

## “Voicing Creative Uprisings”: Women and the Nigerian Diaspora in Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*

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This article analyses two novels published by two writers of Nigerian-Igbo descent: Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), examining the connections between the authors’ and their female characters’ movements and mobilities. This essay first compares the two fictions and the different migration experiences of the two novels’ main protagonists, Adah and Ifemelu, in the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively. Second, it shows how these texts can be read as what Carole Boyce Davies describes as “uprising textualities” (1997), that is, narratives of women’s resistance, reassertion, renewal and rethinking that simultaneously celebrate women’s creativity. Writing, indeed, plays a pivotal role for both the novelists and their characters. It is not only a tool to explore their personal experiences in the Global South and the complex relationships between their travels and the spaces of marginality in which they live, but it is also a political instrument to denounce social inequalities, challenge hegemonic representations, and Eurocentric and masculine epistemologies. This paper aims to demonstrate how the “South” also exists in the geographic North and how the novelists and their respective fictional characters, through writing, voice their “creative uprisings” and simultaneously negotiate their complex and multifaceted identities and subjectivities in different times and spaces.

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### Moving Abroad: Similarities and Differences between the Two Novels

Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are two of the most engaging and well-known Nigerian writers, who in their fiction mainly address issues concerning Nigerian-Igbo women and the social, political and economic circumstances related to them. Emecheta was born in 1944 in Lagos and has been described as a second-generation Nigerian novelist, while Adichie was born in 1977 in Enugu and has been acknowledged as one of the leading authors of the so-called “third-generation”.<sup>1</sup> Emecheta and Adichie were born and raised in Nigeria and both migrated to the West – Emecheta to the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 1960s, and Adichie to the United States in the mid-1990s. Both Emecheta and Adichie are committed feminists. Emecheta declared to be a “feminist with a small ‘f’” (1988, 173–185) as she felt not to adhere to a feminism rooted in the Western, literate and “developed” part of the world (1982a, 116–17). She did not dismiss Western feminist beliefs, but she preferred to support “the African type of feminism”, which addresses issues concerning African people and the continent, such as access to basic rights (i.e. drinking water, primary accommodation, education etc.), which are generally not considered fundamental priorities in privileged Western countries (Emecheta in Holst Petersen 1989, 19). Conversely, Adichie’s ideology is more cross-cultural than Emecheta’s feminist perspective, as it transcends cultural, ethnic and national differences and does not aim to challenge Eurocentric notions of feminism. Adichie’s political viewpoint has become known through her TED Talks, public lectures and commencement addresses at prestigious universities around the world, in which she often discussed the impact of sexism and gender roles in contemporary societies.<sup>2</sup>

Although different in terms of content and style, *Second Class-Citizen* and *Americanah* share many similarities. Emecheta and Adichie and their respective characters migrate to the West because of the limited opportunities for their self-realisation in Nigeria. Emecheta’s alter ego, Adah Obi, leaves her home country and her in-law family in 1962 and moves to England to achieve an independent life for herself and her five children, coping with poverty, racial inequalities and sexual harassment. Adichie’s protagonist, Ifemelu, migrates to the United States at the end of the 1990s, and there she opens a blog to condemn racial and gender inequalities in white American society. In both novels, the diaspora is portrayed as “a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings, of networks of affiliation” (Zezeza 2009, 32). The similarities and coincidences between the two narratives primarily occur because of the characters’ statuses as Black, female and migrants, living in two

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<sup>1</sup> According to Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, Emecheta belongs to the second generation of Nigerian writers alongside authors such as Ben Okri, Ochia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Festus Iyayi, Femi Osofisan and Niyi Osundare. These writers were born during the colonial period but were shaped by independence and left their mark in the years following the Nigeria-Biafra war. They often portrayed a society permeated by a sense of disillusionment, frustration and alienation and used literature as a form of protest to denounce the moments of existential crisis perceived by Nigerian people at that historical time (Adesanmi and Dunton 2005, 7; 14). On the contrary, third generation includes authors such as Helon Habila, Chris Abani, Chika Unigwe, Sefi Atta and Helen Oyeyemi, born between the 1960s and 1980s. Their works mainly address issues of identity, gender, migration, exile and deracination (16).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of Adichie’s political perspective, see her essays: *We Should All Be Feminists* (Adichie 2014) and *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (Adichie 2017).

inhospitable western societies.<sup>3</sup> The secondary factors related to their experiences of mobility concern the use of writing as a relief valve and an instrument to denounce gender, racial and class injustices to which they and other women are exposed.

Travelling abroad is for Emecheta and Adichie in real life and for their fictional characters, Adah and Ifemelu, an emancipatory experience to free themselves from the structures of social conventions and a way to explore the different facets of the Global South. As Jean and John Comaroff emphasise, the “South” has shifting borders: “the line of demarcation between ‘North’ and ‘South’, between zones of prosperity and power and zones of ‘development of underdevelopment’, is not stable, but ‘porous, broken, often illegible’” (2012, 127). Boaventura de Sousa Santos underscores that the “South” also exists in the geographic North and can be described as “a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering” (2016, 18). It exists in the form of marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, refugees and victims of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and islamophobia (19). In Emecheta and Adichie’s novels, the “South” is a space where Adah and Ifemelu strive for gender and social equality while challenging Western socio-cultural norms. It is therefore a space of alienation, change, resistance, renewal and epistemological creativity. Emecheta and Adichie in their fiction, and Adah and Ifemelu in their manuscript and blog, respectively, document women’s migration experiences and discuss the issues of identity, race, gender, class, alienation, and belonging.

As Nigerian feminist Molaria Ogun-dipe-Leslie emphasises, the female writer has “two major responsibilities; first to tell about being a woman; secondly, to describe reality from a woman’s view, a woman’s perspective” (1994, 5). Writing is for both Emecheta and Adichie a liberatory and emancipatory act, an expression of resistant agency and a creative and political instrument to realistically describe women’s everyday lives and the socio-cultural and political dynamics related to the contexts of oppression and resistance in which they are involved. Starting from the word “uprising” that Carole Boyce Davies describes as “rising up from oppression” (1997, 100), I suggest that Emecheta and Adichie’s narratives can be interpreted as “uprising textualities” (110-11). Their novels challenge therefore male paradigms, hegemonic representations and colonial epistemologies and simultaneously celebrate women’s resistance, reassertion, and creativity.

On the other hand, Emecheta and Adichie’s novels cannot be ascribed to a univocal literary category. *Second-Class Citizen* has been read as a semi-autobiographical novel by several scholars, including Davies (1986, 1991a, 1991b), as it chronologically narrates a series of events that reconstruct Emecheta’s real life story and formative process. I suggest that this novel can be positioned halfway between the autobiography and the *Bildungsroman* genre. As Joseph Slaughter underscores in his study, the African counterpart of the European *Bildungsroman* can be read as “a narrative of the becoming of the nation and the struggle for dignity [of a character]” (2007, 126). Adah’s story of development is an analogy of the story of an entire population attempting to rebel against colonialism and its aftermath (126). Likewise, *Americanah* can be described as a

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<sup>3</sup> According to Pauline Uwakweh, migration from Africa has become a “dominant force” of both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (2014a, 2), and a remarkable feature of the modern migration trend is increasing feminisation. Women are part of the migrating families that accompany or follow men abroad (3) or often migrate alone. Since the 1960s, their involvement in educational and professional pursuits has given visibility to their migration experiences (Uwakweh 2014b, 16).

coming-of-age story endowed with autobiographical traits as both Adichie and Ifemelu migrate to the United States for educational reasons and engage in political activism.

Scholars have rarely associated *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah* with the genre of travel literature. Despite its ancient origins, travel writing became increasingly popular in the early eighteenth century due to a rising interest in travelling. Later, the genre got contaminated with other literary categories, such as the autobiography, the philosophical essay, the novel and the romance (Fortunati et al. 2001, 5-6). Travel writing deals with the representation of characters' travel/migration experience(s), the place(s) they perceived as "other", and their relationships with the new land (Fortunati et al. 2001, 5). Writing is an essential part of the protagonists' experiences abroad as it prompts them to acquire a public voice while exploring their hybrid identity, primarily constituted through the process of *othering* (Fortunati et al. 2001, 12). The following sections focus on the different meanings that writing takes for Adah and Ifemelu and the way that Emecheta and Adichie use it to document their characters' physical and emotional experiences in the Global South.<sup>4</sup>

### Writing as a Relief Valve: Being a Second-Class Citizen in the "European South"

Emecheta's most acclaimed novel *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) chronicles the different stages of Adah Obi's coming-of-age story. The novel was published after *In the Ditch* (1972)<sup>5</sup> – an extension of *Second-Class Citizen* and the author's "poverty book" as it deals with poverty and race (Emecheta in Ogunyemi 1996, 234) and portrays Adah's disadvantaged living conditions at the Pussy Cat Mansions (i.e. a public house tenement located in the slums of North London). Only *Second-Class Citizen* will be analysed in this paper as it captures the most significant moments of Adah's travel/migration experience in England. It precisely describes the deprivations of her childhood and adult life in Ibuza (Nigeria), her fight against discrimination and her struggle for liberty and emancipation as a "second-class citizen" in London, her complicated pregnancies, her violent marriage, her debut as a writer, and her divorce from her husband Francis. As British scholar Olga Kenyon emphasises, in many novels set in Great Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, women writers focus on subjects such as "domestic labour, the effects of class discrimination and low pay, [and] women's position in the family and [...] labour force" to capture the exhausting living and working conditions of Black African women (1991, 5). Furthermore, women's relationship with *otherness* "emphasises a complex movement of identity, which reveals [their] marginal position [...] in the social order of their mother country as already 'others'" (Fortunati et al. 2001, 6). In her fiction, Emecheta reshapes the contours of issues such as gender, race, family, identity and location and shows how the exploitation of women's labour benefitted racist, sexist and classist institutions and structures. Her sociological background, cosmopolitan experience and difficult life story enrich her socio-political analysis of Nigerian-British women of the working class and their living conditions during the 1950s and 1960s.

In several parts of her novel, Emecheta focuses on traditional Nigerian practices and women's relegation to its patriarchal society. In Nigeria, Adah experiences the

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<sup>4</sup> In the following sections, I will use the abbreviations "SCC" for *Second-Class Citizen* and "AM" for *Americanah* to refer to the quotes taken from these novels.

<sup>5</sup> *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) were also republished in 1983 as a single volume titled *Adah's Story*. Conversely, *Head Above Water* is Emecheta's memoir published in 1986, which can be read as a more accurate description of her stages of life covering the gaps in *Second-Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch* and conveying her feelings, courage and determination to resist even more realistically.

status of “second-class citizen” because of her gender. She is not provided with an education initially; her parents only decide to enrol her in school to increase her bride price. After completing her compulsory studies in Nigeria, Adah realises that she cannot live on her own and understands that getting married is the only possible way to feed her passion for learning. In Lagos in the 1950s, marriage was considered a “business partnership”, as the husband and the wife co-operated “in the common enterprise of maintaining the family and maximizing its resources” (Jerrome 1979, 423).<sup>6</sup> In Emecheta’s novel, Adah marries Francis to further her education, while Francis marries Adah to complete his studies and become an accountant (*SCC* 19). After obtaining a job as a librarian in the American Consulate Library in Campbell Street in Lagos, Adah becomes the family’s only breadwinner and is nicknamed “the goose that laid the golden eggs” (36) by her friends and relatives. Emecheta focuses on the poor status of Nigerian-Igbo women, providing many examples of how patriarchal norms and cultural practices construct a woman’s biological destiny. Adah realises that a woman can attain value within her own and her husband’s family only if she gives birth to children. Moreover, in funding Francis’s studies, she understands that she is pleasing his family, unavoidably trapped in “a situation dictated by society in which, as an individual, she [has] little choice” (23). When she begins earning a good salary, she and Francis discuss the possibility to move to England like many Nigerians were doing at that time. As Avtar Brah emphasises, political conflicts, famines, economic hardships, the increasing mobility of global capital and aspirations for a better future were key reasons why many Africans (i.e. entrepreneurs, students, refugees, asylum seekers and family members of previous migrants) emigrated to the United Kingdom (1996, 175). Therefore, Francis moves to England first, while Adah joins him later with their two children, and in the meantime, she sends him twenty pounds a month for living. In the spring of 1962, Adah obtains three first-class boat tickets for her two children and herself to travel to London via Liverpool. She is soon called a “been-to”, which “[is] a Lagos phrase for those who [have] ‘been to’ England” (*SCC* 24) and are “constantly on the move [by] having access to several worlds” (Ogunyemi 1996, 237). As Emecheta confessed in an interview, she preferred to omit that experience from her novel as it had a tremendous impact on her personal life (Emecheta 2007).

In the “South” that Emecheta depicts in her narrative, Nigerian women cope with male chauvinism, racism, class alienation, poverty and loneliness. While, in Nigeria, Adah is described as a “second-class citizen” because of her gender, in Great Britain, all Nigerian migrants are characterised in this way due to their “race” and ethnicity. As Francis points out:

In Lagos you may be a million publicity officers for the Americans; you may be earning a million pounds a day; you may have hundreds of servants: you may be living like an élite, but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen. So you can’t discriminate against your own people, because we are all second-class. (*SCC* 37)

By the time Emecheta wrote her novel, in the United Kingdom, all migrants were second-class citizens, regardless of their gender, sex, race, ethnicity, religion and

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<sup>6</sup> British scholar Dorothy Jerrome used a sample of 333 married couples and almost 100 individuals for a census she conducted about the migration of Igbo people to the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s. She shared her results in her article “Conflict and Collusion in a Nigerian Community Abroad”, published in the *Women’s Studies International Quarterly* journal in 1979.

nationality. Like many Nigerians who moved to London during the 1960s, Adah and Francis begin to live in precarious accommodations, which are often not large enough to house an entire family. The search for a new home is for them frustrating. Nearly all the advertisements on the shop windows along the streets of the city contain the inscription "Sorry, no coloureds" (SCC 70). Thanks to the British Library Association Professional Certificate she achieved in Nigeria (38) and her 'O' and 'A' levels, Adah finds a position as a senior library assistant at North Finchley Library. This job opportunity not only allows her to financially support her family and enjoy the same status as her white female and male colleagues but also to study and increase her knowledge of several different subjects. John McLeod emphasises that "[t]he economic value of migrant female labour meant that black women played a pivotal role in Britain's post-war recovery [therefore, they] were not passive[ly] following [...] menfolk but [were] an active [...] presence in postwar Britain" (2004, 96). Nigerian-British scholar Amina Mama similarly notes that "Black women [were] more likely to have unemployed menfolk, and when this [was] not the case, Black male wages [were] low. The Black woman's wage [was] therefore crucial to [their] communities" (1997, 40). Nevertheless, like many young Black women in Great Britain, Adah "bear[s] all the hallmarks of a fundamentally inegalitarian society" (Bryan et al. 1985, 189). Indeed, she cannot enjoy the economic status and the professional prestige she deserves because she is constantly discriminated against for cultural and ethnic reasons.

Adah also deals with her husband's sexist prejudices, laziness and selfish behaviour. Her home in London is the place where she is subjected to his abuses. Soon after her arrival in England, Francis turns into an inept student and a lazy, apathetic man who sees Adah only as a tool to satisfy his own sexual needs and does nothing to alleviate the poor conditions faced by his family. When Francis discovers Adah's plan to use a contraceptive cap, he becomes more violent and dangerous towards her, blames her for having failed his examination and writes to his parents to inform them of his wife's birth control decision. By beating his wife because she dares act against his will, Francis denies Adah the possibility of securing her rights as a woman. Adah knows that she is "a woman who [can] make decisions" (SCC 155) and is not eager to change her lifestyle, nor to give up on her ambitions to please her husband (175). The self-contraceptive method can be interpreted as her weapon of resistance and a prerequisite for emancipation. Conversely, her home, portrayed as a place of violence, can represent, as bell hooks suggests, "the political value of black women's resistance" (2015b, 84), thus, a place where a woman "return[s] for renewal and self-recovery, [...] heal[s her] wounds and become[s] whole" (88).

Her home in London is also the place where Adah discovers and feeds her passion for writing. Emecheta discusses Adah's writing commitment only at the end of her novel, capturing the different meanings this activity takes for her. After the birth of her fourth child, Adah decides to leave her job at the Chalk Farm Library to look after her children at home. While at home, she starts sewing clothes for the Crescent Market's clothing factory and writing her manuscript, which she will later title *The Bride Price*. Writing plays a central role in Adah's migration experience and formative process. First, it represents her way of cultivating her sense of creative purpose. After the very first pages, Adah becomes aware that "[t]he more she [writes], the more she [knows] she [can] write and the more she [enjoys] writing" (SCC 174). Writing is a relief valve for her, a therapeutic remedy that enables her to access her soul and struggle against suffering. Writing is similar to "listening to good sentimental music" (175), and through

it, she can seek refuge in her “land of dreams” (23). As soon as she finishes writing her manuscript, Adah feels released and “so fulfilled” just as if she has “made another baby” (176). It is not by chance that she calls her first draft “her brainchild” (176). She feels positively surprised when her colleague Bill from the Chalk Farm Library recommends typing it out. She never imagined that it would be worthy of publication. Secondly, through her manuscript, Adah introspectively talks about herself, discussing the impact that traditional Nigerian practices, such as that of the bride price, have in her youth as well as the consequences of being a black Nigerian-British woman. Her personal life experience encourages her to discuss more extensively the disadvantaged and problematic living circumstances of black women living in both Nigeria and England. Thus, writing is for Adah/Emecheta not solely a tool that stimulates her creativity, to express her feelings, retrace her memories and examine the complexities of women’s lives from a sociological perspective but also a political instrument that can challenge the politics of domination. It is precisely a way to resist her misogynist husband and the sexist and racist British society he represents.

From the very beginning, Francis describes Adah’s manuscript as “rubbish” (SCC 178), taunts her ambitions, and diminishes her value as a person. As bell hooks points out, moving from silence into speech or the written text assists “oppressed”, “colonized”, and “exploited” women like Adah to make “a gesture of defiance that heals, making new life and new growth possible” (2015a, 3).

Adah works hard to pursue her lifelong dream. Her writing process is a vehicle through which she can attain her “coming to voice”, i.e. the moment in which an individual acquires a voice through speaking or writing (hooks 2015a, 33–4). When Francis burns every page of her manuscript, Adah divorces him. The burning of the manuscript can be interpreted as a form of punitive control over Adah that makes Francis guilty as if he had committed a crime. With her new job as a library officer at the British Museum, Adah decides to provide solely for herself and her four children and move into another house as she is expecting another baby. Divorce and writing represent Adah’s resistance strategies against her violent husband and can be interpreted as symbols of the newfound freedom she uses to pull herself out of the abyss into which Francis has cast her.<sup>7</sup> As hapless disadvantaged girls in Ibuza, in London Adah and Emecheta become well-educated and devote themselves entirely to writing. Their stories realistically recount women’s life experiences in the Global South.

### **Blogging the Political: An Afropolitan Feminist in the Globalised “South”**

*Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is set in the globalised world of the early twenty-first century. The novel can be primarily read as a story of love between Ifemelu and her schoolmate, Obinze (Villanova 2018). Due to the scope of this article, Obinze and his migration experience in England will not be examined. A particular emphasis will be given to the similarities between Ifemelu’s and Adichie’s experience in the United States and their engagement in political activism.

Unlike Adah’s, Ifemelu’s formative process starts when she is a teenager and is mainly related to her experience in America. During the Abacha regime (1993–1998), the University of Nigeria and other institutions in the country went on strike. Several

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<sup>7</sup> Although many scholars criticised Emecheta for exaggerating several aspects in *Second-Class Citizen*, in an interview given in 1982, the author clarified that the cruelty with which her husband and the British society treated her is “truthfully rendered” in the novel (Emecheta 1982b, 4).

professors and researchers protested for better salaries, and many students like Ifemelu applied for scholarships to continue their studies abroad. Unlike *Second Class-Citizen, Americanah* does not provide details on Ifemelu's travel from Nigeria to the United States. It focuses instead on Ifemelu's feelings and first impressions as soon as she arrives in America. Avtar Brah observes that "[t]he emotional upset caused by unemployment manifest[s] itself through boredom, depression, anxiety and anger" (1996, 55). Nigerian critic Isidore Okpewho further adds that African people were traumatised by the way they were received in Western societies (2009, 11). Host countries are "contested cultural and political terrains" but also "sites of hope and new beginnings"; trauma, separation and dislocation are part of an individual's diasporic experience (Brah 1996, 190; see also Bhabha 1994, 12). Ifemelu feels demoralised because of the many obstacles she has to face to integrate into American society and find a decent job. She feels very attached to her home country and does not feel prepared to conform to American cultural expectations. Her friend Ginika and Auntie Uju help her recover from the depression into which she falls as soon as she arrives in the United States and to find a job as a babysitter.

In America, Ifemelu resists and simultaneously negotiates white norms and privileges. She first feels discriminated against when a white American employee at the international student office speaks to her very slowly while giving instructions on how to enrol in the university. Ifemelu feels humiliated by her behaviour and decides to suppress her Nigerian accent and start training the American one. When a few days later, a call centre operator informs Ifemelu that her English "sound[s] totally American" (*AM* 175), she feels ashamed to have changed her accent and pitch of voice and "begin[s] to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him [i.e. the operator], for crafting his words" (175). According to Sara Ahmed, the pain of shame "is felt upon the skin surface" and "involves the intensification not only of the bodily surface, but also of the subject's relation to itself, or its sense of itself as self" (2004, 104). Ifemelu feels that her sense of shame is imprinted on her skin for having rejected her ethnic origins and way of being. She eventually decides to keep her Nigerian accent and stop imitating the American one.

As in Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, racism is a central theme in Adichie's *Americanah*, which Ifemelu discusses in her blog entitled "Raceteenth Or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black". Soon after her arrival in the United States, Ifemelu emphasises: "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America" (*AM* 290). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Adah Obi realises that the colour of her skin "was something she was supposed to be ashamed of [and s]he was never aware of this at home in Nigeria" even when she was surrounded by white people (*SCC* 70-1). In her blog, Ifemelu suggests that racism is deeply rooted in the United States and is the only type of discrimination that American people "are most uncomfortable with" (*AM* 350). She thus speaks about race in the following terms:

[R]ace is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it's about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It's about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair. (337)

Ifemelu emphasises that, often, not even Black people are aware of the effects of racism on white society. In the United States, everyone with dark skin is described as “Black” and, therefore, discriminated against, regardless of his or her ethnicity, gender, class, and nationality. Rose Sackeyfio underscores that “Adichie’s positionality with regard to racial identity in America is instructive in ways that resonate fundamental ‘truths’ about history, stereotypes, ignorance, and divisiveness in the black world” (2022, 55). Adichie/Ifemelu’s active discussion about race in the novel echoes the initiatives and protests of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, which was inceptioned after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012, that is, a few months before *Americanah* was published.

Writing plays a central role in Ifemelu’s formative process. While, in her manuscript, Adah criticises traditional patriarchal costumes and the relegation of Nigerian women in society, in her blog, Ifemelu denounces gender, racial and class inequalities, mainly perpetrated against women in the modern globalised society. The blog is a metanarrative device that Adichie adopts to inform her readers about American cultural and historical issues. Ifemelu employs sharp language, political rhetoric and often sarcasm to address social and political matters. The blog can be interpreted as her “feminist toolbox” or “survival kit” (Ahmed 2017, 241), a space of “radical openness”, “radical possibility”, and “resistance” (hooks 2015b, 228-30, 235), where she proves not to be afraid to make her incisive and “killjoy voice” heard (Ahmed 2017, 242).

The main focus of Ifemelu’s discussion about race deals with the politics of hair and particularly the practice of hair straightening. bell hooks emphasises that hair straightening was related to a system of colonial domination, which did not accept black women as they were (hooks 1988, n. p.). White settlers discriminated against black people, first on the basis of the colour of their skin and second because of the texture of their hair. The kinky or nappy hair of people taken from Africa and then enslaved in America became a symbol of savagery, primitiveness and inferiority (Banks 2000, 7; Kilomba 2010, 73). Blacks were equated to animals, while their hair was described as “wool”, “bad”, “ugly”, and “frightening” (hooks 1988; Banks 2000, 1). Conversely, “good”, long, straight (and generally blonde) hair was related to white beauty, pureness, and delicacy (Banks 2000, 2, 13, 28, 91). After her unsuccessful attempt to straighten her hair, Ifemelu considers her new hairstyle disgusting and compares herself to an insect. She feels ashamed for having rejected a part of her identity and informs her friend Wambui that she cannot go to work. Wambui encourages her to “cut [her] hair and go natural” (*AM* 208) and visit the website *HappilyKinkyNappy.com*, in which a virtual “*natural hair community*” of women (209; italics in the original) posts photos and shares opinions about their natural hairstyles as a way to celebrate blackness and resist racial oppression. Ifemelu feels at ease in this virtual community and decides to no longer conform to white beauty standards. She will later publish a provocative post in her blog, entitled “A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor” (*AM* 296-298), in which she emphasises how hair is a metaphor for race in the United States. If Michelle Obama had appeared on TV with her natural hair, her husband “would [have certainly lost] the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote” (297). Ifemelu purposely mentions the famous former First Lady to draw her readers’ attention to Black women’s widespread tendency to straighten their hair and simultaneously emphasise how hair matters in mainstream society for cultural and political reasons. Ifemelu encourages women to express their femininity in their own way and not necessarily emulate the most common Western hairstyle and fulfil Eurocentric beauty standards. Otherwise, as

bell hooks suggests, they “risk undermining all the [...] feminist interventions which allowed [them] to embrace [their] bodies and [themselves] and love them” (2000, 35-6).

According to Serena Guarracino, Adichie emerges as “a conspicuous *persona* in contemporary media and literary discourse” (2014, 2; italics in original) and the blog posts titled in bold and placed in the last pages of the novel’s chapters represent “a good case study for some reflections on the role of technology in writing, and especially on the global resonance of postcolonial writing” (2). This point is made with reference to Adichie’s statements in several interviews. Adichie admits that she wanted her novel also to be “social commentary”; however, she aimed “to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction” (Adichie 2014c, 1:18:32). Adichie also clarifies that she could not have examined the race issue in a different way than through Ifemelu’s blog posts: “I [...] realized that if I [editorialized it] in regular dialogue or in the narrative, it just wouldn’t work. Also, I think that what I wanted to say [about race] and how I wanted to say it, was in the kind of voice that would not have worked in dialogue or any other way” (Adichie in Obie 2014e). Adichie finally emphasises that *Americanah* is a “very feminist book” as well as her writing: “I think all of my work is very feminist. [Ifemelu] just refuses to keep quiet. In a way that in my life I think I refuse to as well” (Adichie in Kellogg 2013).

After thirteen years spent in the United States, Ifemelu closes her blog and returns to Nigeria as a “serious Americanah” (*AM* 100), as she looks at things “with American eyes” (385). As Guarracino notes, the term “Americanah” marks Ifemelu’s “new affluence and her knowhow on up-to-date fashion trends” (2014, 12) and highlights how the subject of fashion addressed by Ifemelu in her blog is strictly related to the debate over Afropolitanism (12). Although Adichie rejects the label “Afropolitan” for herself, her novel can be read as an Afropolitan narrative as it deals with issues of identity, otherness and home. Ifemelu is simultaneously “African” and “cosmopolitan” and belongs to an African community and other places that are featured by different cultures, languages, ethnicities and costumes (Mbembe 2007, 26-30). Ifemelu’s former boyfriend, Obinze, with whom she starts getting in touch after several years of being apart, is the primary reason for her decision to return to her home country. As Sackeyfio suggests, to return home represents Ifemelu’s “reconciliation of her hybrid status, self-acceptance, and empowered Nigerian woman” (2022, 127), thus “a salient precept of Pan-Africanism” (64). Nigeria plays a pivotal role in this novel for both the author and her character, more than it does for Emecheta and her alter-ego Adah in *Second-Class Citizen*. Indeed, although Adichie has been living in the United States for many years and American costumes have shaped her way of looking at the world, she is very attached to her home country and its traditions. It is not by chance that she has also described *Americanah* as a fiction “about leaving home as much as it is about going back home, and really about what home means” (Adichie in Norris 2014d).

### Voicing “Creative Uprisings”

As Rose Sackeyfio emphasises, “Emecheta’s importance in African, Nigerian, and women’s writing inaugurates a dramatic shift in the direction of the African novel that continues to evolve in the twenty-first century” (2021, 3). Emecheta has been described as an “earliest trailblazer on women’s migration experience” portrayed in novels (Uwakweh 2014b, 16) as well as “Africa’s foremost feminist” (Sackeyfio 2021, 14). Many

writers of younger generations, such as Chimamanda Adichie, carry Emecheta's legacy into the global age.

*Second-Class Citizen* can be read as a "story of the human personality's coming to historical and autobiographical consciousness – for both the novel's protagonist and its reader[s]" (Slaughter 2007, 117). Emecheta adopts the pseudonym of Adah Obi to transform her own existence "[o]ut of the ditch and into print" (Emecheta 1978 quoted in Bruner C. and Bruner D. 1985, 13), criticising the cultural/familial practices that attempted to subordinate her and simultaneously disclosing the wounds and sorrows she experienced first-hand. Adah's story bears witness to what Emecheta and other Black African working-class women experienced or partly experienced in the 1950s and 1960s in both Nigeria and England.

Conversely, as Adichie suggests, *Americanah* can primarily be described as a novel about "love, race, and hair" (Adichie in Obie 2014e), which draws parallels between Ifemelu's and Adichie's experience in the United States and discusses their engagement in political activism. In her blog, Ifemelu uses political rhetoric, accessible language and often sarcasm to denounce gender, racial and class inequalities, as Adichie does in her public lectures and commencement addresses worldwide. Like Adichie's speeches, Ifemelu's blog posts promote dialogues and discussions that transcend cultural, ideological and theoretical boundaries.

Adah's and Ifemelu's migration experiences can be read as "processes of becoming" (Bakhtin 1986, 21), change, resistance, and consciousness-raising. As migrants, they live in multiple locations in different times and spaces, which shape their identities and subjectivities (Mbembe 2001, 9; 182; de Lauretis 1984, 159; 182; Brah 1996, 121), which in turn can be conceived in terms of "slipperiness" and "elsewhereness" (Davies 1994, 36). Adah's and Ifemelu's journeys are "instruments to acquire awareness of their self" (Fortunati et al. 2001, 6), reconstruct their sense of self and home abroad and explore the multiple facets of the Global South. Transcultural spaces emerge therefore as sites of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural encounters, and writing is a tool that these women use to exercise their agency, explore their transnational migration experiences, and denounce gender, racial and class inequalities they often experienced first-hand.

To conclude, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah* can be read as examples of what Carole Boyce Davies describes as "uprising textualities". These novels not only resist univocal classifications and blend different literary genres together (i.e. the *Bildungsroman*, the autobiography, the socio-political fiction and the travel writing), but can also be interpreted as symbols of "women's resistance, reassertion, renewal, and rethinking" (Davies 1997, 111). By portraying the realistic representations of gender and racial otherness, social barriers, and the consequences of being black and female in the Global South, Emecheta and Adichie and their respective fictional characters, Adah and Ifemelu, voice their "creative uprisings" (Davies 1997, 114). Through writing, they attempt to express their voices and creativity beyond the given boundaries of dominant and patriarchal discourses and simultaneously challenge misconceptions, hegemonic representations, Eurocentric and masculine epistemologies. Their voices cross cultural, linguistic, ethnic and national borders, reverberate through and beyond the African continent and its diasporas and unite the spoken with the written world and the local with the global.

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