones et al, 1994.) Postcolonial literature in general, and African literature in particular, will neither await the acceptance of universal standards nor depend on it for validity.

A second criticism of postcolonialism is its prefix *post*. Critics like Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock, and Arif Dirlik take issue with the prefix '*post*' that is attached to the theory (Hsieh, 1997.) These critics argue that the prefix makes it easy to prematurely celebrate the complete end of the colonial experience, thus diminishing the impact of contemporary global power relations on the peoples and spaces of ex-colonies. Hsieh (1997) responds to these criticisms by arguing that the true meaning of postcolonialism does indeed designate a moment that is within colonialism and also beyond it. Postcolonialism seeks to evaluate a world that is at once done with colonialism's dominant phase and yet to catch up its hegemonic phase. Therefore, postcolonialism does indeed take note of the past, and reconciles the effects of the past with the happenings in the present. Newell (2006) also gives a similar response to this criticism. Postcolonialism, she argues, means more than 'after the end of colonialism' because the discourse actively engages with issues concerning how western governments and multinational companies currently interact with the continent. These interactions are in the form of "commerce, business, investment, aid, military intervention, oil extraction, education, and migration, as well as cultural patterns such as the publication of novels and the exchange of literature and films" (Newell, 2006, p.4.) Postcolonial theorists are aware of the complex, ever-changing ways in which colonial history continues to shape contemporary social, cultural and political life in Africa and in other ex-colonies. Therefore, the criticism of postcolonialism situating their politics in the past is unfounded.

Thirdly: some critics point to postcolonialism's excesses; especially its excess of insistence (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994) as some of the weaknesses in the theory. Postcolonial theorists and writers are often accused of being too voluble in insisting upon the reality, peculiarity and autonomy of their experiences. Colonized peoples from Asia, Africa and Latin America often insist on the reality of the African experience, the Palestinian experience or the Latino experience. Edward Said explains this insistence by attributing it to the sense of fragmentation, incompleteness and marginality felt by colonized people" (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994.) Using the Palestinian example, Said suggests that the postcolonial Palestinian is "both self and other" (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.33), as such the excess of insisting on his peculiarity is necessary because it "performs the function of shouldering a space for oneself in the world." (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.33) Are postcolonial writers guilty of the excess of insistence? Ashcroft (1994) argues that such a charge would be premature if critics ignore the fact that insistence is a feature of all marginalized people, and a tool by which marginalized people address their reality. Postcolonialism's insistence is an "insistence upon the reality of postcolonial experience" (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994), not an insistence on a myth. Marginalized people insist because their representation matters to them. For example, in spite of the accusations of excess, *BlackLivesMatter* is important to African Americans because they live the reality of police brutality. It is because of these realities, and the need for insistence, that Ashcroft argues that the gap between the reality of what happened and the rendition of that history cannot be bridged by mere political will or censoring. Critics cannot define the boundaries of the stories that people can or should tell; to demand that the experiences of marginalized people be reported in strict, factual terms, unaffected by ideology and in compliance to the expectations of others outside their group or in accordance to the pure and pristine standards is constricting and imperialist (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994.)

Lastly, some critics argue that postcolonialism is closely embedded in Western theories like Poststructuralism, and thus is a surrogate of Poststructuralism (Gikandi, 2004.) They note that most of the notable postcolonial critics who are often seen as symbols of the canon have close connections to the poststructuralist discourse of Foucault, Derrida and Jacques Lacan (Gikandi, 2004.) Some of these icons are Edward Said and his connection to Foucault, Spivak and her relationship to Jacques Derrida and Homi Bhabha and his affiliation to Derrida and Lacan. The close relations between postcolonialism and Poststructuralism often causes critics to question why theoretical questions which first originated in Europe continue to dominate postcolonial identities, cultures and literatures.

3.6 Postcolonial Writers and Modern African Literature

Literature forms part of a general process of cultural and political affirmation (Quayson, 2000.) Thus, through literature, the culture, history and political ambitions of societies are affirmed. Creators of literature have through their work affirmed the cultures of their society, and created a vision of a just society. They have praised virtues and shamed vices, they have decried corruption and greed and promoted unity and selflessness. They have shone a light on what was valuable in the culture and helped weed out the ignoble from the society. Some of the writers who have engaged with culture and politics in the process of affirmation have been postcolonial writers. Their works have been instrumental in speaking against colonialism and neocolonialism, and they continue to speak against the changing forms of imperialism. Some of these writers spoke about the postcolonial condition of cultural destabilization. They wrote about the disturbances that have taken place in the personal and religious lives of ex-colonial peoples. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a postcolonial work; his *Anthills of the Savannah* is also postcolonial as it examines the political rot and corruption that results after independence.

According to Biodun Jeyifo (1990), there are two broad categories of postcolonial writers. Jeyifo (1990) groups them into postcoloniality of normativity and proleptic designation, and interstitial or liminal postcoloniality. Of the two, postcoloniality of normativity and proleptic designation is the most dominant form of postcolonial expression. It is a type of expression that involves writers and critics speaking to, or for, their post-independent nation, region, continent, ethnic group, race or culture. Such writers write in the name of their social or national grouping; they are like the apostles of their group, and therefore they write in defense of their group. Chinua Achebe was well known for his portrayal of Nigerian history, politics and culture in his imaginative and critical works. His writings depicted Nigeria's culture and values, and addressed the challenges that the nation was going through. His work, *There Was a Country*, is an autobiographical account of the Biafran secession, which was led by Achebe's kinsmen, the Igbos. In Kenya, another postcolonial writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote the stories of his people: Kenyans in general and the Kikuyu in particular. Like other postcolonial writers of normativity and proleptic designation, Ngugi committed his artistic energies to writing the types of work that is committed to reasserting the history, cultures, values and traditions that colonialism almost destroyed.

The other mode of literary postcoloniality that Jeyifo explores is interstice or liminal postcoloniality. This mode, according to Jeyifo, is liminal because it adopts an almost ambivalent posture to the politics of colonialism and its aftermath. Writers and critics have been described as interstitial or liminal post-colonialists are "neither First World nor Third World, neither securely and smugly metropolitan, nor assertively and combatively Third Worldist" (Jeyifo, 1990, p.53.) What this means is that these writers are often in the middle group, occupying the place of hybrids. Often, this group live in the Diasporas of colonized spaces either by choice or as the result of exile. They are cosmopolitan as opposed to nationalist, and unlike the postcolonial writer of normativity,

the liminal writer often refuses to speak strictly or primarily to their nation-state, ethnic group, region or continent. Notable writers of who have been classified as interstitial writers of postcoloniality include Dambudzo Marechera, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende Derek Walcott and J.M. Coetzee. Theorists and critics who fall within this group also include Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Kwame Anthony Appiah. Jeyifo's distinctions of the two kinds of postcolonial writers is a very useful tool for analyzing the works of African writers across the generations. It is useful because it throws some light on how each writer views the colonial experience, and the manner in which this view affects how their stories and commitments.

3.6.1 The 21st Century: Literature of Interstitial and Liminal Postcoloniality

African literature is postcolonial literature, but even in this postcoloniality, there are nuances. Postcolonial African literature can either be classified as normative, or interstitial. This paper hypothesizes that the works of new generational African writers can be primarily grouped under the umbrella of interstitial postcoloniality. This hypothesis is supported by Adesanmi and Dunton's (2008) essay on the works of new generational African writers. In analyzing the works of new generational writers, Adesanmi and Dunton (2008) agree that there are indeed postcolonial elements in these works. They however note that these bodies of works are of a different flavor of postcoloniality as compared to the generation that preceded them. For one thing, 21st century African writers often address themes that are connected to transnationalism, thus they often step outside of the bounds of nationality and ethnicity. Adesanmi and Dunton's (2008) view is reflected in Garuba's (2005) essay on the works of new generational Nigerian poets. Garuba (2005) notes that the younger generation prefers levity as opposed to the rootedness, coherence and stability of the older generation preferred. Unlike the older generation, new generational writers welcome

contradiction and multiplicity. Their works are validated by varied directions and classes of people, in spite of the fact that the writers have not established a distinct direction for themselves. They are not the mouthpiece of their nation, their past, their ethnic group, their race or their families. Their works then, put under the gaze of Jeyifo's categorization, are liminal and interstitial with regards to postcoloniality. More accurately, they can be described as *cosmopolitan*. If the description of their works as cosmopolitan holds, then Kwame Anthony Appiah's theory of cosmopolitanism can be used more accurately as an additional critical lens for evaluating their writing. What is cosmopolitanism, and how does it relate to postcolonial literature? Cosmopolitanism is a theory that was systematically articulated by philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah. Like Homi Bhabha and Spivak, Jeyifo (1994) and Quayson (2000) both describe Appiah as an interstitial postcolonial theorist. His theory of cosmopolitanism assumes that individuals are citizens of the cosmos, which is the universe. They are first a member of the universe before they are members of any local setting that claims their allegiance. Cosmopolitanism has two main assumptions and beliefs. First, cosmopolitanism believes in the idea of universal concern. Advocates believe that they have obligations to others. These obligations stretch beyond the ties of kith and kind that is family, friends, and members of their nations. Secondly, cosmopolitanism assumes a respect for legitimate difference. This they do by assuming the importance of the value of human life, and this assumption leads advocates of cosmopolitanism to take an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend the significance to human life. They recognize the fact that people are different, and respect these differences.

While this theory seems alienating and ambivalent, Appiah (2007) explains that cosmopolitanism is not an abjuration of all of a person's familial, national or local allegiances, neither it is a choice of the vast abstraction of the 'universe' and of humanity over the concrete relations to one's kith

and kin. Instead, it means “the freedom from all loyalties that are unreal” (Appiah, 2007, p xiii) including the loyalty to nation, gender, ethnicity, alma mater or neighborhood. It means also the destruction of patriotism and an unchecked allegiance to one’s nation-state, which according to some scholars, has been the cause of many wars and prejudices (Appiah, 2007.) The writer or critic who identifies as cosmopolitan, who lives on the interstices of postcoloniality, does not become a friend of many while remaining an enemy of all the people that he has had to deal with (Appiah, 2007.) He does not become a lover of “mankind and a hater of his kindred” (Appiah, 2007.) Instead, he breaks free of any claims of allegiance that causes him prejudicially to place one group of people above another. The capacity or possibility of a person breaking free from any claim of allegiance that prejudices him to another group remains in question, but Appiah (2007) suggests it as a feature of cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitanism rejects the idea that any local loyalty should override their responsibility to humanity, it must be noted that they do not join camps with “hard-core cosmopolitans” who regard their friends, family and fellow citizens with “icy impartiality” (Appiah, 2007 p.xiv.)

3.6.2 21st Century African Writers and Universalism, Hybridity and the Unhomed

The interstitial and cosmopolitan nature of 21st century African writers can also be analyzed in light of Homi Bhabha’s concept of the unhomed. This understanding is important in appreciating what Kesteloot (1994) and Newell (2006) explain as ambivalence in third generational African writers. Postcolonial literature of the 20th century spoke for the nation, the race and the ethnic groups. Writers like Ngugi, Achebe, Augustino Neto and Andre Brink wrote in defense of their nations, often recounting the glories of the past before the coming of colonialism. Most of these writers recognized the crucial importance of asserting their culture, traditions and values that had been repressed. This recognition and commitment were necessary, but it was not without its

demerits. According to Homi Bhabha, normative postcoloniality of the sort that was common in African literature of the earlier decades posed a danger of "fixity and fetishism of identities" (Bhabha, 1994.) This danger arose when the identity of the cultures and personalities of colonized people were seen as unchanging and homogenous. As much as it was important to imbue the past with dignity and glory, Bhabha (1994) also recognized the more important responsibility of checking the excesses of cultural reaffirmation. In the place of cultural reaffirmation that is characterized by "a celebratory romance of the past" (Bhabha, 1994, p.9), Bhabha proposes the idea of extra-territorialism and cross-cultural initiations. Instead of the fixation with the boundaries of nation and race and ethnicity, Bhabha proposes a third space beyond the binary structure of center versus margins, colonized versus colonizer and black versus white (Bertens, 2002.) Simply, he recommends that writers and theorist be 'unhomed', so that they can break free of the boundaries of nations and "calcified" spaces. His suggestion resonates with Appiah's view on universalism and citizenship to the cosmos. Like Appiah, Bhabha does not recommend that writers be homeless, but rather he promotes the idea of the "unhomely" as a space for addressing postcolonial issues. The unhomely is still a postcolonial condition, because according to Bhabha the voice of the unhomely has a clarity that "can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fiction that negotiates the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites" (Bhabha, 1994, p.9.) The unhomely will be a more effective space for effecting change because the unhomed writers will speak not to their nations, or to their kith and kind, but instead to a broader audience, positioning themselves to cause the West promptly "to confront its postcolonial history." When writers like Chimamanda Ngozi speak about Nigeria the prejudices against Nigerians, she gets an audience other African writers may not get. Her stories and narratives are what Bhabha describes as native narratives

within Western spaces. Adichie is somehow seen as an ‘*us*’ to some Westerners, because her education, interaction and work in America has made her ‘internal’ to America’s national identity.

Bhabha’s recommendation of unhomeliness, like Appiah’s cosmopolitanism, may seem like an erasure of allegiances to one’s nation, and a neglect of the defense of one’s culture and history.

But Bhabha argues that it is in the interstices of culture and history and in the displacements of domains and fixed territories that “collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value will be properly negotiated” (Bhabha, 1994, p.2.) One advantage that interstitial and liminal postcolonial writers enjoy is the freedom that their “in-betweenness” affords them. By their disavowal to any locality, their works often arouse passionate interests and comments from a large audience, probably because the works are able to appeal to the diverse sensibilities of a wide range of readers who are from different continents, ethnicities and regions and hence are not subsumed under a single national or racial voice.

3.6.3 Looking Ahead: Interstitial Postcolonialism as a Theoretical Framework for 21st Century African Literature

In his essay on Postructuralism and Postcolonial Discourse, Gikandi notes that postcolonialism as a discourse is characterized by a sense of dislocation from its major geographical reference, that is, the postcolony. As a result of this, the discourse of postcolonialism has been more active in metropolitan centers than it has been in decolonized nations. In the metropolises, postcolonial critics and creators have attempted to make meaning of the nature and meaning of colonial modernity from the angle of decolonization and migration (Gikandi, 1994.) This observation by Gikandi gives rise to the need to investigate the contemporary works of postcolonial creators and critics who live and work in the metropolises. In doing this, the theory of postcolonialism, and its various modes of

hybridity and cosmopolitanism, in my opinion, is an adequate theoretical lens for analyzing the main arguments in this research. The comparison that exists between Achebe and Adichie's works, the eras in which they wrote, the themes that mattered to them and the issues that they address can be understood when they are carefully placed within the context of postcolonial discourse. The subsequent chapters, four and five, will evaluate the works of both authors in line with postcolonialism as a literary criticism and discursive theory. The evaluation of Achebe and Adichie's works will investigate how each author walked the corridors of postcoloniality; it will investigate the allegiance of each writer to kith and kin, to nation and culture, and to humanity and the respect of difference in others.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Colonialism as a Perennial Thematic Concern in Modern African Literature: Investigating the Postcolonial in Achebe and Adichie's Works.

In 1970, Nadine Gordimer made an argument that modern African literature is inseparable from colonialism. Her argument was that any African who had a story to tell about the postcolonial condition would find an interested audience to tell their stories to. Gordimer's reason for this position was that the African writer was going to be an agent who presents a counter narrative and an inside story to the "over-documented, white-side" of literary discourse on Africa (Gordimer, 1970, p.12.) Gordimer put this argument forward twelve years after the publication of Achebe's seminal *Things Fall Apart*. At that time, modern African literature was still very proximate to the colonial experience, and therefore it was not much of a surprise that writers writing about the postcolonial experience would have a ready audience for their works. But 1970 is 49 years ago from today, and the heat of colonialism is far cooler now than it was in the 1970s. Is the colonial experience still a topic in modern African literature? What have been the changing trends in postcolonial African literature? And how have writers appropriated their art by adopting different and new approaches in addressing the issue of colonialism?

This chapter will address the issue of the perennial theme of colonialism in modern African literature by comparing the works of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The selection of these writers is based on the hypothesis that both writers address and interrogate the perennial thematic concern of colonialism and its aftermath. The analysis will be done by comparing the thematic and stylistic focus each writer adopts in their novels. Similarly, the different approaches each writer adopts in addressing the postcolonial condition in their works will be explored. I will begin first of all with a profile of each writer, starting with Chinua Achebe.

4.2 Profile of Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16th, 1930 in Ogidi, an Igbo village in the Eastern part of Nigeria. He was named Albert Chinualumogu, and was the son of Isaiah Okafor Achebe and Janet Achebe. Achebe's father had been converted to Christianity as a young man; he had previously worked as an evangelist and church leader in parts of Nigeria before becoming the catechist for the Church Missionary Society. Achebe was witness to colonialism and Britain's evangelizing enterprise. He lived at the crossroads of culture, because his uncles and aunties still practiced traditional Igbo religion while his nuclear family was Christian. This arrangement allowed him to move between traditional systems of belief and the new religion of the British settlers. As a small child, Achebe was intrigued by the differing rituals practiced by his uncles and aunties; he did not, as the typical narrative assumes, experience a soul that was torn between two opposing cultures (Achebe, 1980.) Instead of a conflict in belief and identity, Achebe claims that the distance that existed between his traditional society and his family's Christianity did not become "a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully" (Achebe, 1980.) In effect, Achebe benefitted from the duality and diversity in his society, allowing him to remain objective in addressing the excesses and virtues of each culture.

Achebe had his university education at the University College in Ibadan, enrolling first as a student of medicine, but later changing fields to study English, History and Theology. It was at this point in his life that he dropped the name Albert, settling instead for a shortened version of Chinualumogu. Achebe's nationalist leanings started to bud at the University College in Ibadan. Here, student magazines and publications increasingly began to reflect an interest in Nigerian culture and in the struggle to retain the African identity; most of these pieces addressed the issue

of rural Nigeria and the uneasy coming together of traditional culture and British culture. Achebe was amongst the students who contributed stories and articles to university magazines such as the *University Herald*, *The Bug*, and *Eagle*. In his third year, Achebe became the editor of Ibadan's *University Herald* (Innes, 1992.) Aside the essays, editorials, letters and sketches Achebe wrote while in Ibadan, he also published two short stories, *Marriage is A Private Affair* and *Dead Man's Path* as an undergraduate. At this point in his life, Achebe had decided to become a writer. He was motivated by some of the appalling stories he read about Africa while in Ibadan, and decided that "the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else, no matter how gifted and well-intentioned (Achebe, 1989, p.38.) Achebe graduated from Ibadan in 1953, worked as a producer of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and studied with the BBC in London in 1956. Achebe's big break as a writer came in 1958 when he published his seminal work *Things Fall Apart*. *Things Fall Apart*, many critics note, was a success because of Achebe's "manner of interlacing African cultural and linguistic traditions...with Western -influenced fictional discourse (Lynn, 2017.) In reading *Things Fall Apart*, readers encounter the novel's most important achievement: its ability to create vivid pictures of the Igbo society at the end of the 19th century.

Since his first novel, Chinua Achebe has written four more novels: *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Some of his critical essays have been collected in works like *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), *The Problem with Nigeria* (1983), *Hopes and Impediments* (1990), *Home and Exile* (2001) *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (2009) and *There was a Country* (2012.)

In his essays and interviews, Achebe has not hesitated to describe his role as teacher to his society. His basic position has remained constant: Achebe has always seen himself as a teacher and a historian, helping to re-educate African people about themselves and their value as equally human

and equally gifted as the rest of the world. This primary role has shifted, of course, to accommodate the different eras in which he has written. In 1966, when Achebe wrote his *Man of the People*, his society's most pressing danger was corruption, injustice and exploitation by the African elite who had succeeded the colonial administration. Achebe's role as historian and educator had become much more difficult to achieve in such an era because the writer could no longer "identify himself completely with his own society" because of the society's rot and corruption (Carroll, 1990.) Achebe's task as a writer then shifted to accommodate his new role as a critic of his society. His new task was to "criticize and expose injustice wherever he finds it" and his novel *A Man of The People* is a reflection of this new task. But in all these shifts and turns, Achebe has remained true to his goal of helping his community regain dignity in itself. He was aware of the supreme opportunity he had been given as a storyteller, and he put this opportunity to good use. He used this parable in his *Anthills of the Savannah* to indicate the important role writers like him had to play in their society:

"To some of us the Owner of the World has apportioned the gift to... rise with racing blood and put on their garbs of war....and then there are those others whose part is to wait and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount its story. The sounding of the battle-drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards--each is important in its own way. I tell you there is not one of them we could do without. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story" (Achebe, 1988, p.74)

4.2.1 Achebe's Heritage as a Pioneering African Writer

Nelson Mandela, Nobel Peace Prize winner and former president of South Africa once said of Chinua Achebe, "there was a writer named Chinua Achebe, in whose company the prison walls

fell down.” Mandela had been imprisoned by the Apartheid regime for twenty-six long years, and he said that reading Achebe’s works brought down the prison walls for him, and gave him some reprieve from mental enslavement. Why is the name Achebe so important to African literature? Most critics accept without any major contention that Achebe gave literary expression to the African perspective on Africa and the world. Literary critic Simon Gikandi (2001) has argued that Achebe is the inventor of African Literature. Gikandi (2001), of course, admits that Achebe had “important precursors” (2001, p.5) like Amos Tutuola, Paul Hazoume and Sol Plaatje to look up to in his writing. But he insists that none of these earlier writers “had the effect Achebe had on the establishment and reconfiguration of an African literary tradition as Achebe did” (Gikandi, 2001, p.5.) He makes the case that Achebe remains exceptional because of his pioneering role in entering and interrupting “the institutions of exegesis and education ...to establish the terms by which African literature was produced, circulated and interpreted.” (Gikandi, 2001, p.5.) Thus because of Achebe, colleges and universities know how to read African literature and how not to read it. They have become aware of the nuances that the canon carries precisely because Achebe paved the way by successfully creating a technique that had never been seen before in African writing, that is to simulate an African language in English (Lynn, 2017.) Achebe was able to create a world that was keenly real to the African imagination, and for the very first time in the history of African writing, a writer had succeeded in re-routing the African experience and worldview through his creative and careful use of language. As a result of this, African readers could see themselves in the books they read, and enjoy it as well.

Achebe is also an important name in African literature because his works succeeded in asserting the integrity and authority of the African voice and the African perspective in a world dominated

by European discourse. In 1958, colonial discourse was at its peak; *Things Fall Apart* being able to break through the din of colonial voices was an important landmark.

Lastly, Achebe is important to African literature because he was committed to helping African people look within their own society to identify the flaws within the society, so that they can rebuild the walls that had been broken. This he did by narrating against the grain of stereotypical, one-dimensional African discourses. He was careful to take into consideration the idea that counter-narratives hold important political significance in identifying the continent's problems and finding workable solutions to them (Lynn, 2017.)

4.2.2 Achebe and the Postcolonial

Achebe witnessed colonialism and the process of decolonization; when the first missionaries came to Nigeria, they first settled in Achebe's granduncle's home for some time, and so Achebe was a first-hand witness to the evolution of colonialism in Nigeria. Achebe was a product of the educational opportunities made available by Christianity and colonialism for young people in his society. His elementary education was provided by missionary established schools, his university education was in the colonial government's University College, Ibadan. As a writer, Achebe is a postcolonial in his orientation because of the subject matters he addresses in his novels and essays. Achebe argues that the African writer was born out of this need to tell different stories, that the writer had to tell different stories because a story had been told for him and he had found the telling quite unsatisfactory. As a postcolonial writer, it was not Achebe's aim to write a long litany about the ills of colonialism, but his hope was to "to ask what possibility, what encouragement, there was in this episode of our history" (Achebe, 1990, p.3.) He hoped that after these interrogations had been made Africans could begin to celebrate, learn and rebuild a new future by "singing of the song of ourselves, in the din of an insistent world and song of others." Achebe did not cease to

seize the opportunity to tell the world about Africa and its stories. He did this because he believed that stories were not innocent as many people believed. Stories had the power to dispossess a person by putting them in wrong crowd. Achebe sought to present African stories to the world, in hopes that he could undo some of the harm done to the psyche of Africans because of the blight of colonialism.

Achebe's literary and critical works cover a wide range of postcolonial topics and concerns, but Carroll suggests that three main themes can be summarized from his works, two of which will be briefly discussed here. The first theme in Achebe's works is the rejection of Africa as the cultural foil of Europe (Carroll, 1990.) This theme is very visible in his novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. The second theme in Achebe's works flows from the first. If Africa is not the foil of Europe, then there was the need for the continent to offer genuine alternatives to the systems, values and structures of Europe in terms of aesthetics and social arrangements. Within this theme is the idea of valuing African worldviews and ways of life. Achebe for instance, challenged European notions like art as product of an individual, art as private, art as collectable, art as preferably antique, and the artist as a freak living on the fringes of society. Achebe used his Igbo worldview as a way of challenging existing European definitions of art and literature. When he was invited to speak at international conferences, he often began with a theoretical framework from Igbo cosmology. He made the Igbo principle of celebration popular, for example, through his explanation of the concept of *Mbari*. *Mbari* is a celebration by Igbo people. It is an art display that showcased the past, present and future joys, hurts and ambitions of the people. Achebe used the concept of *Mbari* as a worldview for seeing our pains clearly as a people, celebrating those pains, in order to carve out a better tomorrow (Achebe, 1990.) Achebe's postcolonialism identified where the 'rain began to beat Africans' (Achebe, 1989) but he did not stay there and point fingers

at who had done what to ruin the continent. He believed in the power of the African to re-craft a destiny for itself through the continent's own ingenuity. His novels showed his postcolonial bend, and the paper will examine two of his novels in line of their postcoloniality.

4.2.3 Things Fall Apart as a postcolonial novel

Things Fall Apart is a tragic story about Umuofia, an Igbo society that comes into contact with European colonialism and proselytizing. The book's main character is Okonkwo. *Things Fall Apart* opens with the presentation of Igbo culture as dynamic, complex, rich and untouched by Europe. In describing the religious landscape of the land, Achebe gives readers this picture of the Oracle of Agbala:

Many years ago, when Okonkwo was still a boy his father, Unoka, had gone to consult Agbala. The priestess in those days was a woman called Chika. She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared. Unoka stood before her and began his story. (p.14)

Achebe's portrait of Umuofia's priestess, and her formidable god Agbala, gives an image of power and reverence, infusing the pre-colonial past with an identifiable and revered system of belief. Achebe also draws the attention of readers to writing and record keeping, just in case any of his audience had bought into the popular narrative that writing arrived with the first European ship. He does this by showing readers the character Unoka. Unoka is lazing about his hut when his neighbour Okeye visits him to extract a loan Unoka owed him. Unoka points to the writings he had made on the walls of his hut, telling Okeye to wait his turn until his more substantial loans had been paid off.

The second part of the novel involves a shift from the idyllic Igbo village to Umuofia after its encounter with European missionaries and colonial administration. At this point in the book,

readers come face to face with the fractures that occur in the clan because of this encounter. Nwoye is Okonkwo's son. When Nwoye is converted and joins the missionaries, his father Okonkwo is shattered by this change in their way of life. He sees it as the biggest calamity that could befall an Igbo man. Alone one night, he thinks about the calamity that has befallen his clan:

To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine, waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes and bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god (p.108.)

Achebe's choice of words like effeminacy, annihilation and abomination, and the imagery he conveys of anxious ancestors waiting in vain for faithless sons to bring them worship clearly shows readers the extent of the cultural disruption that had taken place in the traditional society. Achebe describes the colonial establishment as a knife at the throat of the traditional society, cutting quickly and mercilessly at the cords that hold the society together.

As the book draws to a close, one notices the stark silence and voicelessness that descends on the once vibrant, speaking village of Umuofia. The colonial administration had succeeded in capturing the elders of the town, leaving behind only women, children, and 'voiceless' men. Umuofia was left cowering in fear, whispering in dread around fireplaces in the dark. The closing chapter of the novel shows a sudden shift in voice, and the omniscient narrator's voice is replaced by the stream of consciousness of the British District Commissioner. The District Commissioner dreams about his plans to write a book concerning his experiences in the colony, titled *The Pacification of the*

Primitive Tribes of The Lower Niger. This visible shift is a metaphor of the loudness of colonial discourse. The shift also throws light on the tendency of colonial discourse to re-write the stories of the dispossessed after it has succeeded in silencing them with half-truths and sheer lies. In his book, the District Commissioner believes that a paragraph will be sufficient enough to contain the dynamic and complex life of Umuofia and its tragic hero Okonkwo. Okonkwo was a great hero, yet the District Commissioner chose to write a paragraph to represent the entirety of his life and his achievements. Achebe's novel is starkly postcolonial, because the writer succeeds in using his work to point at the power of colonial discourse to misrepresent people and reduce their existence to stereotypes and misrepresentations.

4.2.4 No Longer at Ease as a postcolonial novel

Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* was written in 1960, coinciding with Nigeria's independence. The novel is a postscript to *Things Fall Apart*, as its main character Obi Okonkwo is the grandson of the tragic hero in *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo (Carroll, 1990). *No longer At Ease* is postcolonial because it addresses the issue of political corruption in erstwhile colonial societies. The protagonist of the novel, Obi Okonkwo is the son of a church catechist and evangelist. He is the product of colonial education. He returns from his education in England to a Nigeria that is under the full sway of colonial political structures. In Obi Okonkwo's Nigeria, the traditional society is no longer kicking against the new European order. Christianity had almost formed a hybrid with traditional African religion. When Obi returns home from England, the President of the Umuofia Progressive Union says this prayer in his welcome:

He that brings kola nuts brings life' he said. 'We do not seek to hurt any man, but if any man seeks to hurt us may he break his neck.' The congregation answered Amen (p.157.)

The kola nut of traditional Igbo and the amen of the Christians have now formed a union, and we see tradition mixing with the European modernity to create an example of a postcolonial reality of the hybridity of cultures. The seemingly seamless hybridization of African religion with Christianity was only a mirage, for beneath the calm was the boiling tensions of opposing beliefs that had been forced to become one. We see this tension when Obi decides to marry Clara. Clara is an *osu*, which means that her ancestors were promised as slaves to the oracle in the past. Obi's Christian father disagrees with Obi's decision to marry Clara, and all Obi's attempt to appeal to his father's faith falls on deaf ears. Obi says:

“I don't think it matters. We are Christians.”

His father agrees,

“We are Christians”, he said. “But that is no reason to marry an *osu*.”

Obi still tries to plead his case, “the bible says that in Christ there is no bond or free.”

Yet his father remains unmoved, because no matter how much he understood his son's decision to go ahead with Clara, he could not wipe away that traditional part of him that still remained standing in spite of his many years of Christianity. He could not stop seeing the condition of an *osu* as “leprosy in the minds of our people.”

A major theme in the novel is corruption. Achebe actualizes this theme by placing Obi Okonkwo, the returnee son of Umuofia who now works in the civil services, in the middle of a conflicting set of events that test his integrity. Obi works for the government in its scholarship secretariat, and he is determined to make a difference by living above the corruption and extortion that is now rife in the modern state of Nigeria. Corruption had increased in Nigeria because of the fracture that had been created in the traditional society by the new order of colonialism. Money had become the

new indicator of value and worth, and people who had migrated to the cities in search of jobs had to show that they had become people of worth when they went back home to their villages. European education, European jobs and European luxuries were the new validation people sought for a sense of self-worth. When villagers left in search of greener pastures in the city, they had this in mind: we did not,

‘Leave Umuofia four hundred miles away to come and sleep in Lagos...there are enough beds in Umuofia. If you don’t want to work, you should return there.’ (p.213)

‘It is money, not work’ said the man. ‘We left plenty of work at home. Anyone who likes work can return home, take up a machete and go into that bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino.’ (p.214.)

In the beginning, Obi Okonkwo stands strong in the face crippling temptation to give in to corruption. But eventually he fails. There was a mother’s funeral to be planned, a clan’s loan to be repaid, a fiancée’s medical bill to be footed, and a desperate need to keep body and soul together. Through Obi’s story, Achebe draws attention to corruption as a postcolonial situation. Obi’s life shows the tension that exists between the public life of the postcolonial African citizen and his private obligations to his traditional society. Obi was a product of a society that had come to consider Western education as the only tool to success. Traditional means of wealth creation and status attainment could no longer be the answer for Obi Okonkwo’s need for self-actualization. He needed to show his village and his clan that he was not a failure, that Western education and employment had delivered the glittering success it promised, so his integrity and will crumbles under these pressures, and he is at last publicly disgraced.

It is worth noting that Achebe did recognize the role of individual responsibility, vigilance and integrity in fighting against corruption. However, it is clear that he is sympathetic to the tensions that pull on the individual in the new order. Perhaps, the book is Achebe's message to African readers to begin to look closely at where the 'rain began to beat us', (Achebe, 1989) so that we can make feverish steps in rebuilding what we have lost as a result of corruption and excess in the postcolonial state.

4.3 Profile of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on 15th September 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria. She was born to a scholarly Igbo family in Nsukka in Enugu State. She grew up in the university town of Nsukka, where her parents worked. Adichie studied medicine at the University of Nigeria; while at the university she contributed stories to *The Compass*, a student magazine. Adichie left Nigeria to study Communications and Political Science at the Drexel University in Philadelphia in 1996, but completed her university education in the Eastern Connecticut State University. She later completed a Master's Degree in Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University in 2005; she also earned an MA in African Studies from Yale University and was awarded a fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study in Harvard University.

Adichie has been writing since her childhood. She wrote because she loved books, and because writing was the only thing she found truly meaningful. At first, Adichie's writing were a mimicry of the American and British books she read; her characters were white, her stories were set in winter. She started to write about African people who lived in Africa and ate African food after she read Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and his *Arrow of God*. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* was a critical success, receiving the Commonwealth Prize. In 2006, she published the widely

famous novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which was inspired by the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War. The war had significant impact on Adichie's life. She was born seven years after the conflict, but she was told by her family that they had lost a lot in the war, including both her maternal and paternal grandfathers. In 1998, Adichie wrote a play, *For the Love of Biafra*, based on the Biafran War. The play was followed by several short stories, all exploring subjects of the war.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is well noted for her social commentary on racism and gender inequality. Her feminist advocacy is internationally known, and social media websites like Twitter and Facebook have contributed to helping place her in the middle of dialogues concerning gender and feminism. Adichie's feminist advocacy is not restricted to the internet and social media interactions; her advocacy covers her creative works as well. She addresses issues of female sexuality and freedoms in both her *Half of a Yellow Sun* and her *Americanah*. She dedicates one of her creative non-fiction works, *We should All Be Feminists*, to addressing the injustices of gender inequality in our societies. She has remained unapologetic of her advocacy, writing in her *We Should All be Feminist that:*

Not long ago I wrote an article about being young and female in Nigeria. An acquaintance told me that it was an angry article, and I should not have made it so angry. But I was unapologetic. Of course, it was angry. Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change. In addition to anger, I am also hopeful, because I believe deeply in the ability of humans to remake themselves for the better (Adichie, 2014.)

Adichie's major works are *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Americanah*, *We should All Be Feminists* and *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*.

4.3.1 Chimamanda Adichie as a Postcolonial Writer

The most obvious pointer to the postcoloniality of the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the fact that she is from a postcolonial nation, Nigeria. That aside, she is a postcolonial writer because of her commitment to telling the African story. Postcolonialism, primarily, is a commitment to presenting an alternative story to the misrepresentations of colonial narrative. It is telling a story about African people as they truly are, and representing their philosophies, their hopes, their stories and aspirations as truly as is creatively possible. And Adichie has committed herself to telling such stories, a commitment she made in front of a global audience when she delivered what is now a popular TED talk titled "*The Danger of a Single Story*" in 2009. Adichie defined a single story as the kind of story created by one set of people (let us call them People A) about another set of people (People B.) In this story, People B are represented as "as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again" (Adichie, &TEDTalks 2009.) Overtime, this created story becomes the picture most people have when they think of this People B. As an African woman, Adichie stated that she identified with one such single story that had been created about Africans, the origins of which she said, ultimately came from Western literature. What was this single story about Africa? It was the story that pitched Africa as a land of endless catastrophes. This story began in colonial imaginations, and was told by merchants, enslavers, missionaries, historians and ethnographers. They carried the story of black Africans as "beasts who have no houses... as people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts" (Adichie, &TEDTalks 2009.) This was the colonial imaginative and discourse, and this discourse began a tradition of Westerners telling

stories about African people. This tradition entrenched the story of the continent as a place of negatives and dangers, of “difference, of darkness, of people who... are half devil, half child” (Adichie, &TEDTalks 2009.)

Single stories are useful in dispossessing a people, as Adichie indicated in her speech. The single story of the African as half-child, half-devil was instrumental to the justification of colonialism by Europeans. After colonialism, single stories continue to dispossess Africans by painting them in the image of the Other. This picture makes it difficult for non-Africans to see Africans as people just like them. The single story, Adichie says, rouses feelings of pity in non-Africans, barring other complex feelings like respect, appreciation, trust and love. Instead of respect, there was “a kind of patronizing, well-meaning, pity” (Adichie, &TEDTalks 2009) and the need to stretch a charitable hand to the Dark Continent. Adichie’s protagonist in *Americanah*, Ifemelu, was the embodiment of Adichie’s attempt to shake off Western pity, and represent African people, especially women, as independent people with capacity and a voice, unembarrassed about their background, past mistakes and desires. Ifemelu rouses feelings of respect amongst blacks and whites alike, and Adichie gives no room for her to have be the Other, a strange dark woman from a dark continent.

As a writer and speaker, Adichie has committed herself to avoiding the danger of telling a single story about people and places. Her commitment, she said, stems from her belief that stories can be used as a tool of dispossession, and when handled rightly, used as a tool to restore dignity to a dispossessed people. Thus, Adichie’s stories have been stories that seek to empower and humanize the silent voices in society, and to make sure that their dignity that was broken can be repaired and restored. Before coming into the idea of the potency of stories to dispossess and restore, Adichie had been herself guilty of telling a single story. She says this at the beginning of her talk:

I was an early reader. And what I read were British and American children's books. I was also an early writer. And when I began to write... I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading. All my characters were white and blue-eyed. They played in the snow. They ate apples. And they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out (Adichie & TEDTalks, 2009.)

Fortunately for Adichie, she was saved from the danger of telling a single story by the works of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, who showed her that "people like me could exist in literature (Adichie & TEDTalks, 2009.)" Adichie is passionate about telling the many stories of people, because she does not want to be guilty of flattening their experiences by insisting on telling only their negative stories. She wants to step out of the trap of stereotyping people, because she knows the problem with stereotypes that not only are they "untrue, but that they are incomplete" (Adichie & TEDTalks, 2009.)

The Dangers of a Single Story, one of the most viewed TED Talk videos, raises some key postcolonial concerns, which makes it reasonable to view Adichie as a postcolonial writer. In line with postcolonialism's aim of giving dignity to people dispossessed by colonialism, Adichie has committed herself to telling stories about a progressive Africa, not of the poor squalid Africa that is common in some Western discourses. In her stories she chips away at the popular image of an Africa of difference and of darkness. By drawing attention to the universality of human experience, she shows that Africa is no darker or stranger than other parts of the world. She admits the complexity of the continent, but shows that it is not a complexity that evokes charitable pity. By doing this she writes back into literature the erasures of the dignified and proud African lecturer like Obinze's mother in her *Americanah*. Obinze's mother is a foil to the Western picture of a fly-swarmed poor woman in a patriarchal society who struggles to make ends meet. Even as Adichie

writes about the commonalities in the human experience, she presents the stories of African people who have worked to overcome the difficult challenges that were inflicted by colonialism. She writes about Ugwu, who fights a daily battle to make sense of the English tongue; she writes about Obinze who suffers from his obsession with the glamour of America; she writes about Auntie Uju, who had battled racism and sexism, just so she can make a living for herself and her son in America. Her stories are representative of the fractures created in societies, and in the psyches of African people by colonialism and its aftermath.

Finally, Adichie is a postcolonial writer because she has once described herself as proudly African, a description she says will be unnecessary if she did not inhabit a postcolonial space. As a Nigerian writer, she calls herself an “inhabitant of the periphery”, lacking the “automatic privilege of not needing to declare your pride.” (Adichie & EnglishPEN, 2018.) She is aware that her place in the world is constantly in question, and because of this makes it a point, in her own words, not to use her art as an armor of neutrality behind which she will hide from commenting on the political inequalities that affect African people as a result of colonialism and its aftermath.

Adichie’s works addresses postcolonial issues and how they affect African nations and peoples in her novels. The subsequent pages will discuss themes of postcoloniality in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*.

4.3.2 Half of a Yellow Sun as a Postcolonial Novel

Half of a Yellow Sun is the story of two lovers, Olanna and Odenigbo, in the middle of the Biafran War. The novel is an account of the devastating and lasting effects the war has on the lovers, their friends and families. The novel opens with the portrait of a postcolonial society. There is Odenigbo and his group of Western educated friends on the university campus of Nsukka. They drink brandy,

speak English, talk about Marx and play tennis. Then there is Ugwu, Odenigbo's houseboy, and his family. Ugwu's family in his village had palm oil lamps; they pounded *akpu* in a wooden mortar, and cooked watery soups on smoky tripod stoves. In Ugwu's village, the children run merrily at the banks of the stream as they fetch water for their homes. The picture these accounts paint is a traditional society that has come into contact with European, modern culture. Adichie expands this picture with the introduction of the story of Odenigbo's mother, Mama. Mama's entire life revolves around Abba, a very small bush village. When she visits Odenigbo's house and meets Olanna, her response to Olanna is antagonism. Olanna is an English-educated middle-class woman, and Mama cannot understand Olanna's world. Explaining his mother's hostile behavior to a confused and hurt Olanna, Odenigbo explains Mama's behavior as a "real tragedy of the postcolonial world." He explains further that postcolonialism had created a world where a good majority of the citizens of former colonial states lacked the tools to negotiate the new world left behind by colonialism. They did not have the tool of education; they did not have the tool of technology and they often were not well versed in language of the new world to properly and confidently negotiate that world.

Another postcolonial concern that flows from the tragedy of inadequate tools is the problem of language in postcolonial societies. One of the main things readers notice is the glamour of English as a language; readers will also see the power of language to divide people into classes, the respected speakers of well-accented English, and the respecting class of those who don't. When Ugwu first meets Odenigbo, the first thing he notices is Odenigbo's feathery Igbo. He describes Odenigbo's Igbo as "colored by the sliding sounds of English, the Igbo of one who speaks English very often." Ugwu's admiration for his boss is first sparked off by his boss's command over the English language. He stares in admiration at Odenigbo as Odenigbo points a map to him and says

“this is our world, although the people who drew this map decided to put their own land on top of ours. There is no top or bottom, you see.” When Ugwu finally meets Olanna, a graduate of a British University, he is blown away by the superiority of her English accent:

Master’s English was music, but what Ugwu was hearing now, from this woman, this was magic. This was a superior tongue, a luminous language, the kind of English he heard on Master’s radio, rolling out with clipped precision (p.28.)

In addition to language and the tragedy of inadequacy, Adichie takes up the postcolonial subject of corruption and nepotism by the political elite of the early post-independent states. Olanna’s parents, the Ozobias, are representative of this class. Chief Ozobia is not very qualified and deserving of his position, but he has climbed up the social ladder by his connection to affluent politicians. As a government contractor, he gives a kickback of 10% to the minister in charge for every contract he is given. His friend Chief Okonjo, a fat, gaudy politician is as corrupt as Chief Ozobia and would not hesitate to appoint Olanna on any ministerial board she liked if only she would give in to his romantic overtures. The subject of corruption is significant postcolonial theme; it draws attention to how the failure of European political institutions that were the heritage of colonialism have served as a breeding ground for exploitation, excess and greed in many postcolonial African states.

Lastly, *Half of a Yellow Sun* addresses the theme of war as a postcolonial situation. Wars are varied and diverse; but often, the failure of the postcolonial state is a major cause. Adichie’s account of the Biafran War suggests that the root cause of the conflict was postcolonial in nature. In the voice of Richard Churchill, a British writer and Olanna’s brother-in-law, the writer says

It is imperative to remember that the first time the Igbo people were massacred, albeit on a much smaller scale...the carnage was precipitated by the British colonial government when it blamed the Igbo people for the national strike...and generally encouraged anti-Igbo sentiment. The notion of the recent killings being the product of 'age-old' hatred is therefore misleading...If this is hatred then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide-and-rule policies of British colonial exercises (p.209.)

Like many of the war novels written by African writers, *Half of a Yellow Sun* addresses the atrocities of wars, exploring the disastrous impacts it has on the society, on families and on individuals. Adichie looks at the impacts the war has on individuals; she explores how the war turns otherwise noble humans into monsters who cause untold pain to their friends. Before the war, Olanna's uncle, Uncle Mbaezi had a Hausa friend, a Muslim called Abdulmalik. When the massacre of Igbos begins in the North, Olanna is present at the scene and witnesses Abdulmalik lead a party of people to wipe out Mbaezi's family. They leave no one alive, not even Arinze, Mbaezi's heavily pregnant daughter. Abdulmalik had only one motivation, "*It was Allah's will.*" When Ugwu is conscripted into the Biafran army, he joins some of his men in gang-raping a waitress at a bar. Ugwu is one of the main narrative voices in the novel, and until then he had been nothing but a sweet, sensitive young man who cared for the wellbeing of others. But the war gets to him, and his actions haunts him forever, filling him with shame.

The postcolonial issue of single stories and how they fester can also be seen in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Adichie addresses this subject by representing the tellers of stories with Western journalists assigned to covering the news on the war. In covering the story of Biafra, these journalists were only interested in a peculiar brand of story from Biafra. What kind of stories did they want? They wanted stories with a '*human angle*', angles that featured African people '*muttering tribal*

incantations while they did the killings.” They wanted stories about African people who ‘ate body parts, and they wanted to truly understand the ‘African psyche’, as if the African psyche was markedly different from the psyche of all other humans. Among the story mongers was the character of Susan. Susan is an English diplomat who worked in Lagos. Susan always had one story or another to tell about Nigerians and Igbos, stories that were more a reflection of her ignorance and racism, than they were a reflection of the true story of Nigeria. She is patronizing, superior and condescending. Adichie’s account of how stereotypical stories are preferred to the actual stories of African people point to the postcolonial situation of presence and representation. Right before Europe and the West’s eyes lay the story of Biafra, but that story did not fit the image of Africa as a land of adversities and suffering, so typically, the real story was overlooked, and the world remained silent as Biafra died.

4.3.3 Postcolonialism in *Americanah*

Americanah is a quintessential transnational novel; not only is its author a transnational author, the novel itself is set in three different continents, addressing the themes of migration, racism and diasporan relationships. Ifemelu is the main character of the novel, and *Americanah* is the love story between her and Obinze. Ifemelu moves to the United States for greener pastures in education. Nigeria at the time of her migration is a corrupt, underdeveloped, ineffective postcolonial state. The sun is mercilessly hot, the traffic eternally choked and the public transport unfit for safe and humane transportation. Like many postcolonial African states, its failed democracy had given birth to a corrupt and greedy middle class of politicians who cared first for their stomachs, and second for the state of the nation. Citizens like Ifemelu’s father grapple with the disillusionment of the country. Ifemelu’s father is a civil servant who had lost his job because he refused to be part of the common sycophancy that colored employer-employee relations in

Lagos. He is a man full of “blanched longings...who wanted a life different than what he had...an overzealous colonial subject...with a mannered English that was his costume and shield against insecurity” (Adichie, 2013, p.31.) The failures of Nigeria as a nation caused most of its citizens to cast their gaze to America, because they believed strongly that “America creates opportunities for people to thrive.” Against the backdrop of such discomfort, it is no surprise that most of the Nigerian characters in the novel develop a longing for the glamour of the West, especially for America. Take for example Obinze’s friend Emenike who was so awed by people who went abroad. When a classmate of theirs, Kayode, returns from a trip abroad, Emenike “bent down to caress Kayode’s shoes, saying ‘I want to touch them because they have touched snow.’” Emenike eventually achieves his dream of becoming European when he immigrates to England, marries an English wife, and refers to himself as ‘we Brits.’

In the novel, Adichie directly connects migration to disillusionment and hopelessness in postcolonial states. She talks about factors like war, dilapidating poverty and famines that push Africans out of their continent. More often than not, these factors are postcolonial in nature. But even more subtle and insidious of these factors is the issue of choicelessness. Many African young people migrate because they feel that their nations cannot offer the opportunities that the West can offer. These sentiments of dissatisfaction are the result of years of conditioning of young Africans to “look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened somewhere else.” And what happens when these migrants arrive in the lands of their dreams? They become like Ifemelu’s aunt Uju, and Obinze’s sister-in-law Ojiugu. Uju and Ojiugu while they were in Nigeria were proud, passionate women, full of hope and life. When they get to America, they are shadows of their former selves, because racism and the emptiness they encounter as migrants crushes them.

Racism first crushes their bodies, straightens their hair, refuses to mention their names right, silences their African languages and turns them into anxious, frightened women.

When Ifemelu finally arrives in America, she is met with the typical case of stereotypes that some Westerners have about Africans. There was Elena, Ifemelu's flat mate, who wanted to know if Ifemelu's dislike for dogs was a 'cultural thing', did Ifemelu by any chance eat dogs back her country? Then there was Cristina Tomas, who was welcoming freshmen into school. Cristina thought she had to speak slowly so that Ifemelu could understand her, because she assumed that Ifemelu did not speak English. These responses of Americans to Ifemelu's presence in America were a small part of the broader response of Americans to the presence of Black people in general. As Ifemelu settles into America, she becomes more aware of the bigger problem of racism, and the response of American Whites to Black people. There were those Americans like Kimberly and Curt, who responded to Black people with a largess and an open-mindedness that begged for recognition. They showed their open-mindedness by apologizing for the racist behaviors of other white people. Ifemelu says of Kimberly:

At first Ifemelu thought Kimberly's apologizing sweet, even if unnecessary, but she had begun to feel a flash of impatience, because Kimberly's repeated apologies were tinged with self-indulgence, as though she believed that she could, with apologies, smooth all the scalloped surfaces of the world (p.174.)

Then there were a second group of American whites who were both racist and in denial of their racism. These people made statements like "race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it's all about class.... look how far we've come, forty years ago it would have been illegal for us to even be a couple..." (p.8.) In one of her blog posts, Ifemelu writes

In America, racism exists but racists are all gone. Racists belong to the past...Here's the thing: the manifestation of racism has changed but the language has not. So, if you haven't lynched somebody then you can't be racist. If you're not a bloodsucking monster then, then you can't be called a racist. Somebody has to be able to say that racists are not monsters. They are people with loving families, regular folks who pay taxes (p.180.)

One cannot talk about the postcolonial in *Americanah* without talking about the tensions between continental Blacks and diasporan Blacks. The novel describes several examples of tension between the two groups, groups that should not be divided into two in the first place. The disrespect some continental Africans show towards diasporan Blacks can be explained by the heritage of colonialism and slavery. Had it not been for slavery, continental Africans would not think themselves as 'purer' than African Americans. Had it not been for slavery, the bitterness African Americans have towards Africans for their complicity in the slave trade would not exist at all. Similarly, it is the colonial discourse of Africa as a continent of decadence and corruption that makes diasporan Africans look down on continental Africans.

Perhaps *Americanah* will be some the first of many books that will begin to address these tensions between the races, so that someday the plague of colonial discourse and the harm it has done to Black people and to the harmonious relationship between the races will finally and fully be resolved.

4.4 Comparative Analysis of Achebe's writing Style to Adichie's: *Things Fall Apart* and *Americanah*

One of the objectives of this work is to explore the different approaches that African writers have adopted over the years to address colonialism and its aftermath. The very first novel of Chinua Achebe is a good fifty-five years older than Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. Both

works address colonialism and its aftermaths, and as much as they share some common themes, they do digress on some themes as well. Similarly, the approach that Achebe uses in telling his stories differs from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's. Chinua Achebe is a forerunner to many contemporary writers of African literature, Adichie being a part of these writers. A significant point this paper draws attention to is the undeniable impact that Achebe has had on Adichie's writing career. Adichie has often paid homage to Achebe in her talks and in her essays; she has often spoken about how *Things Fall Apart* taught her that her world was also worthy of literature, that characters like her could be represented in books and that her voice could also be heard. In her novel *Purple Hibiscus*, she begins with a reference to *Things Fall Apart*.

"Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines...." (Adichie, 2009, p.1.)

This reference is an excellent way of alerting her readers that the "familiar terrain" of Nigeria and African history, culture and literature will be rewritten and remapped in her works (Hewett, 2005.) In as much as Adichie's writing pays homage to Achebe, Hewett (2005) and Wenske (2016) argue that her works also challenge and revise Achebe's works. This last section will compare the storytelling and writing approach of each writer, noting where they converge and diverge. It will also investigate some of the new approaches that have been adopted in changing the narrative around African people and the continent.

4.4.1 Vision of the Nation in *Things Fall Apart* and *Americanah*

The first feature of difference and similarity between the works of Achebe and Adichie that this paper will investigate is how each writer views the concept of nationality and citizenship. Achebe

is a noted nationalist and Africanist; there is no mistaking his commitment to always identifying as an African writer. Achebe has argued in some of his essays on the concept of the nationality, art and the artists' responsibility to their nation. Achebe was committed to writing for the audience of African readers and peoples, and to being of some practical use to his community in the process of education and re-education.

In his *Things Fall Apart*, each member of the society had a responsibility to the clan and its continuation. Achebe's prior inspiration for writing the novel was to tell the story of his people, and to show the world that his nation was not a dark nation full of meaninglessness. When the white man threatens Abame, the people take it upon themselves to defend the clan against foreign encroachment and they do this even to their total annihilation. Also, when the missionaries come to town, the people in Umuofia are not so much worried about their activities because their focus is the clan and the nation of the clan, and not what the White man chooses to do in his past time. Their allegiance is to the clan; they are its mouthpiece and protector, and they take their role seriously. For the protection of the clan, Okonkwo does not hesitate to take a machete to Ikemefuna's neck, even when Ikemefuna had for a while called him father. When twins were left crying in the evil forest, it was done for the pacification of the nation, and for its survival.

This commitment to the concept of nationality and group identity is present to some degree in *Americanah*, but it does not jump out at you as much as it does in *Things Fall Apart*. In Adichie's own testimony, whether she is an African writer who writes African stories is a question that she is often asked by many Africans. She has stated in a talk that her writing is a deeply private act because of the hold her writing has on the emotional boundaries of her life and its centrality to her self-identity. Even while acknowledging the privacy of her writing, she admits that writing is essentially a public affair, and that she does write for an audience, even if she doesn't know by a

definite certainty who her audience is. Adichie has remained ambivalent to the question of her works being authentically African. Her ambivalence stems from the expectation that is placed on her by African people to toe a certain line and to avoid certain topics just because those topics are considered ‘un-African.’ Examples of such topics that Adichie is often accused of betraying her citizenship for are feminism and LGBT issues. Adichie argues that the question “are you an African Writer?” is not a question about geography or identity, but about loyalty. And her answer to that question will be a “no” because of the “subtle and not-so-subtle constraints that the question implies.” Even though Adichie is aware of the expectations and constraints that come with a person’s loyalty to citizenship, her ambivalence to citizenship does not however mean that she is unaware of the essential need for writers to speak up for their nations on certain pressing social issues. She says that writers have to speak up because they have the particular advantage of a platform to address those issues. She does not at all think that art is a “valid reason for evading the responsibilities of citizenship – which are to think clearly, to remain informed, and, sometimes, to act and speak” (Adichie, 2018, p.1.) While remaining wary of her novels being judged on the merit of citizenship, she also does not want to use her art “as an armor of neutrality behind which to hide.”

In her *Americanah*, Adichie does not twist herself out of shape in her eagerness to perform citizenship (Adichie,2018.) Instead, she addresses the peculiar issues of Nigeria as part of the global problem of racial, class, and gender oppressions. Her work is global and many people from different parts of the world can identify themselves in the novel. She chooses to tell the individual stories of lovers and mothers and aunts, without a definite color of nationality because of her belief that “the expectations of citizenship...often get in the way of engaging honestly with the jolly coarseness” of everyday life.

Achebe did not mind being tied fully to the notion of citizenship, but Adichie remains ambivalent. She affirms her citizenship as her way of identity, but she also wishes that she will be allowed to be that type of African writer who writes on her “own terms, on multiple terms, for that is the essence of art” so that her writing will be freed from the constraints of expectations.

4.4.2 Thematic Concerns in *Things Fall Apart* and *Americanah*

Things Fall Apart and *Americanah* address share a similarity in thematic concerns. Though both writers show concern for these themes, their focus and the angle from which they come at it differ to some degree. Two of the themes that both books address are identity and oppression; I shall begin with the interrogation of the theme of identity. Identity, according to Erikson (1970) is the “a subjective as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some shared world image.” Identity is what makes a person feel special, different and unique from others. In *Things Fall Apart*, the identity under attack is the ethnic and social identity of the traditional society that has been encroached by British missionaries and colonial administrators. The first contact of one of the villages in this society with Europeans was bloody. The whole village is first wiped out, and Achebe gives readers this image about the incidence:

“During the last planting season, a white man had appeared in their clan...The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them... I forgot to tell you another thing which the Oracle said. It said that other white man were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain” (p.97.)

In a short time, Umuofia comes under the full power of the European settlers who came as friends and now are masters. The identity of the tribe is shattered; the new converts to the new faith are betraying their traditions, and in a fit of religious zeal slaughter the totem of the tribe, the royal

python. The tribe no longer knows who they are, and the few men who remembered the clan in its glorious past mourn its loss.

Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women.

Achebe's portrayal of a conflict of identity in *Things Fall Apart* is primarily on the collective level of the clan. There are, of course, individuals like Nwoye and Ikemefuna who have flashes of an identity crisis, but that does not seem to be the Achebe's focus in his treatment of the theme of identity. It is in this collectivism that his thematic concern differs from Adichie's in *Americanah*. In *Americanah*, readers see the identity crisis that Nigerian teenagers encounter as they look at the glitz and glamour of America. There's that desire in Ifemelu, Emenike, Ginika and Aunt Uju to be American, and be part of America's glory. These characters massage their Nigerian accents, perm their hair, lose weight, and marry English wives just to be as Western as they possibly could be. The loss of identity in *Americanah* is analyzed as it pertains to the individual, and not on the collective level of the class. Perhaps this focus is because of the setting of the story, of the experience the protagonist has as a lone person in America. Perhaps, the postmodern focus on individualism and lived experiences account for Adichie's decision to focus on the individual's direct grappling with identity. Essentially, Adichie addresses the ways in which imperialism, racism and structural inequality threaten the certainty that a person has about themselves about their worth.

In addition to the common theme of identity, Achebe and Adichie address the theme of oppression and injustice. Achebe speaks out against the abuse of the colonial administration, addressing the injuries and inhumanities the administration carries out on the clan. Achebe's focus is on the

traditional society, and in his other novels this concern is expanded to include oppressions on the national level. In contrast, Adichie addresses all forms of oppression, be it racial, ideological, gender and class discriminations from the standpoint of Blackness and the Black experience. Thus, Adichie expands the scope of oppression to include oppression on the global sphere and how this trickles down into national spheres. She narrows in especially on how racial oppression particularly oppresses black women. Hewett (2005) describes this approach in Adichie as a revisioning of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Revisioning a work is to speak about the work through a difference lens, and to look at it from a different perspective than was previously done. In revisioning *Things Fall Apart* through the lens of feminism, Adichie looks at the bodies of women as the sight of social oppression. She investigates the specific ways in which oppression affects women. It is as a result of her feminist revisioning that causes her to "voice the female body", speaking out about how racism forces women to bow to European standards of fashion and body size. One notes how significant the hair braiding salon is in *Americanah*; it is in this setting that Ifemelu carries readers along with her in most of her reveries and flashbacks. Adichie also voices the female body in her *Americanah* when she writes about female sexuality and sexual freedoms in the context of romantic relationships.

4.4.3 Complementary Dualism in *Things Fall Apart* and *Americanah*

Complementary dualism is an Igbo philosophy that is hinged on the constant recreation of balance between paired terms. This philosophy states that there is no need to split the world into two polar opposites, and after splitting it into two choosing one of these opposites as superior to the other. The philosophy sees the necessity in balance, and believes that a dark story exists to make a bright story more meaningful (Wenske, 2016.) Be it narratives, races, causes, religions, complementary dualism often seeks to strike a balance between two paired items.

The principle of complementary dualism can be seen in Adichie and Achebe's writing about the West. Writing about the West, and about Westerners has been the trade of both Achebe and Adichie. As postcolonial writers, they are aware of the aftermath of colonialism and the impact it has on postcolonial peoples and societies. A common trait that can be spotted in *Americanah* and *Things Fall Apart* is the way both authors balance their portrayal of the Western world and in their development of Western characters. A complementary dualism is that ability to adopt a contrapuntal approach to storytelling. Guided by this ideology, a writer will choose to explore multiple concepts and perspectives rather than privileging one explanation over the other (Lynn, 2017.) Wenske (2016) notes this trait in the works of Achebe and Adichie, and suggest that neither writer takes the side of blame in their diagnoses of the continent's challenges. Thus, their novels require readers to search for balance, as the tone of the writers is a reconciliatory tone and not a tone of blame.

Given the era in which Achebe wrote his *Things Fall Apart*, one would expect that his tone would be one of blame, or that he would develop an unflattering, predictable, one-dimensional caricature of Western characters, but that is not the case for him (Lynn, 2017.) Take for instance his portrayal of the character of Mr. Brown, the first missionary to establish his convert in Umuofia. Achebe describes him as a congenial man who was very

“firm in restraining his flock from provoking the wrath of the clan...Mr. Brown preached against such excess of zeal. ...And so, Mr. Brown came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith. He made friends with some of the great men of the clan”
(p.126.)

It should be noted that Achebe did not hesitate to expose the arrogance and prejudice of the missionaries. Mr. Brown, in spite of his tolerance, did tread on the faith of Umuofia, and Achebe

states this clearly for readers to see. But even while telling this story, Achebe still brought out a multidimensional and sympathetic image of Mr. Brown, so that his humanity could be appreciated for what it was. He did not make Brown's race dictate what kind of person he would be. Achebe also applied the same objectivity when talking about the beginnings Christianity in Umuofia. He did not describe Christianity as an all-powerful religion that bulldozed its way into a traditional religious society. Instead, he addresses the ills of Umuofia's religious scene which made it easy for the new religion to make inroads into the clan. One of such ills was the practice of leaving twins in the Evil Forest to perish. When the mission church was established in the village, it provided a safe harbor for poor mothers who did not want to lose their twin children. A safe harbor was also provided for lower achieving, frail men, and title-less men who had little or no say in the community of Umuofia. The Christian Missions' inclusivity and mercy for the outcasts was what attracted Okonkwo's son Nwoye to the new faith. Nwoye had never gotten over the decree by the oracle of Umuofia. The oracle had demanded that Nwoye's adopted brother Ikemefuna should be killed. Years after Ikemefuna's death Nwoye is still broken, until the missionaries come with their hymns and doctrines. Every time Nwoye listens to the hymns of the new religion, he is moved in response to the song about,

“Brothers who sat in darkness and in fear which seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul – the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief as the hymn poured into his parched soul” (p.104.)

A final portrait that shows Achebe's commitment to painting a balanced and nuanced picture of the colonial situation is the tragic hero Okonkwo himself. Without doubt, Okonkwo's tragic end is directly brought on by the colonial administration. His best friend Obierika tells the colonial

administrator that “that man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself, and now he will be buried like a dog.” But Okonkwo was not merely a victim of colonial oppression and calamity. Okonkwo’s violent temper, coupled with his fear of becoming like his weak late father, as well as his famous impatience contributed to his demise and public shame.

Like Achebe, Adichie showcases this complimentary dualism. She addresses the systematic oppression of the West and the pretentiousness also in the same breath as she addresses the subject of insincerity, greed and sycophancy in the Nigerian society. In her *Americanah*, she refuses to valorize poor Black people just because they are poor and black; oppressed people are not saints and therefore she makes no attempt to excuse them of their actions and inactions. When Ifemelu’s white boss Kimberly refers to a plain looking black model as beautiful, Ifemelu retorts “no, she isn’t. You know, you can just say ‘black.’ Not every black person is beautiful.” The novel lacks the caricature of even the most racist white people. Adichie attempts to give a human side to racists, in spite of their arrogance, ignorance and blinding privileges. Achebe and Adichie’s commitment to telling a nuanced story can be explained by the fact that both writers were vitally shaped by both Igbo thought and narrative tradition. In his essay, the *Igbo World and Its Art*, Achebe states that “all extremism is abhorrent to the Igbo sensibility.” True to this Igbo ideology, both writers avoid the extremism of blaming all the continent’s problems on colonialism and imperialism. They do indeed acknowledge how colonialism, to a large extent, impacts colonial societies but they also acknowledge that “it is too late in the day to get worked up about it or to blame others, much as they deserve such blame and condemnation” (Achebe, 1989.) Instead of blame, these writers make real the Igbo belief that no causality can be ignored, and that “any presence which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgement... can become a focus for anxiety and disruption.” (Achebe 1990, p.3)

4.4.4 Narrative Style in *Things Fall Apart* and *Americanah*

The last but not least feature of convergence and divergence in Adichie and Achebe's work that will be examined in this paper is the narrative style of each writer. Narrative style is a writer's peculiar way of using certain writing techniques and practices to tell their story (Koziel, 2015.) What is striking about Achebe's narrative style is his phenomenal way of interlacing African linguistic expressions with a Western fictional discourse in the form of the novel (Lynn, 2017.) Achebe achieves this distinctive narrative style by the adopting the characteristic syntax of the Igbo language, in addition to techniques such as code-switching and the incorporation of translated or transliterated African expressions into his narratives. *Things Fall Apart* is noted for the richness of its Igbo diction and proverbs, examples of which include:

“He who brings kola brings life.”

“Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them.”

“If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings.”

“The sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels.”

Following after the footsteps of Achebe, Adichie, like many other postcolonial writers, includes Igbo expressions in her *Americanah*. Even though Adichie does not use many Igbo proverbs, she makes use of Igbo expressions all the same. Examples of such expressions are as follows:

“Obi ocha. A clean heart.”

“Darling, kedu ebe I no?”

“Ahn an! O gini?”

“Ha, o di egwu, for where?”

“Aunty, biko, leave my hair alone,”

According to Lynn (2017) postcolonial writers may switch to African languages in their English novels in an attempt to interrupt “the encoding of power that supported colonialism and other forms of Western cultural domination in Africa” (Lynn, 2017, p.2.) Take for example a book as globally read as *Americanah*; because of Adichie’s use of Igbo expressions, the world can read the Igbo language and in some small way appreciate the fact that good literature does not have to explain itself to its readers in English, or French or Spanish, in order to have a global reach.

Narrative style also reveals itself through plot structure. Unlike Achebe’s *Things Apart* which is almost chronological in plot, *Americanah* starts with a flash-forward. Readers meet a middle-aged Ifemelu, then thirteen years a migrant in America, visiting a hair braiding salon as she prepares to move back home to Nigeria. The flash-forward is followed by a long flashback, which helps connects the missing pieces of the story to the flash-forward. In *Americanah*, the story shifts back and forth in time and space. Adichie’s chronological shifts in *Americanah* allow readers to do a double take on Ifemelu’s many experiences so that they can see how these experiences have molded and modified her prejudices and past worldviews (Guarracino, 2014.) The shifts in chronology also allows readers to confront issues of pain and grief in young Ifemelu’s life even as they keep in mind the image of the much older, more experienced and more distanced older Ifemelu.

What approaches does each writer adopt in telling their story? In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe’s manipulates the various expressions of the story in the form of legend, parables, myths and

proverbs in telling the African story (Carroll, 1990.) Achebe's adoption and use of myths, legends and folktale in *Things Fall Apart* is effective in helping him showcase the richness of African culture and history. The legend of Okonkwo, and the traditional town of Umuofia Achebe weaves, replete with parables, proverbs and traditional songs draw the reader's attention to the complex history of African people, making it almost impossible for them to continue holding on to the colonial stereotype of an ahistorical, cultureless dark continent.

In *Americanah*, Adichie adopts a writing approach that is quite novel in African writing. She uses blogging as a means of storytelling. Ifemelu, the main character in *Americanah* owns and runs an anonymous blog which she calls *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) By a Non-American Black*. Through her blog, Ifemelu is able to engage the American culture on heated issues like race. She expresses opinions that she is otherwise silent about in her real life, face-to-face interactions with white Americans. Blogging is a specialized form of expression, quite useful in its ability to bring together storytelling, reportage, and emotional value (Guarracino, 2014.) Unlike published novels where writers can be critiqued for overindulging in an expression of their feelings on a given topic, the anonymity that goes with blog posts allows its writers to directly and boldly express their feelings and experiences on social issues, especially controversial social issues like racism and sexism. An additional advantage of blogging is the extra-visibility that is offered by the internet. Extra visibility means that many readers from different parts of the world can interact with writers.

Readers who follow Adichie's social media presence will not find it surprising that Adichie uses the medium of blogging in her *Americanah*. Like most contemporary postcolonial writers who have gained popularity in contemporary media and literary discourse (Guarracino, 2014), Adichie is a celebrity in her own class on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Most of her YouTube videos

often go viral within minutes of being posted, and her comments on Twitter generate instant and heated debates. *Americanah* then, one can argue, is a “seamless continuity” of Adichie’s real-life social media presence as a respected opinion maker. What was Adichie’s goal in using blogging as a writing approach? In an interview, Adichie stated that the approach helped her achieve her goal of using *Americanah* as a social commentary on issues of racism, discrimination and corruption. Blogging, she said, facilitated her need to tell sections of the story how she wanted it without flouting the conventions of literary fiction. Adichie’s use of blogging in *Americanah* also indicates how she makes use of the resources available to her in communicating to her audience. Achebe had his myths and legends, and Adichie taps into technology and the blogosphere to connect with her audience, thus appropriating blogging as a “metanarrative device” in reaching her audience (Guarracino, 2014.)

4.5 New Dimensions by Adichie: Sexism-over-Racism and Individualism.

The third objective of this work is to identify the different and new approaches that Adichie’s works adopt in addressing the issue of colonialism and its aftermath. An important difference in writing approach which can be seen upon the comparison of Adichie’s work to Achebe’s is the commitment she gives to gender inequality. It is quite clear that as a female writer, Adichie thinks of oppression in quite a different fashion. (Quayson and Olaniyan, 2007.)

Upon close analysis of her works vis-à-vis Achebe’s, one can sustain the argument that Adichie departs to some extent from the postcolonial commitment of writing about the direct effects of colonialism on peoples and nations. This argument is especially sustainable if one undertakes a textual analysis of one of Adichie’s creative non-fiction, *Dear Ijeawele*. In evaluating Adichie’s

peculiar approach in telling the African story, I will look at three major areas: individualism, gender equality and global citizenship, starting with individualism.

In the introductory section of her essay (which is in the form of a letter), Adichie indicates that her *Dear Ijeawele* was premised upon a request from a childhood friend of hers “who'd grown into a brilliant, strong, kind woman” to “tell her how to raise her baby girl a feminist” (Adichie, 2017, p.1.) While admitting how great a request this was, Adichie responds to her friend's request by writing her a letter, giving her fifteen pieces of advice, on how nurture a baby girl up into a feminist. Adichie considers this task worth undertaking because in her opinion “it is morally urgent to have honest conversations about raising children differently, about trying to create a fairer world for women and men” (Adichie, 2017, p.1.) Adichie tells her friend, Ijeawele, to raise her daughter Chizalum, with these thoughts in mind:

1. Be a full person as a mother
2. Share domestic and parenting roles as a couple
3. The idea of gender roles is absolute nonsense
4. Beware of “Feminism Lite.”
5. Teach her to read
6. Teach her to question language
7. Never speak of marriage as an achievement
8. Teach her to reject likeability
9. Give her a sense of identity
10. Be deliberate about how you engage with her and her appearance
11. Teach her to question culture's selective use of biology as reasons for social norms
12. Talk to her about sex, and start early
13. Romance will happen, so be on board
14. In teaching her about oppression, be careful not to turn the oppressed into saints
15. Teach her about difference

Of the fifteen suggestions that Adichie gives to Ijeawele, at least five focus on individualism; on the unapologetic freedom and decision to claim one's right to exist as one wants. Perhaps it is by no accident that Adichie makes "be a full person" (Adichie, 2017, p. 2) her first suggestion to Ijeawele. Adichie gives Ijeawele such advice like: "do not define yourself solely by motherhood... 'never apologize for working (quoting Marlene Sanders)' ...everybody will have an opinion on what you should do, but what matters is what you want for yourself, not what others want you to want" (Adichie, 2017, p.2.) Thus, the primacy of what the individual wants is very visible in *Dear Ijeawele*, and especially more visible if put side by side to Achebe's portrayal of individual happiness in *Things Fall Apart*. In *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonist Okonkwo's desires and wants and identity are intricately connected to what the clan and society want and desire. For instance, Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna in spite of his love for the boy, because the oracle directed that Ikemefuna be killed. In a conversation with his friend Obierika, one sees that even the exercise of the individual's choices must fall within the confines of what the oracle and society decrees:

'I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy,' he asked Obierika

'Because I did not want to,' Obierika replied sharply. 'I had something better to do.'

'You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die.'

'I do not. Why should I? But the oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision'
(Achebe, 2010, p.48.)

Similarly, Okonkwo's father Unoka suffered public shame and was counted as a hopeless member of the society because he chose the love of music and his flute over the responsibility of being an industrious father who works hard to leave behind property for his children. With

her insistence on individual happiness, and on the pursuit of one's version of happiness over the society's, Adichie departs thematically from Achebe in her *Dear Ijeawele*.

Another departure Adichie makes from Achebe is her rather bold emphasis of gender over race. While both artists are committed to the postcolonial struggle for racial recognition and to undoing of racial stereotypes and prejudices, Adichie clearly indicates her commitment to gender equality and to destroying sexism. Were she ever asked what form of injustice she is angrier about, Adichie, from her *Dear Ijeawele*, shows her commitment to the pointing to the ills of gender inequality. She says on page 4 of *Dear Ijeawele*:

I am angry about racism. I am angry about sexism. But I recently came to the realization that I am angrier about sexism than I am about racism. Because in my anger about sexism, I often feel lonely. Because I love, and live among, many people who easily acknowledge race injustice but not gender injustice.

Adichie is not in her position diminishing the relevance of the fight against racial inequality; what she is pointing to, is the double oppression women, especially Black women, face by virtue of being female. She is pointing to the blind eye even oppressed Black peoples turn to issues of gender inequality, indicating that when most Black men complain about racial inequality, they do not address how many women are oppressed. It is worth nothing that Achebe's commitment, from his essay *The Novelist as Teacher* was towards the destruction of racial inequality, stating: 'If I were God I would regard as the very worst our acceptance – for whatever reason – of racial inferiority (Achebe, 1989, p.43.)

Finally, a significant new focus which can be seen in Adichie's work is her capturing of the globe as her audience, casting her in the mold of a global citizen. In her *Americanah*, *We should All be Feminists*, and *Dear Ijeawele*, one senses that Adichie (in her essays) and Ifemelu (the heroine in *Americanah*) are not only speaking to continental African people and

addressing purely continental concerns, but rather, speaking to the world as a global village.

In telling *Ijeawele* to be ‘fully herself’, Adichie quotes the American journalist Marlene Sanders, to make her case. Also, it is quite a pattern in *Dear Ijeawele* to see Adichie make references to her American friends and their experiences as her way of explaining Nigerian sexism. Similarly, Adichie does not hesitate to talk confidently about American domestic politics, almost as if she is an American citizen. Adichie differs significantly then from Achebe, who was committed first to African politics and problems, and sought to explain African issues with an African lens.

In conclusion, in evaluating the new approaches adopted by Adichie in telling the African story in the aftermath of colonialism, one can see a difference in her commitment to individualism, gender equality and to her place as a citizen of the globe.

4.6 Telling the Story about Colonialism and its aftermath: Writing Approaches in the 20th and 21st

Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have committed their efforts to telling stories about Africa and its people. Their stories were necessary for undoing the damage that colonial discourse had done. A predominant issue that has ran across their works has been the theme of colonialism. As postcolonial writers, each writer addresses the aftermath of colonialism differently, and their different approaches can be noticed in their writing style, their commitment to the idea of the nation and identity, and their view of what qualified as African literature. At the forefront of Achebe’s storytelling was the idea of the nationality, identity, and the need to rebuild the image of a dispossessed people. To achieve this aim, Achebe explored the richness of language and history to remind colonized people of their beauty of their past, of the potential of growth in the present and of the possibilities of a better tomorrow. Adichie’s approach to addressing the perennial theme of colonialism was quite different. As a relatively

ambivalent writer with regards to nationality, Adichie addressed the aftermath of colonialism by making an appeal to universal humanity. She appealed to a wider audience of Black people, not just the nation-state of Nigeria or continental Africa. She does explore how love, empathy, humiliation, loss, poverty and other such concepts play out in the African setting, but her gaze is more universal in scope. And this gaze explains some of the approaches she explores in her writing, approaches like the exploration of blogging as a medium of prose writing. Though each writer had a different reaction to colonialism, its aftermath and discourse, their stories reflect the impacts of colonialism and the changing faces that these impacts have adopted across the years.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Summary of study

A perennial theme in African literature is colonialism and its aftermath on African people and spaces. As such, modern African literature is postcolonial literature: first, because it is the direct product of colonialism and of the institutions that colonialism established. Modern African literature is written in European languages, languages which are a heritage of the colonial experience. Secondly, modern African literature is postcolonial literature because a significant number of the works are in line with the postcolonial aim of re-writing the real African story, and tearing apart the stereotypes, half-truths and misrepresentations of colonial discourse. Early post-independence African literature was committed to this aim, because cultural affirmation was necessary for a people who had been dispossessed by colonialism and oppression. Nationalism, the African identity, and the dignity of the African personality were common themes. With time, critics commented on this trend in African literature. Would the African writer keep writing about politics and colonialism and its aftermath? Was this obsession not restrictive to the imaginative palette of the African writer? Was the writer sacrificing art for politics? Would African literature ever evolve to capture new themes and issues? Will the writer ever put the dark past of colonialism behind them?

At least, some two decades have passed since these comments surfaced on the literary scene. African literature has witnessed three different generations of writers, and currently the third generation is the most active. These writers, as much as they are postcolonial citizens, live in a relatively new era with relatively new concerns. They write about different topics and from different perspectives. For instance, the 21st century African writer is writing more about global and interstitial issues like the plight of migrants, the intermingling of cultures and the existential anguish that comes with growing into an adult. Unlike the generation of writers who preceded them who were often politically active, third generational African writers are

moderate or reserved. Or totally silent on politics (Kesteloot, 1996.) They are not the moralist and teacher and historian that their earlier generation was, but a comparison of their works to the works of the older generation shows that the 21st century writer has not completely abandoned the topic of colonialism and its aftermath. Newell (2006) explains that instead of nationalism and a committed action, these new writers address the fracture of postcolonialism by employing the use of “local acts of compassion and humanity” (Newell, 2006, p.184.)

In order to examine how the theme of colonialism has been represented in African literature across the years, this work compared the works of two postcolonial writers: Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Achebe’s writing career was predominantly in the 20th century, while Adichie’s is in the 21st century. Yet, each writer addresses the aftermath of colonialism, in spite of the evolution that has taken place in African literature. Contrary to notions that a gaze at the past will make African literature ‘small, unimaginative and dull’ (Nnolim, 2006, p.4), Adichie’s voice on postcolonial matters have shown that there are fresh topics to be addressed while speaking on the aftermath of colonialism. Building on the writing style of pioneers like Achebe, Adichie has adopted distinct styles to telling the African story. Both writers share similar postures on thematic concerns and are complementary dualists (Wenske, 2016.) The styles they adopt however, are different. Achebe’s narrative technique differs from Adichie’s, as the analysis indicates. It could be argued that the bold new approaches that Adichie has adopted in telling postcolonial stories is because she does not dwell so much on a “a celebratory romance of the past” (Bhabha, 1994), but instead expands her works through extra-territorialism and cross-cultural initiations (Bhabha, 1994.) Adichie connects to Africa and Nigeria in no uncertain terms, but she is also a global citizen, and very cosmopolitan. As such, she has made full use of the freedom that her “in-betweenness” affords her. She has addressed controversial African, racial and political issues boldly because of her relative disavowal to any locality. From the analysis of the works of both writers, it can be

concluded that while colonialism and its aftermath indeed remain a perennial theme in African literature, and while writers have adopted different approaches in writing about colonialism, there have indeed been some new dimensions of African literature explored by new writers like Adichie.

5.2 Limitations and Challenges of the Work

This work had three principal objectives. The work sought to examine the main literary trends in African literature that have addressed matters arising out of the colonial experience. Secondly, the work was interested in interrogating the critical objections that have been raised against the thematic concerns that address issues on colonialism in African literature. Lastly, the work sought to interrogate the perennial thematic concern of colonialism and its aftermath, identifying the different and new approaches that have been adopted by Achebe and Adichie in addressing the issue of colonialism. These objectives were fairly achieved, yet in spite of this achievement there are some limitations in the study. The first limitation of this work is the number of writers whose works were analyzed. Two writers, both from Nigeria, cannot give a conclusive indication of the trends that are taking place in African literature addressing colonialism and its aftermath. Although these writers are not representative of all of African literature, their works are widely read by a significant number of continental and Diasporan Africans, many of whom identify with the themes that Achebe and Adichie address. Achebe's works for instance, span over 50 years of creative production; some of his works are also critical essays that are a useful means of analyzing African literature in general. A second challenge was the relative dearth of critical works on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. As an evolving writing, whose career hasn't spanned more than two decades, critical essays and

criticisms on her works are still evolving, making it quite challenging to have enough information to arrive conclusively at conclusions.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies on how colonialism and its aftermath have played out in African literature will benefit from the comparison, first, of more than two writers, and second, of writers from different regions of the continent. More writers present researchers with a broader perspective upon which they can draw conclusions. Additionally, literature from different regional blocs on the continent gives a more nuanced understanding of how different peoples on the continent have been affected by colonialism. Also, an in-depth analysis and evaluation of Homi Bhabha's works on hybridity, identity, extra-territorialism and the concept of the *unhomed* will benefit literary studies which seek to investigate issues of colonialism, postcolonialism, identity and representation.

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