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Writing for Change

A Narratological Approach to Repositioning Afropolitan Discourses in Adichie's *Americanah*, Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*

Lisa van der Werf

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Supervisor: Birgit Kaiser

Second reader: Barnita Bagchi

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Abstract

This thesis argues the often-unheard narratives represented in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo and *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi are urgent to the circulation of world literature. Their fiction demonstrates how novels can be meaningful aesthetic encounters to address the residual powerlessness concerning contemporary Black living. I first discuss why Afropolitanism functions as a fitting neologism for this thesis in the Theoretical Framework, while also selecting theories from narratological studies in order to do my analysis concerning these novels. In the second chapter I explore how Adichie's *Americanah* imparts emotional empathy and productive unease concerning the humanity of the Afropolitan experience. Chapter three revolves around how Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* resists easy binary categorisations and confronts readers with prevailing racial stereotypes and pertinent issues. Lastly, the chapter on Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* discusses how the narrative offers the reader a more empathic relation with the Afropolitan experience. These chapters all demonstrate how these works of fiction offer the reader to engage with the painful dynamics of contemporary racism and what literary narratives can do to address these pertaining problematics.

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Lisa van der Werf, October 5th 2020

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Introduction

On May 25th, a Black American man called George Floyd died at the knee of a white officer. In the weeks following his murder the surveillance video footage of his last 8 minutes and 46 seconds went around the world. Although incidents of other Black men killed by police officers have frequently occurred in the last years, Floyd's words "I can't breathe" have sparked an international response only few have received. The Black Lives Matter movement caused people across the world to demonstrate, but also caused the emergence of dozens of lists with recommendations for novels by Black authors. Book sales of several classics by American authors such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison have increased, but contemporary novels such as Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* were also at the top of lists (Peirson-Hagger). Moreover, marketing campaigns of actors in the literary field were recommending Black authors, such as a Dutch publishing house which brought to life the hashtag #Educateyourself (Atlas Contact). Why is it that the sales of literary novels by Black authors suddenly spike amid these times of social unrest? And what does this say about modes of reading?

The topic of race and injustice has reached wide audiences, across individual communities in order to find a deeper understanding of contemporary problematics by immersing themselves in cultural expressions of Black authors. Works of fiction that touch upon issues of racism and Black living offer pertinent perspectives for the prevailing issues surrounding the current political landscape. However, narratives beyond the depiction of racist problematics are also vital to explore since it is fundamental to any human to be seen as a whole being. In 2009, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a *TEDTalk* on misrepresentation, called "The Danger of a Single Story," where she argues how the single story of Africa originates from Western literature and media representation:

> Show a people as only one thing, over and over again, then that is what they become … how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power … The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they aren't true, but that they are incomplete, they make one story become the only story … stories can be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. (09:32-17:55)

She stresses the importance of creating counterdiscourses to the nearly monolithic visions that exist of blackness in world literature, since misrepresentations feed into an unethical value system that seeps into everyday lives.

This thesis recognises the importance of counterdiscourses, and aims to demonstrate how literature can help to create new perceptions and needs by exploring three works of fiction that offer new perspectives on Black living. The three novels that are discussed in this thesis are Adichie's *Americanah*, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. While there is a wide emerging body of work concerning these types of contemporary writing, these novels and authors seem to have an interesting cultural position within the literary field, displaying their works have been well-received. Adichie has a large followership with her famous TEDTalks, Evaristo was the very first Black female author to win the Booker Prize last year, and Selasi theorised the concept "Afropolitanism" to pinpoint a more specific experience concerning diasporic settings. Therefore, they all seem to bring something new and necessary to the spectrum of world literature. I will argue these novels exemplify urgent perspectives for Black living on global as well as local levels. Former research has shown what these works of fiction do through their content, but this thesis specifically examines *how* these authors tell their stories, carrying out an analysis of their use of narrative techniques in order to see how they create a fictional space that

represents unheard narratives in the contemporary literary field, thereby making a contribution to narratological studies. This will illustrate how new perspectives concerning prevailing racial issues emerge from their narratives through the readers' active engagement in the reading process.

In order to answer these questions, the first chapter will be devoted to finding the right terminologies surrounding African contemporary literature and the most suiting narratological devices, while also establishing an idea of the history of the African novel and its literary critiques. The specific mode of consciousness that is explored will for the purpose of this thesis be identified as "Afropolitan," which is further clarified in the Theoretical Framework. The following three chapters will all have one of the primary sources as their focus, while also delving into the contrasts among them throughout. In the second chapter, I will argue how Adichie uses her narrative devices in *Americanah* to generate imaginative empathy among her readers and provides a social and political commentary. Then, in the third chapter, I will analyse how Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* stipulates a new growing awareness concerning Black womanhood and engages the reader through productive unease by the way her narrative is arranged. Lastly, the final chapter provides an analysis of Selasi's debut novel *Ghana Must Go*, exploring how her narrative offers a more nuanced appreciation of Afropolitanism and tries to lead to a more empathic relation with the Afropolitan experience.

Although these chapters focus on Black narratives, they are written from a white, Western perspective. Throughout this thesis I aim to be as inclusive as possible, but unfortunately there will always be a notion of subjectivity present in my writing. Especially since this thesis considers reading experiences and engagement – which is always subjective – I have to point out mine is unconsciously drenched in Western discourse, meaning that the focus of my analysis tends to be focussed on the way these novels presuppose existing

images and situations present in my everyday experience. This might be a different case for readers of other backgrounds, which are of course as important to consider but not possible to fully grasp from my perspective, although definitely considered to the fullest extent possible.

Theoretical framework: The Representation of the African Condition in Literature

Since this thesis considers how the novels of three Black female writers open up the reader's mind for cultural hybridity against existing stereotypes, this chapter puts contemporary African[1] writing in a historical and theoretical perspective. By doing this, a politically conscious examination of the past and present will illuminate some of the power dynamics currently at play in the literary field between Africa and the West, which is essential in order to understand how and why Adichie's *Americanah*, Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* move against hegemonic writing.

1.1 The African novel

In order to study African contemporary literature, it is important to consider the history that has shaped current realities. As Adichie mentioned in her *TEDTalk*: "how [stories] are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power". The African novel has acquired cultural significance since the 1950s with the rise of authors like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka. Literature can be seen as a reproducer of culture and establishes identity, thus African writing coincided with literary nation-building and creating national imagery. The rise of African literature concurs with a debate about African literary criticism, of which this chapter gives an overview in order to establish an idea of the history of repositioning counterdiscourses in world literature.

In 1962 the Conference of African Writers of English Expression was held at Makerere University, where a group of promising writers and critics discussed the challenges and possibilities of African literature as Africa was in the throes of decolonisation. One of the main controversies following the Conference was the language use of African literature.

[1] Although 'African' definitely is an overgeneralising term for a continent with lots of diverging cultures and traditions, this term will be used to give an overview since it has been a convenience of history and used this way in the literary field.

Since this thesis considers *how* Adichie, Evaristo and Selasi tell their stories, we should first and foremost consider which language they use. By delving into the language debate, some insights considering their narratological decisions will be made visible, while also considering the weight of history.

Obiajunwa Wali, responding to the Conference in an article in 1963, is one of the critics who refused to accept the position of the English language in African literature as was discussed on the Conference. The name already excludes writers in other languages, which he views as problematic since it implies the English language holds the entire African literary imagination. Wali declares that "the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture" (14). Literature is "the exploitation of the possibilities of language," and African languages need this creative dimension in order to flourish (14). According to Wali literature from African authors written in European languages could not be termed African literature as it was solely enriching the Western literary tradition, to which it was only a minor appendage.

In his article "The African Writer and the English Language," Chinua Achebe looks upon the controversies surrounding African literature around ten years after the Conference. He argues for a complex definition of African literature, as he believes postcolonial and decolonising struggles should be reflected in its literature (429). According to Achebe, African literature is the sum of the "national and ethnic literatures of Africa" (428). By this, he means to support the African languages to flourish alongside English, recognising the importance of mother tongues (434). However, Achebe acknowledges the flaws in the origins of the English language in Africa, concerning its colonial dynamics, but in his opinion this "is not saying that the people comprising these nations were invented by the British" (429). The people may have been colonised, but they can use and adapt the language and speak for

themselves. Although Achebe acknowledges English to be associated with power, oppression and devastation brought to the continent by the British, he acknowledges the efficiency of a national language, to bind people together and the benefits of writing in a world language which makes it easier to reach a wider audience and obtain a voice (430).

In addition to Wali's argument for the adoption of African languages, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, more than a decade later, neither complies to Achebe's views as he prioritises having control over creative self-definition (109). According to Ngũgĩ, continuing to use the English language disabled decolonisation since language is implicated in culture. He sees the English language as an inseparable component of the colonial system and as "the carrier of culture" (116). Taking this into account, English-written literature cannot hold cultural significance for Africa in his view, since it celebrates Western oppression and cannot be written outside the context of colonialism.

Ngũgĩ argues how English as the colonial language (in Kenya in his case) has influenced the way people perceive themselves and how they see the world, which comprises a disassociation from their immediate environment since spoken and written word do not conflate (117-119). Although European languages gave the African "bourgeoisie" opportunity to explain the complexities of Africa to the world, Ngũgĩ still sees writing in European languages as propaganda for the imperial cause (121-124). Thus, the use of English by African writers indirectly means African languages are not used for writing and therefore do not get culturally reappropriated – reclaiming the language that has been absorbed in mass culture – while literary writing bears an important element of cultural significance. He claims the English language continues to have damaging effects on literature, culture and education.

Achebe sees opportunities for a distinct use of the English language by Africans which reflects a new rising voice to the extent that it still holds its power as a "medium of international exchange" (433). Although the use of the English language originally came

from the need to reclaim history by the postcolonial subject, he argues Africans have every right to alter the language in order to be able to represent the African experience rightfully so. In his fictional writings, Achebe bends the English language to suit his personal experience, using African myths, proverbs, etc. By doing this, African languages continue to gain cultural significance, even though in a different way than Wali and Ngũgĩ argue for.

Adichie, Evaristo and Selasi write in English, for which they each have their own reasons. In an interview with the *Women's Caucus of the African Literature Association* Adichie expresses her view on the use of English by African writers:

> I think African writers should write in whatever language they can. The important thing is to tell African stories. Besides, modern African stories can no longer claim anything like 'cultural purity' … to somehow claim that Igbo alone can capture our experience is to limit it … My English-speaking is rooted in a Nigerian experience and not in a British or American or Australian one. I have taken ownership of English. (Azodo 2)

Adichie counts both English and Igbo as her native languages, a modern sense of cultural hybridity that is not taken into account in the language debate years ago. She argues for a distinct use of the language that holds her personal experience, which is different than that of any other native speaker. She presents language-use as a site of cultural expression, like Achebe has argued that African writers can use and even 'own' the English language for themselves, while also creating a space for the flourishment of Igbo and addressing the (mis)representation of her culture. By providing new perspectives, this thesis is a contribution to the struggle against the perpetuation of clichés about the African experience in the West. Especially in a world that is even further globalised, this is important to consider.

More than 50 years after the Conference of African Writers of English Expression, the debate on the representation of the African experience still continues. In 2006, Kenyan

writer Binyavanga Wainaina wrote the article “How to Write About Africa” on prevailing Western stereotypes of Africa, displaying that literature is still steeped in colonial discourse. With sarcasm, Wainaina shows the Western publishing industry still holds onto the single story of Africa originating from colonial times, similarly to Adichie’s argument in her *TEDTalk*. He declares that Western publishing still categorises Africa as an overgeneralised entity without complexities, holding onto tropes of poverty and primitivism, and portraying its inhabitants as flat characters, either savage or corrupt. This shows how contemporary literature still carries the legacies of colonial (mis)representation and is in desperate need of counterdiscourses. Contemporary Black authors represent a different experience than those holding the cultural imagination, for their connections to the African continent are often way less prominent and more complex. This thesis will therefore consider how the selected authors offer a broader representation of African diasporic lives by deepening and moving against existing stereotypes which Wainaina touches upon.

In a recent *TEDTalk*, Taiye Selasi discusses the lack of complexity in understanding Africans concerning ancestry and the problem of the nation. She crystallises that to her “a country … hardly seemed the basis for understanding a human-being” and is an invented concept stemming from colonial times, a social construct (“Don’t Ask” 02:37). As she puts it, “all experience is local, all identity is experience,” declaring that shifting towards a more local perspective focusses on where real life occurs (04:50). A country is a fixed concept, whereas the question of locality allows to merge into one, more complex identity (12:13). She condemns Western culture for the urge to uncover a person’s heritage, which is often accompanied with colonial tendencies of presupposing one’s identity. Hence, she envisions a more dynamic locality with the shaping influence of multiple locales. Adichie’s *Americanah* already contains the issue of locality in the title, referring to the way the protagonist is called after she returns to her native country. However, she does not feel solely American, but also

Nigerian, which reflects Selasi's point of view. Therefore, 'Africa' does not seem to be the right label to cover what this thesis entails, which is why another frame of reference will be provided in the next section.

Feldner discusses the contemporary status of African writers in the Anglophone literary field, touching upon the great imbalances of power. Due to unevenly distributed power on the market, international literature is mostly published in the United States and Europe resulting in "the disproportionate influence of the West as cultural forum" (qtd. in Feldner 25). In other words, novels are produced, distributed and given value in the West, which might imply a limited range of cultural and aesthetic expression for writers of African descent, although this thesis also acknowledges the opportunities it generates. According to Feldner, African novels are often expected to represent anthropological insights, but are also read for their political concerns such as anti-colonialism, racial issues and migration (27). The next chapters will consider how writers utter these political concerns. Feldner argues the power structures at play on the global literary market shape the work of these writers (29), which will be kept in mind during the analysis. In the end, literature can help create new perceptions and new needs, and the analysis of their narrative techniques might illuminate some of the limits caused by colonial legacies of African literature while also shedding light on the possibilities of representing these often-unheard narratives in the West.

1.2 Afropolitanism

From this deeper understanding of the legacies of colonialism and representation, this chapter moves to contemporary issues originating from postcolonial ones, concerning more urban and transnational situations and literary writing about these new realities. This section tries to find a thematic frame of reference, as it allows to skip *what* these authors discuss. Since the term 'African' continues to be drenched in colonial discourse and tends to be oversimplified

and problematic, another term might be more suited which allows to think outside the colonial legacies. Adichie comes from an Igbo household and grew up in Nigeria, while now dividing her time between America and Nigeria, Evaristo is an Anglo-Nigerian writer living in London, and Selasi is a British-born woman of Nigerian and Ghanaian descent, describing herself as a local of Berlin, New York, Accra and Rome. This already demonstrates the difficulty of finding one inclusive concept as their self-definition reaches further than one specific place or language. Afropolitanism seems to be a fitting neologism as a frame for this thesis, although being a complex one as a result of a sustained debate about African identity, which already appeared in the language debate. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the different definitions of Afropolitanism in order to compose the specific angle that is most suited to transcend limiting postcolonial or victim identities.

The concept 'Afropolitan' was first deployed by Selasi in her article "Bye-Bye Babar," where she explores what it means to be African as the nation fails to encompass the full spectrum of her identity. She examines an understanding of what Feldner calls the "New African diaspora," referring to the voluntary emigration to the West in the second half of the twentieth century, which resulted in people claiming more than one place and language as their own (15-16). In her article, Selasi proclaims the following: "We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world". She attempts to redefine what it means to be African, and expresses the difficulty a person might experience with ancestry and not feeling bound to one specific place, as self-perception transcends geographies, nationalities, cultures and languages:

> What most typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is the refusal to oversimplify; the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique. Rather than essentialising the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity. ("Babar")

Most of all, Selasi values cultural hybridity, which also lies at the heart of this thesis. Selasi opens up a definition of Afropolitanism that moves beyond the media's portrayals of Africa's alleged backwardness and tropes concerning immigrant realities which continue to be prevalent in African discourse, as we already saw discussed by Wainaina and Adichie. Selasi stresses the importance of restoring dignity for "our parent's culture" in an attempt to create a place where their cultural and spiritual legacy could be valued outside colonial discourses, without a sense of shame ("Babar"). Therefore, she talks of "Afropolitan privilege," a multi-dimensional way of thinking across nations and cultures to create a sense of self (idem).

Scholar Chielozona Eze has responded to Selasi's Afropolitanism, arguing it lends itself well for a re-examination of the notion of African identity (234). He discusses that literary writing in the Afropolitan tradition reveals a shift in self-perception of any person genetically linked to the continent, and allows them to move beyond narratives of autochtony (235). According to Eze, the strength of Selasi's term lies in the fact that it finally contests the uncritical application of 'Africa' as an identity tag to a large group of people (240). He sees the term as a challenge to "weave a more universal solidarity that can accord individuals anywhere in Africa their rights and dignities" (237).

However, Eze also disagrees with Selasi on certain matters. He mentions Afropolitanism is the African equivalent of Cosmpolitanism to grasp "the diverse nature of being African or African descent in the world today," thus implying Africans are not included in the term Cosmopolitan itself (239). Eze also recognises the elitist notion of the concept, as it mostly refers to Africans who emigrated to the West for a higher education or a job (240). According to Eze, every African can be labelled Afropolitan, regardless of their education or geographical position; the need for transcending local geographies has been misunderstood for privileged snobbism, but is actually feeding into the necessity to move beyond the confines of ascribed identities (240), which seems like a meaningful addition to this thesis'

definition of Afropolitanism. The essence in Eze's argument lies in the fact that dichotomies of African, European or Asian are fading with Afropolitanism, as a person no longer identifies in a purist sense – stemming from colonial times where people were identified as opposed to the West – but in terms of relation (240).

Amatoritsero Ede also published an article on the Afropolitan condition, aiming for a concept that is "an ideological condition of cultural production" (89). He contends that writers of African descent often reject the term 'African writer' for limiting their identity; Adichie rather adopts the term "Pan-African sensibility" (Ede 91). Ede sees Afropolitanism "as a coping mechanism against the nausea of history" (92) and as a "concept of self-representation and black agency" (89). The term is oriented towards a metropolitan public and allows writers to move away from the pain of the continent as merely native informants. Through literary writing the Afropolitan can arrest the "residual powerlessness which accompanied global postcolonial modernity" (90). In other words, fiction gives the contemporary Afropolitan the possibility to remedy their lack of voice and agency in Western discourse to certain degrees. Similarly, critic Serena Guarracino declares that "in some way before and against popular culture and the media, literary fiction appears as a fertile ground for Afropolitan cultural elaboration" (9). Hence, this perfectly aligns with this thesis' aim to analyse how the selected novels attempt to grasp the diverse nature and inner complexities of being of African descent in today's world.

However, Ede also sees some pitfalls in the term Afropolitan, considering these authors set themselves apart from a larger social minority, refusing to symbolically represent an "often powerless crowd of metropolitan blacks" (94). Ede deems it ignorant to move away from the history that has shaped current realities, as colonial legacies continue to be prevalent in everyday life. Hence, this thesis seeks to use this concept in a way that is both invested in the new realities of the Afropolitan experience, but is aware this is the result of globalisation

and colonialism which consequently meant social and political inequality of Africans in the past, and unfortunately continues to be so. By doing this, it does not seek to show how these writers operate as native informants, but as actors of change that provide a social commentary to impart emotional understanding and change among its readership.

To conclude, this chapter explicated an understanding of the Afropolitan experience[2] that captures the complexity in a hybrid, post-modern sense where centre/periphery models have become inadequate and disrupts oppositional notions of African identity. Afropolitanism works as a frame for *how* the selected authors grasp this sense of the diverse nature of being of African descent today, a person with ties to the African continent but at home in different places in the world, attaining an identity from multiple cultures, languages and nations.

1.3 Narrative devices

As theorised above, the Afropolitan experience offers opportunities to contest (mis)representations of colonial legacies in contemporary fiction. Through literature readers might find an understanding of the complexitiy of Afropolitanism by gaining insight into the mind of a fictional individual relating to this experience, as a fictional narrative might function as a sort of simulation. The question remains how the selected novels carry this out. Therefore, this section will give an overview of some of the theories concerning narratological studies. Narrative devices involve the reader, since the reader is made to participate in understanding what the protagonist is going through (Keen 208). Narration is always the result of a selection: the way words are arranged, what is left out, the form of the novel, and so on. In order to examine how the narrative construction contributes to making

[2] Throughout the chapters, this concept is not meant to serve as an essential category or label to put these authors in a specific box or a subject of being, but as a particular experience, a certain self-image, a mode of consciousness.

different ideological effects possible concerning the Afropolitan experience, five specific devices will be central to this thesis: paratext, focalisation, stylistics, narrational gaps and tone. As will be further explained now, these specific devices create a useful angle to meaningfully analyse the selected novels.

To start with the analysis of the novels, some of their intentions will be determined by studying what can be found at the borders of the text: its paratext. This closely coincides with Jauss's "horizon of expectations": the way a reader approaches a text through interaction with other texts, which impart certain expectations and interpretations (13). Gérard Genette explains a paratext is used to guide the readers' perceptions in a specific direction, as it serves like a "threshold" to the story within and assures its "presence in the world, its reception and its consumption" (268). It constitutes what is inside the text and what lies outside, "the discourse of the world on the text" (261). This exterior presentation of the novel includes things such as the appearance of the material product such as cover, quotes, title, author, but also dedication, foreword or headers, which are all elements which are to a large degree reliant on the publishing house. The paratext often has what Genette calls a "cardinal function," which is imparting a certain interpretation or intention from the author or editor (268). Another aspect of the paratext is a functional one, as it presents why a text matters (269). These two aspects show how the literary field has positioned a novel, which is important to take into account considering the disputable position of Black authors in the literary field. Lastly, Genette's "inevitable paratext" becomes another important aspect for this thesis, which is information that has been generally known to readers (266). Considering the Anglo-American literary field is working under lots of power dynamics, it will be necessary to first lay bare the way these novels are published and what specific readership is

addressed.[3] While paratext in consideration of Afropolitan novels has not been studied before, it is useful to look at them because they tie literary discourse to social discourse, marking the threshold of a text which may be used to lure readers in and into certain directions.

After determining the novel's thresholds, the next step is to delve into the story by looking at the focalisation. Focalisation, as described by Mieke Bal, is "the relation between the vision and what is seen, perceived" (133). It is "the represented colouring of the fabula by an agent of perception, the holder of the point of view" (12). In other words, through focalisation the reader follows the story through the eyes of the protagonist and is therefore able to view the world from their perspective. As Suzanne Keen stresses, "the interior representation of characters' consciousness and emotional states – as devices supporting character identification, contribute to empathetic experiences" (213). Spivak explains that "this term is deemed more useful than point of view or perspective because it emphasizes the fluidity of narrative – the impression of (con)sequence as well as the transactional nature of reading" (22). Considering Ede's critique on Afropolitan writing, this term also offers opportunities to study the representation of a wider range of classes in the narration when considering the elitist notion to Afropolitanism and what type of experience authors decide to focalise. Bal also distinguishes a number of possible focalisations, namely those of character-bound or unbound focalisation, and internal or external focalisers (135-136). The focalisation can create suspense when the reader knows more than the focaliser or the other way around (148). As she draws from her analysis, Bal states how focalisation has a "strongly manipulative effect" (141). The way focalisation is assembled in these novels on the Afropolitan experience becomes highly significant to the analysis since it illuminates how the

[3] Although this thesis will try to be as inclusive as possible and consider readers across cultures, presupposing existing racial dynamics in Western literature will be one of the main points of analysis considering this remains to be urgent with movements like BLM.

writer challenges its readership and where they create tension, which could for example be through productive unease, doubtfulness or empathy.

We can move onto the third device, that of stylistics, the way words are arranged on the page and whether this is moving against existing contemporary hierarchies where Black authors are still expected to resonate in a certain way of writing – instead of experimenting with language and reflect unique cultural backgrounds – as Feldner has contended. Considering the position of the African novel in the literary field, stylistics will be important to take into account since this is under regulation of the expectations of publishing houses. As Bryce has declared, texts are sometimes made more "publishable" during the editing process, meaning that they are made to "conform more closely to an educated reader's expectation of the novel form – not only correction grammar and syntax, but restructuring and rewriting" (qtd. in Feldner 27).[4] Due to this limited artistic freedom, especially considering the hierarchies on the publishing market, it is interesting to consider the way texts are arranged on the page. Novels of the African diaspora are often expected to be published in a "realist mode," meaning that they have a "seemingly simple, transparent, and non-experimental style" (Feldner 27-28). This seems to be problematic with regards to the language debate, as it means African writers cannot make use of a distinct type of English which epitomises their cultural hybridity.[5] The analysis of stylistics will question how these authors move against the mainstream expectations of 'African' writing, therefore representing new forms, and how this actively involves readers in re-valuing cultural hybridity. All three novels contain the use of native languages through e.g. dialogue, which also represents their own use of the English language since they consider both an African language and English as their own. By

[4] Although the editing process of these novels is not publicly available, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind these texts are published under the power dynamics of the Anglo-American publishing industry and its pertaining influences.
[5] Hegemonic writing does not allow them to experiment with language and reflect their unique cultural backgrounds, therefore they need to open up new discourses.

analysing and comparing their use of languages to each other, this thesis hopes to demonstrate what these authors try to establish through making native languages visible, also taking the language debate into account. Other stylistic deviations will also be taken into account in order to find out in what way these writers distinguish their writing to move against existing hierarchies.

Besides exploring engagement for the aforementioned techniques, narrational gaps will be the next tool to analyse how these texts might generate certain reading responses. The withholding of crucial information and jumps in time are often interwoven in the narrative without the reader's notice. However, these disruptions in the plot often involve the reader in reconstructing the storyline and filling in those gaps which generates active engagement. According to Keen, "aspects of plot structure and narration that might have a role in invoking readers' empathy include the control of timing (pace), order (anachronies), the use of nested levels of narrative (stories within stories), serial narrative, strong or weak closure, the use of subsidiary (supplementary, satellite) plot events, repetition, and gaps" (217). Most of these techniques have to do with the rhythm of the story, the way it is structured. This narrative technique is interesting to consider for representing the Afropolitan condition, especially since writers can feel like some elements cannot be represented in the narrative due to power dynamics, but wish to do so implicitly. As Bal explains, an ellipsis has been omitted for a reason, as it may have been too painful or it is preferable to remain silent (91). These gaps, therefore, become vital to this thesis' analysis, since the silences these gaps express might shed new light on some of the painful elements and historical dimensions of the Afropolitan experience that cannot be expressed elsewhere. Moreover, it might give the narrative more

complexity as the reader has to work along, stressing the complexity of Afropolitan identity as well.[6]

Lastly, the narrative tone of the texts will be analysed. James Phelan argues that the way tone functions in the narrative construction is a crucial part of narrative theory (50). By closely looking at the tone used to represent characters and situations, the reader comes to understand the attitude the speaker has towards his or her object, and sometimes also the author's own attitude towards characters or even the world (56). Phelan points out that narrative tone can expose the authorial voice and set of values (58). Through the narrative tone, the author is able to reflect on situations and can convey some of their personal values.

According to Molly Hite, the tonal cues from fictional characters give the reader guidance in whether a situation should be deemed seriously or ironically and whether characters are admirable or untrustworthy (249). She argues how tonal indecisiveness has a distancing effect on the reader as it calls for "ethical questioning without necessarily guiding readers to a definitive conclusion" (250). In other words, readers continually shift attitude towards characters and situations in the narrative due to a lack of definitive indications in tone, which enacts unease. Hite further explains how tonal cues can signal the attitude a reader should have according to the narrative and function as a sort of evaluation of the situation or character (251). In this sense, besides representing the Afropolitan experience, the narrative can also display the personal views of the author and signal the reader towards certain attitudes.

Now that we have established an idea of which narrative techniques will be considered in order to analyse how these texts shape new ideas of Afropolitan realities, the next chapters will look at the individual novels. The selected devices will be helpful to what

[6] This also closely corresponds with Iser's theory, which mentions how gaps spur the readers into filling in, interpreting and testing their own assumptions.

this thesis aims to demonstrate, laying bare some of the narrational structures of the three novels that might illuminate how they are very urgent to our current political climate.

Empathy as Social Commentary in Adichie's *Americanah*

Now we have established an idea of the theories and representations of the Afropolitan condition, we are moving onto the first novel. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie published her first novel in 2003 and has gained popularity for her writing and as a public figure ever since. *Americanah* is Adichie's fourth novel and her works have been translated in over thirty languages. She has become an important public speaker as a transnational cultural critic and feminist activist. One of her most well-known speeches is her *TEDTalk* "The Danger of a Single Story," as mentioned in the introduction, with over 6 million views, where she tells how the single story creates stereotypes which affect people's thinking and political choices in ordinary life. In *Americanah* some of the issues of the single story, mostly concerning race and gender, are questioned and presupposed in the narrative.

Americanah represents the complexity of Afropolitan experiences in the West as it follows the stories of main characters Ifemelu and Obinze. After growing up together and falling in love in their teenage years in Southern Nigeria, their paths separate after Ifemelu is forced to migrate to the United States with her aunt. Here, she pursues an academic education, but is also confronted with the colour of her skin for the first time. In Nigeria, being Black is not an important signifier of identity, but in the US this identity is suddenly ascribed to her: "I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black" (Adichie 476). This already displays how Adichie pinpoints race as a social construct. After a couple of years in America, Ifemelu decides to start a blog where she opens up the conversation on discrimination, injustice and immoral beauty standards she – as a Black female immigrant – encounters in American society. Consequently, the reader follows Obinze's journey of working in the United Kingdom after being declined an American visa many times for supposedly being unqualified (233). The story of Ifemelu and Obinze provides "a social commentary on the discourse of gender and strong race divisions and how it affects the lives

of black migrants, especially female migrants in the United States" (Kozieł 99). This chapter will explore the way Adichie carries this out, generating certain readers' responses and contesting stereotypical representations of the Afropolitan experience in the circulation of world literature.[7]

First of all, the paratext of *Americanah* will offer some insights into which readership Adichie tries to draw into reading her novel and how she positions herself on the global literary market. The paratext serves as a "threshold" to the text that partly defines how books are received. The novel has been a certified bestseller for years, and consequently there have been several editions. Most editions include several quotations from American or British newspapers, and mention the novel has been shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction. Through these Western literary institutions, "symbolic capital," which could be defined as the allocation of honour and prestige according to Bourdieu's theory, is bestowed onto the novel, guaranteeing the reader of the novel's literary quality (37). However, Adichie has also granted free publishing rights to her native country Nigeria in order to stimulate the local market (Feldner 28). Nigerian publishing house Farafina Books has its own edition of the novel, which has quotations from writers Chinua Achebe and Binyavanga Wainaina. Here, the identity of the paratexts' authors is deemed important for the message the novel wishes to convey.[8] This also conforms to what Wernick calls "the authorial name [a]s promotional capital" (qtd. in Squires 87). This is what Genette calls a "cardinal function" of the paratext

[7] As Adichie herself says: "many of the stories of immigration that the mainstream Western world knows about Africans is the kind of immigrations where Africans have left poverty, or AIDS, or war, and where they're mostly refugees … This is not a story that I know personally" (*Librairie Mollat* 04:33).

[8] Achebe and Wainaina are both well-established authors in the circulation of world literature, and their works are known to be concerned with postcolonial identities and issues of racism. Moreover, they are both concerned with stimulating modern African writing, Achebe with cofounding a Nigerian publishing house and supporting African writing in his academic career and Wainaina for being the founding editor of *Kwani?*, a literary magazine of new writing from Africa.

(268), as it imparts the expectation that Adichie's writing is concerned with the problematics of modern African writing. This can also be seen through the covers that are used for various editions: while most copies have been sold in the Anglophone literary field, the covers of English editions show African screen printings, a woman with dark skin or afro braided hair. This slightly forebodes the story that is about to be told and guides the reader's expectations towards subject matters surrounding the Black experience.

Adichie's title suggests her novel is concerned with the 'in-between' identity immigrants might suffer from, feeling estranged from all locales they categorise as home, for not being fully committed to any of them. As Adichie herself explains:

> *Americanah* is a Nigerian word that means a person who's gone to the US and comes back to Nigeria and suddenly has all of these affectations, and pretends not to understand the Nigerian languages, speaks with an American accent. (*Librairie Mollat* 00:12)

In the novel, Ifemelu does not necessarily identify herself in this regard, but is condemned to be so by other people. Considering this, Adichie mostly seems to emphasise how immigrants are perceived by others with this title and the social constructivism involved with national identity. Selasi's suggestion of being an "African of the world" is deflated in this title, as Adichie implies this state of being tied to several localities is accompanied by a struggle to find your place in the world, suggesting her novel offers new perspectives.

Adichie's dedication acknowledges the importance of her African heritage. In the first sentence she uses an Igbo expression, making clear to her reader that she is in no sense defying her Nigerian heritage. The first line says: "This book is for our next generation, *ndi na-abia n'iru*," suggesting the novel is concerned with nation-building and Nigeria's past. However, Adichie seems to move away from colonialism by solely referring to the future, stating her involvement in the promotion of African languages while staying clear from a

patriotic position. Through the combination of English and Igbo in her paratext, Adichie positions herself in the language debate and stresses the importance of cultural hybridity.

Adichie's reputation as a public figure can also be seen as paratext due to her name on the cover, so public speeches become important signifiers of what her fiction might entail. This is part of Genette's "inevitable paratext," which are the facts generally known to readers. Virginia Pignagnoli has written an article on this phenomenon in post-postmodern fiction, where "digital epitexts" become one of the "resources at an author's disposal to generate certain responses in readers" (183). She deems this as important since narrative is a "communicative event, a rhetorical action in which an author addresses an audience for some purpose(s)" (189). Thus, readers are drawn to Adichie's writing for what she discusses as a public figure, and she therefore reaches a readership that is interested in contemporary racism and feminism, considering her activist reputation. To conclude, through her paratext Adichie already implies her reader she is defying easy categorisations of African or non-Western that conservative literature seems to endorse, and that her writing might not resonate in the hegemonic way.

To move on to how the text itself generates certain readers' responses, focalisation is an important technique to see how Adichie allows the reader to empathise with multiple cultural frames of reference. *Americanah* is mostly focalised through Ifemelu and Obinze, two characters with distinct experiences, told from a third person omniscient narration that exposes the inner thoughts and feelings of these characters. Ifemelu mostly encounters issues with the colour of her skin and being female in America, whereas Obinze can only dream of America, "it had always been America, only America," after his visa had been declined without receiving a clear explanation (232). This story of rejection sheds light on another element of being Afropolitan, as it displays the difficulties of movement due to the colour of one's skin, which opens up a broader understanding of Selasi's term. The focalisation of

these two characters seems to display that easy oppositional categorisations simply do not apply: while they identify with Western values they also keep strong connections with their Nigerian identity (Guarracino 10). This is strongly seen in the way Ifemelu thinks about Western beauty standards; whereas she tried to conform to these when she arrived in America, "was close to anorexia" and straightened her hair (Adichie 124), she now embraces her heritage by keeping her hair loosely braided and is horrified by her aunt who becomes obsessed with getting her skin "ligther, brighter, and [taking] on a sheen" (74). While Ifemelu assimilates into Western culture, the American way of life never becomes superior and carries elements she could never comply to. When she, for example, keeps being rejected for job interviews, her friend Ruth says: "My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters" (202). Later on, when Ifemelu has her blog, she posts about hair as a race metaphor, proclaiming "some black women, AB and NAB, would rather run naked in the street than come out in public with their natural hair," while she wears it "in cornrows, Afros, braids. No, it's not political" (297). Here, Adichie represents a perspective out of the mainstream, voicing thoughts and feelings that many Black women cope with and which have even materialised in a movement to encourage Black women to embrace their natural hair. In these passages, Adichie focalises issues of race that are pertinent and have not been dealt with in literature in such an outright way. Adichie exposes how characters identify in terms of relation, as Eze has argued for, since Ifemelu identifies as both American and Nigerian, while also rejecting cultural elements from both.

Moreover, Adichie's use of focalisation allows multiple characters to tell their stories, due to the third person omniscient narration, stressing the complexity of the Afropolitan experience and nuancing its elitist tendencies. Ifemelu's aunty Uju and cousin Dike, for example, play an important role in the story and represent the issues of second-generation immigrants with Dike experiencing a sense of rootlessness and the issues aunty Uju has to

face as a Black single mother. Complexity also arises when Ifemelu is sitting at the hair salon throughout the story, where she hears the stories of Mariama, Halima and Aisha, three women who also immigrated from Africa to the US. Their stories seem to contrast with Ifemelu's, and therefore offer the reader a deeper understanding of Black living in America. Aisha's story of falling in love with an Igbo man as a Senegal woman, for example, is told through dialogue. Similar to Ifemelu, Aisha is torn between American customs and African heritage. However, she closely counterpoints Ifemelu's attitude towards issues of race and heritage, and in these passages Adichie highlights these differences as they are constantly pitted against each other:

> "Your hair take long. You need food" Aisha said.
>
> "I'm fine. I have a granola bar," Ifemelu said. She had some baby carrots in a Ziploc, too, although all she had snacked on so far was her melted chocolate.
>
> "What bar?" Aisha asked.
>
> Ifemelu showed her the bar, organic, one hundred per cent whole grain with real fruit.
>
> "That not food!" Halima scoffed, looking away from the television. "She here fifteen years, Halima," Aisha said, as if the length of years in America explained Ifemelu's eating of a granola bar. (39)

In this scene, Ifemelu seems to be the one conforming to American beauty ideals, choosing a granola bar, "organic," "whole grain," "real fruit," all signifiers that she simply eats for nutrition and losing weight in a typical American way. Moreover, their faulty grammar, "your hair take long," suggests the three women are less integrated in American society. However, Adichie displays that identifying with a specific culture is far more complicated than that, as the three women do conform to American beauty ideals when it comes to straightening and bleaching their hair, which Ifemelu despises. Their differences continue as the conversation progresses and is centred around more serious issues such as racism: "'Why

do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you mean?' Ifemulu asked. Aisha clucked. 'You don't know America. You say Senegal and American people, they say, Where is that?'" (15). Whereas Ifemelu tries to resist the internal racism of everyday life by proclaiming where she is from, Aisha adopts the American way of speaking for being tired of the usual response. These women could be considered each other's antagonist, stressing how Black women cannot be easily categorised as the same, opening up new discourses surrounding race divisions. What they do have in common, is that they both are focalised in a complexity that moves away from existing stereotypes as Wainaina has argued for, from being savage or primitive, away from media portrayals of Igbo women as "wild" (Adichie 117).

This is part of larger construction in *Americanah*, which displays "the diversity of the African experiences and many variant points of views from characters that are different with regards to ethnicity, race, gender, social class, age" (Kozieł 108). Adichie uses focalisation and dialogue as a tool to cleverly focalise multiple views on matters and to refer to multiple cultural frames. As a consequence, she offers a new perspective to literature that opens up about the complexities of relating to a specific culture as an immigrant. Black readers will finally be able to see parts of themselves represented on the page in a complex way that moves away from mainstream representations such as angry or oversexualised Black women. Moreover, Adichie seems to emphasise the universality of Afropolitanism by using traits readers across cultures can identify with: Aisha's broken heart and Ifemelu's thoughts on eating chocolate while sitting at the hairdresser, but also aunty Uju's struggles as a single mother are topics many readers can easily relate to. For Western readers, the comfort of sameness disrupts notions of otherness and race, nudging them to think more deeply about these issues and emphasising the humanity of the Afropolitan experience. Taking all of this into account, Adichie attempts to presuppose existing stereotypes concerning Afropolitanism

through her focalisation by portraying complex and diverse characters that readers can easily identify with, which results in a more critical consumption among her readers.

Moving on to the next technique, the stylistics in *Americanah* also contribute to generating readers' responses, since the unconventional style steeped in Afropolitan discourse challenges the reader's presuppositions and nudges the reader to empathise with the Afropolitan experience more. First of all, Adichie published her novel in English, although she made the stylistic choice to use Igbo words, proverbs and aphorisms throughout its narrative. Some scholars state that Adichie is following "the Achebe model" for her writing with the use of linguistic variation (Kozieł 107). The fact that the Igbo phrases made it past the editing process demonstrate their importance for the narrative, and will therefore be further considered in this section.

Adichie provides a definition of Igbo phrases and sentences through lexical context or English translations accompanying these expressions. All Igbo is put in italics, which makes the reader aware of the mediation between languages. Scholar Patrycja Kozieł argues the use of Igbo in the narrative is an "*ethnosizing* narrative strategy" (101), which is a strategy that makes the coexistence of different cultures visible. In this way, the conjunction of English and Igbo can be seen as "multilingual communication" that allows Adichie to use as a marker of identity (102). Kozieł identifies three usages of Igbo language in the narrative: phrases that refer to glossing, those that are contextually explained, and those the reader has to interpret from the flow of narrative (103). The latter one is most crucial in relation to "ethnic identity" and to capture the "Igbo cultural worldview" since the non-Igbo reader is actively involved in understanding another culture (103). This "linguistic diffusion" becomes an important stylistic device (107). When aunty Uju says "*Adi m ime,*" the reader understands through its context that she is pregnant, and such interpretive phrases occur throughout the narrative (Adichie 83). The Igbo rhetoric enriches the text to express idioms, proverbs, folktales and

songs, which the reader actively engages with since they all carry meaning. It represents a new form of Igbo culture, as Adichie claims both Igbo and English as her native language, and nudges non-Igbo readers to engage with this cultural frame, which also means the Igbo language gets culturally reappropriated. Alternating between Igbo and English suggests that they are two distinct elements of the speaker's identity, while also flowing into each other, which demonstrates the cultural hybridity of characters. This is a good example of what Keen means by an aspect that "might have a role in invoking readers' empathy" (217). This participation with the protagonist's cultural frame might unleash a spark of imaginative empathy, making Western readers more able to empathise with elements of the Afropolitan experience and voicing an element of identity immigrants often struggle with.

The stylistic choices are not the only narrative technique generating empathy, since narrational gaps in *Americanah* also play a vital role in its readerly engagement. The narrative is not completely chronological, as the story often jumps through time and space, for example closing a chapter from Ifemelu's childhood with a blog post. Spivak's following theory will be key to this argument: "the literary text gives rhetorical signals to the reader, which lead to activating the readerly imagination" (22). As Wolfgang Iser has argued: "it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process" (1526). In other words, due to the use of narrational gaps, such as time jumps, the withholding of crucial information or ellipses, the reader is inclined to fill in those gaps to fully grasp the narrative. This is an important device for creating readerly engagement and to employ imaginative empathy; by filling in those gaps, the reader is invited to imagine the feelings of characters and maybe even picture a different perspective than their own. Whereas stylistics give a deeper understanding concerning culture, this tool rather creates emotional empathy.

Due to the structure of *Americanah*, with the different parts and the unchronological narrative, the reader is searching for ways to reconstruct the story and the way characters relate to one another, encouraging the reader to interact and engage with the text. The blog posts seem to be one of the overarching elements that allow readers to jump through time. These posts occur far earlier in the narrative than the point at which they are represented in the story, and are therefore often introduced by markers such as "years later". Guarracino remarks on these chronological shifts in the narrative that allows "a double take on many of the character's experiences as a black migrant in the US" (13). In other words, Adichie displays the diversity of the immigrant experience by putting these different times alongside each other, which stresses how characters change over time and makes readers reconsider binary oppositions of Africa and the West. This occurs when the narrative comments on situations or characters across time: "if Ifemelu had met Alma in Lagos, she would have thought of her as white" (105). This technique of temporal synchronicity adds another layer to the narrative, illuminating how the Afropolitan experience shifts over time and is based on personal experiences.

These comments also foreshadow the way the story progresses to a certain extent. For example, the reader knows from the beginning of the novel that Ifemelu will return to Lagos, although the exact reason and moment remain unclear. As a result, readers might be more aware when Ifemelu starts to feel distanced from American society, seeing her daily encounters with racism and what it instigates in her character clearer. Although the American way of life offers Ifemelu opportunities, these flash forwards illuminate critical notions towards American society. This, for example, happens when Ifemelu posts a blog on the pertaining influences of tribalism in America, creating an invisible social hierarchy (Adichie 184). In the next chapter, Ifemelu and her boyfriend Curt tell his family they are together, and the children react very surprised and even call it "disgusting" (194). Although the narrative

jumps through time again before Ifemelu has responded, the reader easily classifies the earlier blog post as a response to this conflict, which says "intermarriage is discouraged and on the rare occasion that it happens, is considered remarkable," therefore stressing the racism involved (184). The way Adichie has aligned the narrative sets out specific markers, nudging the reader to pay close attention to the racial bias that is involved in the Afropolitan experience, which allows them to see the scenes more clearly and maybe even from another perspective.

Ellipses also play a big part in the narrative of *Americanah*, as it shows how characters lose voice or are not able to find the right words. After Ifemelu's cousin Dike attempts suicide, the reader sees a change in Ifemelu's attitude: she stops posting on her blog, also because of the heated discussion in the comments which makes her edit more heavily and eventually causes her to feel powerless (Adichie 312). The reader can sense a shift in her character, as language used to be Ifemelu's main tool of expression. First, "she longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others" (296), but towards the end it seems like she is slowly losing her sense of self. Through the act of writing Ifemelu acclaims her own identity, but since her blog posts are all about the deeply rooted racism in American society this only leads to negative identification, which ultimately results in the desire to reclaim her Nigerian roots. Towards the end of her time in America, the blog posts become more and more political, proclaiming "American Blacks, too, are tired of talking about race. They wish they didn't have to … Try listening, maybe. Hear what is being said" (326). As a consequence, the ellipses that follow might cause unease among its readers, since Ifemelu's daily encounters, which readers might easily be complicit to, cause her to feel completely silenced. This unease is manifesting itself in these silences since it displays Ifemelu's lost sense of self instigated on her by institutional structures. As a consequence, the unease might turn out to be productive as it makes the reader aware that change is necessary.

This is not the only instance that ellipses generate certain responses among readers: when Ifemelu has been in America for some years, she is not able to find a proper job due to her immigrant status. As a last resort, she becomes an escort (Adichie 153). Although the man claims she does not have to have sex with him, one passage suggests he sexually harasses her: "she did not want to be here, did not want his active finger between her legs … her fingers still felt sticky; they no longer belonged to her" (154). After this, the narrative seems to be fragmented, only showing snippets of what Ifemelu is going through. Ultimately she says "her self-loathing has hardened inside her. She would never be able to form the sentences to tell her story" (158). This stands in line with Mieke Bal's theory of ellipses sometimes representing being silenced (91). Since readers are interpreting Ifemelu's emotions and her story, this might invoke empathy since they actively imagine themselves into someone else's perspective. Moreover, the reader might obtain a deeper awareness of the workings of institutional racism, as these issues are ultimately caused by Ifemelu's inability to find a job as a Black woman. These findings show how narrative gaps play a major role in invoking imaginative empathy among readers – advocating for change – while also finding a space to represent unheard perspectives.

Lastly, the tone of the narrative plays a vital role in generating reader responses, especially since Adichie provides social commentary through her writing, as we have shortly touched upon. An important element here is Adichie's use of the authorial voice, which mostly becomes prevalent in the blog posts, reminding the reader of the authenticity of her voice. In an interview, Adichie herself comments on the use of blog posts: "I wanted this novel to also be social commentary, but I wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction" (qtd. in Guarracino 2). Guarracino has argued how the blog posts in *Americanah* function as social commentary since they talk about race on a global level and function as a "metanarrative device" (3). To add to this, the blog posts

allow Adichie to raise awareness on very specific topics and notions, which then reverberate through other passages and make readers think of their own experiences and presuppositions. These blog posts allow Adichie to map out some of the hidden racism in American society, for example when a post says "Don't say 'Oh, it's not really race, it's class. Oh, it's not race, it's gender. Oh, it's not race, it's the cookie monster.'" (325). Whereas some readers might experience this as confrontational, others might finally experience they are being heard and stood up for in literature. Pignagnoli also argued that Adichie's own voice reverberates through the narrative (186), which can very clearly be seen in the quotation above. Pignagnoli calls this "mask narration", that is, when the author uses characters to voice views they hold themselves (193). This seems to surface from the narrative since the story of Ifemelu and Obinze, set partly in Africa and partly in Western countries, reflects issues Adichie herself can easily relate to considering her home residency in both Nigeria and America. Moreover, her subjects as a public speaker mirror some of the topics mentioned in the blog posts, such as the differences between black men and women (213), or when she talks how hair is political (297), which are topics Adichie also has discussed in articles and interviews. Although her novel should definitely not be read as autofiction, drawing these parallels is important to her narrative: the way she addresses readers with her authorial voice is an important element to again generate productive unease among readers since it stresses how these issues do not merely exist within fictional narratives. This unease might be very effective for the reader to change their attitude towards subject matters and to think more deeply of American culture and its involved racism.

To conclude, the analysis of narrative techniques in *Americanah* has illuminated how Adichie creates a space in her fiction where readers can find an understanding of the complexity of the Afropolitan experience that might be hard to find elsewhere. The mentioned narrative devices seem to contribute to generating imaginative empathy and

productive unease for the Afropolitan subject, inviting readers to imagine the lives of other people, although Adichie is not merely an anthropological informant but a provider of social and political commentary on the discourse of race and gender divisions by representing often unheard stories in her narrative. In doing so, she tries to battle stereotypes and makes readers challenge their own presuppositions, affecting people's way of thinking in ordinary life and illuminating change is necessary regarding contemporary issues Black people have to deal with on a daily basis.

Productive Unease and Advocating Change in Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*

Now that we have discussed the ways in which Adichie's *Americanah* provides social commentary and imaginative empathy through narrative techniques, this chapter looks at Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and its particular structure and style. Evaristo is an Anglo-Nigerian award-winning author of eight books of fiction that explore aspects of the African diaspora. She is professor of creative writing at Brunel University, London, and Vice Chair of the Royal Society of Literature. Evaristo is also known as a literary activist for Black writers and artists, as she has for example founded the Brunel International African Poetry Prize. McLeod discusses some of her contributions to the literary field and states that "in addition to her status as a writer of significant and innovative works, Evaristo has also played an important cultural role more broadly in the promotion and evolution of black writing in Britain in recent years" (168).[9] Moreover, he mentions the move against hegemonic Black British writing that Evaristo supports also counts for her own writing, in which she displays a feeling of being "distinctly European" or even "self-consciously global" (169).[10] This very well translates into this thesis' definition of Afropolitanism, a sense of being a citizen of the world. In 2019, Evaristo won the Booker Prize for her latest novel, sparking interest among a wider readership than she had ever reached before and further establishing her importance as a writer. This chapter will look at the way Evaristo's "self-consciously global" identity is expressed and what responses she generates with her readers, as she seems to upend racial

[9] By for example instating this literary prize for African writers, but also by being a co-editor at several magazines that draw attention to contemporary Black female writing, and editing the *Black Women Talk Poetry* anthology, which features 20 Black British authors.

[10] As McLeod argues, Black British writing of the last years of the twentieth century has mostly been preoccupied with redefining notions of national identity which has often been charged with racial exclusion and prejudice (168). Therefore, to speak of a Black Britishness in this time often involves reclaiming one's space and reshaping it (168). Evaristo's novel, however, detects "a shifting sense of consciousness that supplements this ongoing and vitally important challenge to Britain's imagined community with something culturally and geographically wider" (169).

stereotypes through a redefinition of Black womanhood and productive unease in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

Girl, Woman, Other follows the life and struggles of twelve different – mostly Black – women. The chapters are little snapshots of these women, going into their political opinions, their jobs, their family structures, their past and their present. The novel is a celebration of women's diversity, representing them as old and young, rich and poor, traditional and progressive, in the past and the present, women who are Black to women who do not look like they are of colour, breaking down many different forms of binary oppositions. The novel begins with Amma, a London-based lesbian playwright, staging her play *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* after being rejected from The National Stage, as a Black woman, for 30 years. Her story reverberates throughout the novel, serving as a sort of framing device as the reader follows the stories of her friends, her daughter, and women that solely encounter her as a director. Although the women have their own sections providing their individual stories, they are interconnected and *Girl, Woman, Other* turns out to be a cohesive novel. In the last chapter, almost all characters come together at the afterparty of Amma's play. By providing this wide range of perspectives, Evaristo throws up all sort of things concerning the Afropolitan experience, contesting existing stereotypes of Black womanhood and the problematic homogeneity of them as a group. The first device that signifies this, before her reader opens the novel and starts to read, is the paratext.

The paratext already displays Evaristo's novel is not easily classified and offers insight into the readership Evaristo tries to address similarly to Adichie. The title, the most classical of paratexts, initially suggests the novel deals with topics on gender due to the succession of "Girl" and "Woman," laying emphasis on womanhood. Moreover, due to the conjunction of "Girl" and "Woman" the title also suggests the novels touches upon intergenerational topics and the passing of time. Lastly, "Other" foreshadows the way women

in the novel are othered in so many ways, even by each other. The inclusion of topics on race, class and gender suggest Evaristo's novel is concerned with intersectional feminism, a term theorised 30 years ago by Kimberlé Crenshaw. She argues that:

> the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. (1243-1244)

Evaristo seems to allude towards Crenshaw's intersectional disempowerment by making race and gender intersect in her title. As Evaristo herself explains: "I wanted to put presence into absence. I was very frustrated that Black British women weren't visible in literature … There are many ways in which otherness can be interpreted in the novel" (Sethi). Overall, the title suggests the novel is concerned with topics on feminism and voices that have been historically silenced, but "Other" also refers to the inclusion of non-cisgender identities, as becomes crystallised when taking other paratextual elements into account. The presence of this often-unheard narrative can also be seen is in Evaristo's dedication, which makes her topic of discussion quite clear and sets the tone for her novel:

> For the sisters & the sistas & the sistahs & the sistren & the women & the womxn & the wimmin & the womyn & our brethren & our bedrin & our brothers & our bruvs & our men & our mandem & the LGBTQI+ members of the human family. (xi)

She uses various terms that suggest her inclusion of groups that would be categorised as minorities by mainstream society, such as "sisters," a term often used among Black women since the nineteenth century, or "womxn" which is adopted by transwomen and non-white women. However, by ending with "members of the human family" she emphasises these groups should not be categorised as anything other than simply human. By using a dedication that is as inclusive as possible, Evaristo emphasises her novel is about equality among these groups and signals that easy categorisations will not apply to this novel.

To move on, each chapter has a symbol printed above the name of the character, which turn out to be Adinkra symbols.[11] These are traditional West-African symbols, therefore relating to Evaristo's Nigerian ancestry, representing concepts or aphorisms that are meaningfully referring to characters' qualities. In Adichie's fashion to use Igbo language, Evaristo wants to make her African heritage present or even aims for active engagement since curious readers will look into the symbols and traditions of Adinkra. The chapter entitled Bummi, for example, has the symbol of adaptability, which is reflected in her migration story from Nigeria and her career change for her own cleaning company after her Nigerian university degree is rejected, or Dominique's chapter which has the symbol of friendship, foreshadowing that she should always trust her friends' opinion after running off with the wrong woman. However, the symbols are less prominent than Adichie's in-text inclusion, but still offer the reader a meaningful intervention with African culture and encourage active readership by the immersion in another culture.

Obviously, the Booker Prize 2019 is featured on the cover, which symbolises the symbolic capital Evaristo and *Girl, Woman, Other* received by winning the prize and further increases the value and attraction of the novel for new readers. Moreover, various prestigious newspapers are quoted on the cover similar to *Americanah*, often mentioning the novel is concerned with Black womanhood and politics, while also stressing the novel's insightfulness. This all suggests the "cardinal function" of the novel (Genette 261), the author's intentions, has to do with offering a wider definition of what it means to be Black in today's Britain, but also in the world. By merging her African and English heritage in the paratext, Evaristo conveys that her novel is concerned with her "self-consciously global" identity, using both as signifiers for what the novel might entail. Taking all of these findings

[11] The symbols are not very prevalent in the narrative, and at first sight look like illustrations. However, they do carry meaning and add an extra layer for the attentive reader.

into account, the mixing of her African and English heritage in her paratext already transpose Evaristo's concerns for a transcultural identity and develop a focus on the international, transcending borders, which is further established in her portrayal of the narrative, the focalisation.

Girl, Woman, Other focalises no less than twelve different characters of various backgrounds and milieus with its internal focalisation. The stories are told from a first-person narration, bringing the reader very close to the characters' inner complexities. However, compared to Adichie's narration the characters remain at a distance due to the shift of perspective with each chapter. The characters are grouped in four sets of three, with clear links between each set, but less obvious links between the characters in different sets. The novel covers over 100 years, telling stories from daughters, mothers to grandmothers, or several people from a friend group, which in effect illuminates questions of heritage and institutionalised racism originating from the past. Grace, for example, was born in 1895 to an itinerant Abyssinian seaman and a 16-year-old orphaned girl living in South Shields. Since the chapters preceding hers are focalised by her daughter and granddaughter, Evaristo draws some strong links concerning racial prejudice and sexism; Grace's husband sees her as "his expedition into Africa," and Hattie experiences that a boy from her village solely sees her as a sexual object, being "the centre of his universe, for about thirty minutes" (393; 369). Consequently, the reader is exposed to the fact that women are still facing the same problems as they did decades ago. With the narrative going back and forth in time, Evaristo tells the story of the Black experience in Britain's past, present and future. Evaristo represents Black women in as many different roles as possible, and as complex and flawed characters which offer new perspectives from traditional literature.[12] She portrays these women as mothers,

[12] Evaristo takes some feminine archetypes often seen in literature, such as lover, maiden, mother, queen-bee, and innovates and deepens those tropes in unexpected and insightful ways.

daughters, friends, lovers, teachers, supermarket managers, cleaners, journalists, students, bank tellers, lecturers, immigrants, victims. The different ages, backgrounds, and heritages epitomise the broadened perspective on Black womanhood in the United Kingdom and beyond. As McLeod has argued on her oeuvre, "Evaristo forges a vision of polycultural interrelation which breaks beyond dichotomous distinctions between the local and the global, or between black history and white oppression, and so forth" (171). In *Girl, Woman, Other* a number of places are gathered and transposed upon the geographical location of London, as McLeod identifies Evaristo's fiction to be "diachronic histories within synchronic spaces (172). Yazz's friend group, for example, shows this companionable juxtaposition of different cultures, which conjoins the history and cultures of their heritages: although they come from diverging backgrounds they identify in a similar way. They call themselves the "Unfuckwithables" (41) and claim they all are "more wordly-wise through [their] membership of the squad" (73). Different times of transcultural passage are gathered at a common site, creating a mutual, transcultural identity. They would fall in different categories of 'Other' according to the majority view, but identify in the same way, breaking down these categories of otherness. Evaristo illustrates diverse and intersectional identities as it pertains to Black women in these twelve chapters by delving into each woman's psyche, which will now be shown through some close readings.

First of all, Evaristo breaks down presuppositions of the Black experience by representing characters in diverse and complex ways. Similar to Adichie, Evaristo displays that Black women cannot be perceived as a single entity, mostly by the way they all relate to racist offences in very distinct ways. Yazz, for example, is very conscious of the "dirty looks" people give her Muslim friend (58), Shirley sees it as her "job as a teacher to help those who are disadvantaged" (228), while Hattie seems less engaged when she asks her husband "to tone down with the stories" of Americas racist past (355). However, while Yazz

is very concerned with race, her intentions are also ironized to some extent, offering a nuanced perspective that activism does not come without missteps. Throughout her chapter she keeps emphasising how "woke" she is, which is seen in a different light when reading in Megan/Morgan's chapter that "[Yazz] was thinking of becoming non-binary as well, how *woke* was that? she said excitedly, like she was going to embark on a trendy haircut" (338). This passage shows how Yazz aims to put her political correctness on display, as people perceive her interest as an eagerness to fit in, to be trendy. This remains prevalent throughout the chapter, as Yazz and her friends have a certain social hierarchy of who is most oppressed: "yes but I'm black, Courts, which makes me more oppressed than anyone who isn't" (66). With humour, Evaristo displays how some racial activism is also accompanied by the tendency to enter the victim role. By doing this, Evaristo highlights the complexities of Black womanhood and the impossibility of categorising them as a homogeneous group, as each chapter offers a new perspective to the precedent ones.

This interconnected approach is also seen in Penelope's chapter, the only character who identifies as being white, when she talks about issues of white feminism: "women whose husbands forced them to stay at home when they were more than willing to put their intellect to good use in the skilled workforce, women, such as herself, who were going bonkers with boredom and banality" (289). The juxtaposition of her boredom in this passage and the traumatic experiences of Black women in the novel is a clever device to stress the urgency of Black feminism and how privilege works in different waves of feminism. Whereas Penelope talks about husbands forcing women to stay at home – closely coinciding with second wave feminism –, women like LaTisha, Hattie or Winsome never even received the opportunity to go to college and deal with issues like rape or trauma. Although Evaristo does not explicitly condemn Penelope's story to a position with less relevance, she offers an insightful intervention to her readership through her focalisation, which generates a deeper awareness

of privilege and the urgency of intersectionality – adopting a third wave, inclusive feminist approach. As opposed to Adichie, Evaristo does not narrate this variety of perspectives by using the judgments of the narrator, but gets into every thought of these characters, using a more character-bound internal focalisation that follows specific characters and their opinions. In the end, Evaristo's focalisation opens up a broadened perspective on issues of race and feminism, urging the reader to think more deeply about these matters.

Evaristo also uses her focalisation as a tool for mapping the urgency of issues of Black feminism and the complexity of Black womanhood. This is best seen with transgender character Megan/Morgan who talks about their experience of being regarded as female instead of male: "I'm also wary of walking home late at night on my own, I miss being respectfully called sir when I'm in a shop or restaurant, and I'm definitely taken less seriously when I open my mouth" (323). The differences they encounter after their transformation showcases how society treats women different than men, which is an example of the "spatial synchronicity" McLeod talks about, meaning that different experiences are positioned at the same site, in this case on the body (172). Megan/Morgan's body is a conjunction of supposed binary oppositions, although their voice remains the same throughout the chapter, which is how Evaristo cleverly provides critique on societal constructs concerning gender. Moreover, by drawing on the universal experience of women for this transgender character, readers are invited to think more deeply about these issues to understand themselves and others better. This is what Spivak means by "rhetorical signals … which lead to activating the readerly imagination" (22), as the reader is made to think of his or her own interior world and presuppositions. This device is carried out throughout the novel, also for issues concerning race. Penelope, for example, is the only character who consciously identifies as being white before finding out about her heritage, as her story follows how she discovers being adopted. In the epilogue, she receives the results of a DNA

test telling her true mixed African heritage (447). Penelope finding out about her ancestry shows Evaristo's most central point to her narrative: Black women, transwomen, lesbians, transsexuals, Black feminists, white feminists, they are all human beings no matter how one identifies, and difference should be cherished and not hierarchical. She delivers unforgettable, multi-layered, multi-dimensional characters that do justice to the Black experience in her focalisation.

To continue to the next narrative technique, Evaristo's style is one of the most important elements of her narrative for its uniqueness and innovativeness, and in the end nudges the reader to empathise more with the Black experience. Evaristo is known for her unique writing style. According to Deirdre Osborne, she "has engaged with the multiple ethno-cultural frameworks that contour Black British literature to alchemize a distinctively self-fashioning and emancipatory poetics" (233). Evaristo herself calls *Girl, Woman, Other* "fusion fiction," which is a fluid form of prose fiction. She uses a free-flowing writing style with elements of stream of consciousness. Whereas Adichie characterises her distinct use of Igbo-English as a re-evaluation of cultural hybridity, Evaristo combines a prose and poetry style that goes against the hegemonic way of writing to generate certain readers' responses. As McLeod has argued, Evaristo's fiction is breaking beyond "conventional parameters of black British writing and its predominant critical modes" (173).[13] With this, Evaristo uses a literary vision that enables the representation of the complexity of Afropolitanism and being Black. The entire novel lacks full stops and punctuation, so in some paragraphs the reader might have to slow down a bit to work out what is exactly said and meant. However, this

[13] According to McLeod, Black British writing is predominantly in the form of a *bildungsroman* and excavates Black British history by exploring the polycultural relationship with Africa (170). However, Evaristo rather involves all her readers in a rethinking of Afroeuropean history and is crossing borders concerning genre and writing style.

could also allow the reader to share the disorientation of a character during traumatic experiences, for instance when Carole attempts to cope with being raped:

how had her clothes come off?

then

her

body

wasn't

her

own

no

more

it

belonged

to

them

…

it was hurtinghurtinghurting

onandonandonandon into infinity, which was something without end like 0.333333 or 0.999999. (125-126)

Evaristo emulates stumbling thoughts by means of line breaks that slice sentences which break up the reading flow. The way words are arranged on the page invites the reader to slow down while reading, realising the severity of the issues discussed. The words are almost shattered across the page, which reflects Carole's emotions and struggles with coping. As Suzanne Keen has suggested, the "interior representation" of characters emotional states contribute to "empathetic experiences" among readers (213). However, this passage seems to do something else since Evaristo exposes some issues that have not often been dealt with in literary writing by exploring the discomfort of these experiences. Her characters are victim of a system where we are all complicit to in some way or another, from which a sense of unease might arise among readers, similar to Adichie's productive unease through her social commentary. This stylistic technique is mostly used for traumatic experiences concerning race and gender, generating responses from her readers on these specific topics. Carole's chapter further examines her struggles with the Afropolitan experience when she talks about fitting in at university and finding out the world is centred around privilege:

> nobody talked loudly about growing up in a council flat on a skyscraper estate with a single mother who worked as a cleaner
>
> nobody talked loudly about never having gone on a single holiday, like *ever*
>
> nobody talked loudly about never having been on a plane, seen a play or the sea, or eaten in a restaurant, with waiters
>
> nobody talked loudly about feeling too uglystupidfatpoor or just plain out of place, out of sorts, out of their depth
>
> nobody talked loudly about being gang-banged at thirteen and a half. (132)

Evaristo uses a very direct style to voice thoughts and feelings that are usually not expressed and emphasises the severity through her stylistic devices. The anaphora of "nobody" at the beginning of each sentence offers the reader a deeper understanding of the challenges to

break the circle. The use of anaphoras is a major tool for Evaristo to represent the powerlessness characters endure and is seen throughout the narrative. For example, when Shirley talks about the systematic obstacles she sees Black children struggle with:

> more children at school coming from families struggling to cope
>
> more unemployment, poverty, addiction, domestic violence at home
>
> more kids with parents who were 'inside', or should have been
>
> more kids who needed free school meals
>
> more kids who were on the Social Services register or radar
>
> more kids who went feral – (she *wasn't* an animal tamer). (236-237)

The anaphora of "more" again puts emphasis on the powerlessness characters' experience concerning institutional problematics. These anaphoras manage the reader into slow reading due to the heightened emphasis as opposed to Evaristo's very free-flowing writing style, which triggers the imagination and emphatic experiences.

Moreover, stylistics are very outspoken for some characters, for example when Yazz says "the older generation has RUINED EVERYTHING and her generation is doooooomed" (42) or the use of hashtags such as "#allblackhistorymatters Book now or cry later, peepalls!!! @RogueNation" (334). The addition of these contemporary ways of expressing oneself allows Evaristo to draw attention towards these sentences, but also addresses a younger audience. Besides, a certain tone of speaking is reached through these stylistics, giving the reader an indication of Evaristo's own attitude towards these matters and what she deems important, which brings us to our next narrative device.

The last technique to discuss, but certainly not the least important, is the narrative tone Evaristo uses in her writing which humanises the pain and injustices of the Black experience. Reviews on *Girl, Woman, Other* often mention Evaristo's wittiness, which already signals the importance of this element to her narrative (Garner; Frazer-Caroll).

Following James Phelan's theory concerning the exposure of the authorial voice through narrative tone (58), Evaristo's outspoken tonal cues signal certain attitudes and opinions towards her readers. Evaristo uses her characters to make big political statements concerning race and gender, which might come across as unnatural dialogue. For instance, when Yazz at age 14 tries to convince her mother to go to a literary festival:

> it would be to the detriment of my juvenile development if you curtailed my activities at this critical stage in my journey towards becoming the independent-minded and fully self-expressed adult you expect me to be, I mean, do you really want me rebelling against your old-fashioned rules by running away from the safety of my home to live on the streets and having to resort to prostitution to survive and thereafter drug addiction, crime, anorexia and abusive relationships with exploitative bastards twice my age before my early demise in a crack house? (38)

This passage displays Evaristo's wittiness many reviewers have pointed out. As Dwight Garner has reviewed the novel in *The New York Times* and wrote that "there's a looseness to her tone that gives this novel its buoyancy" (Garner). Yazz, only aged 14, very eloquently exposes some major prejudices of race and gender, mentioning issues that society often associates with her character, a Black girl, such as living on the street, prostitution and crime while keeping a lightness to her tone at all times. These are topics which impact Black women in contemporary times, as these are barriers they are forced to circumnavigate in a society where they are set up to fail. Although the tone is almost humorous with an innocent 14-year-old mentioning these issues, unease is again likely to arise from these statements among readers. According to Molly Hite tension arises for "ethical questioning without necessarily guiding readers to a definitive conclusion" (250). The tension in this specific passage, explores discursive structures that construct stereotypes. By using humour and lightness, Evaristo does not voice her opinion explicitly, but the reader notices change is

necessary for the topics mentioned, meaning that Evaristo's tonal cues are indirectly advocating for active readership.

Evaristo's tone is also quite offensive towards issues concerning race and gender at times. For example, Yazz says "she was in effect now an honorary sistah with an *h*, a term that originated with black women which was now being appropriated (typical!) by those who weren't" (65). Through these passages Evaristo seems to express her discontent on cultural appropriation; especially by adding "typical!" in parentheses the phrase almost feels like an authorial intervention and might be a source of recognition to some of her readers, but a discomfort to others. As Hite argues, "tonal cues … indicate an attitude" (251), which is a very important element of Evaristo's narrative. She seems to expose racial tension inherent to our contemporary world. Besides topics on race, this also occurs for feminist issues:

> busted! yes, you *are* a woman,
>
> she even contemplated having her womb taken out to eliminate periods altogether, which would surely be her greatest possible career move, a tactical hysterectomy for ambitious women with menstruation problems. (140)

Evaristo uses wit and humour to address issues that are normally silenced and makes a political statement about gender restrictions in the work environment. Although the lightness of her tone makes it easier to digest, this is exactly what might create unease among readers; the reader sees the conflict of talking lightly about severe issues and might acknowledge change is necessary. Hite's article on narrative tone suggests it can be very "decisive" towards guiding readers towards certain ethical views (251). Evaristo uses her witty tone to make her political beliefs clear to her reader:

> Megan was part Ethiopian, part African-American, part Malawian, and part English which felt weird when you broke it down like that because essentially she was just a complete human being. (Evaristo 311)

Evaristo almost mocks the way people see heritage as an important signifier of someone's personality – in line with Selasi's theory concerning social constructivism – addressing how racial prejudices create unequal opportunities. However, in the end she emphasises that we are all connected, no matter how a person identifies, epitomising Eze's argument concerning identification in terms of relation. This contributes to how Evaristo challenges her readers' worldviews concerning racial bias and understanding themselves and others better, generating meaningful responses. Whereas Adichie uses her narrative tone to condemn social commentary on certain phenomena concerning Black living, Evaristo uses tonal friction to create productive unease. Besides signalling her readers of her specific attitude towards these issues, Evaristo advocates for change in her readers' attitudes by confronting them with painful contemporary realities.

Whereas Adichie tries to generate imaginative empathy among her readers by making them identify and engage with her characters, Evaristo produces unease and confrontation about race and gender with her style and tone. Productive unease in *Girl, Woman, Other* invites the reader to engage with the painful dynamics of racism today. However, both authors establish a complex and diverse understanding of the Afropolitan experience which refuses the homogeneity of Black women as a group, breaking down binary oppositions. The shifting focalisation epitomises the broadened perspective Evaristo offers on Black womanhood, and the way the women are related to one another shows this is a story about the significance of connection. In a sense, the reader is also connected to Evaristo's fictional web, by seeing parts of themselves represented in the narrative which shows their experiences are universal and not solely conditioned by the colour of their skin, which might result in a growing awareness of the complexity of Black womanhood.

Afropolitanism at the Intimate Level in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*

While the former chapters have shown how Adichie and Evaristo have used narrative techniques to generate empathy and certain responses among readers, this last chapter will finally discuss Taiye Selasi's own novel on the Afropolitan experience. Next to writing several essays, short stories and her debut novel, Selasi directed documentaries with themes centred around global migration, emphasising how people can feel at home in several places on the world. This chapter will analyse how this is present in Selasi's debut novel *Ghana Must Go*. Scholar Aretha Phiri has argued that *Ghana Must Go* has provided new discourses on blackness, as "the novel domesticates and reinterprets an abstract phenomenology through its pointed focus on the intimacies of family life and the intricacies of Afrodiasporic experiences" (146). This chapter will look into how exactly Selasi assembles her narrative techniques to offer a nuanced appreciation of the complex condition of the Afropolitan experience, representing often unheard stories concerning Black living.

Ghana Must Go tells the story of the Sais, a Nigerian-Ghanaian family living across the world. The family is reunited at the beginning of the novel after father Kweku has died from a heart attack. The four children, Olu, Taiwo, Kehinde and Sadie, are forced to return to their mother Fola in Ghana and are confronted with the events that drove them apart. As the story progresses, it turns out the family has been split apart after Kweku's unexpected departure from their American home to Ghana years before, thereby abandoning his wife and children. He returned to reclaim his heritage after his attempt to fit into the American Dream and create better opportunities for his children. Slowly, his death reunites the disjointed family and exposes how each family member has coped with the disappearance and loss of their father, shifting back and forth in time and space, while also narrating their personal journeys and struggles. The focus on the Afropolitan experience is one of Selasi's main themes, which already becomes apparent from her paratext.

The paratext suggests Selasi's novel deals with the Afropolitan experience and the question of cultural heritage by self-consciously positioning Selasi's localities on the global literary market, which will now be further explained. As Genette argues, a novel's paratext assures its "presence in the world" (261). *Ghana Must Go* is published in a way that guides the reception and reading experience in a specific direction by using several markers that categorise it as a novel concerned with Afropolitanism. First of all, the title alludes to a political event of the migration of illegal immigrants, mostly Ghanaians, from Nigeria after an executive order from the president in the 1980s, and is therefore associated with "a negative form of movement and the loss of place" (Feldner 135). The sturdy checked bags in which immigrants had to pack their belongings became a symbol of exclusion and intolerance. "Ghana must go" became the saying for this political event. Representing a symbol of mass migration in post-colonial times suggests the novel deals with diasporic settings. Besides, referring to this specific political event mostly implies it deals with rejection and not receiving the opportunity of finding a home. In doing so, Selasi seems to address a specific audience that is familiar with this emotionally charged history. Combined with the cover featuring the silhouette of a running girl, Selasi conveys the message that her novel is concerned with themes surrounding immigration and movement.

Before the story starts, the novel contains a list with the pronunciation of names and a family tree. According to Feldner "this indicates a self-conscious positioning on the global literary market, where an international readership with a cosmopolitan worldview and an interest in being provided with some local flavour is not expected to be familiar with these terms" (135). Despite the title and cover, Selasi also seems to draw in a seemingly Western readership that is not familiar with Ghanaian and Nigerian culture yet, which she tries to reach through providing additional information. Another way of reaching out to this readership is the list of quotes, which are predominantly Western prestigious newspapers like

The Guardian and *The Times*, which bestow symbolic capital on the novel. By incorporating the list of names at the beginning of the novel Selasi offers non-informed readers a way to engage with her Ghanaian and Nigerian heritage since it offers a more detailed background.

Unlike Evaristo's use of Adinkra symbols in the paratext, Selasi already explains these cultural elements in the glossary since the list of names also contains a section which tells the origins and meaning, signalling the importance of being connected to a certain geographical location. The reader is, for example, provided with the pronunciation of the Nigerian word "Kehinde," which means "second-born twin," instead of letting them speak for themselves through the narrative's context (Selasi VII). By using this technique, paratext could also influence the reading process and "unleash [the reader's] emotional responsiveness" (Keen 220). With the inclusion of this section Selasi guides the reading experience through making sure her readers are introduced to these cultural and geographical elements of her storytelling. Moreover, the family tree that is included in the paratext "might serve to ease the readers' orientation but could also be seen as remedy for the rootless family; depicted in the context of their lineage, the family gains grounding, weight, and a history" (Feldner 140). In other words, although the novel deals with the family's rootlessness, Selasi makes sure to show that these roots are not non-existent, considering it remains significant to their identity. By offering this additional information, Selasi's paratext makes sure her readers are correctly oriented before the story starts. In her paratext, she is profiling herself as an author of the Afropolitan experience, as Adichie and Evaristo also seem to do.

To move on, the focalisation in *Ghana Must Go* seems to be a manifestation of Selasi's definition of Afropolitanism, displaying character's coping mechanisms with finding a sense of self and their existential disorientation. This will be analysed by focussing on three specific aspects of Selasi's terminology on Afropolitanism, which are the difficulty of "forg[ing] a sense of self from wildly disparate sources", the coping with a lack of heritage,

and the "refusal to oversimplify" a person's cultural identity ("Babar"). Thus, these aspects of the Afropolitan experience are drawn from Selasi's essay, although the focalisation will show a more nuanced take on these issues by acknowledging the difficulties of being "African of the world" besides the elitist notions it has been criticised for.

First of all, the focalisation of the Sais illuminates how each family member attempts to find a sense of home and find out how to exist in the world, considering the family is unbound. The third person omniscient narration starts off in medias res, as the first sentence immediately tells of Kweku's death, which might have a distancing effect on the reader since there are no emotional bonds yet to any of the characters while they deal with heartbreak and grief. Lots of changes in point of view occur in the first part. All family members are contemplating the loss of their father, although they themselves are not really introduced in this part yet. Even though the family tree in the novel's paratext gives some guidance, the reader is made to feel abandoned by the focalisation as it keeps shifting from character to character before the reader can really grasp the situation. To some extent, the reader has to share the abandonment the children had to endure once their father left them; "They never wished the man dead or pretended he was dead. Just deleted, walled off. Denied existence, present only in absence and silence" (Selasi 39). All the Sai children are unconsciously looking for a "warm-yellow-glowing-inside-ness of home" which arises once Selasi starts narrating their individual stories from the second part onwards (123). Ucham claims that "identity or a lack thereof, is significant in diasporic settings because it affects the individual's sense of home" (70). Tellingly, all the Sai children struggle in one way or another with the feeling of coming from nowhere. The omniscient focalisation often finds the children contemplating their lack of home in the world, remaining outsiders to American society, but also not being able to connect with their African heritage, which can for example be seen with Sadie "secretly want[ing] to be white. It isn't a matter of 'white,' though it's true

that she's never had many African American friends" (146). While she experiences a desperate need to belong to a specific group, Sadie cannot identify as American due to the colour of her skin, neither as Black American due to her Nigerian heritage and diasporic identity. Whereas Selasi's essay makes it sound fashionable to be home at several places in the world, the novel sketches the complications of not feeling at home anywhere at all. Hence Feldner contends that "the four Sai children negatively perceive the hybridity of their Afropolitanism, expressed in a sense of unbelonging and of not being connected to a stable family tradition" (140). The body turns out to be an important locus for finding this sense of home, since it seems like the family members realise they can find a sense of home in material beings instead of geographical locations. Father Kweku, for example, talks about his second wife Ama as his home, "whose soft body is a bridge on which he walks between worlds" (52).

Since the sense of home closely coincides with the sense of self, a new fluid concept of the self arises from Selasi's focalisation. Phiri contends that "in an existential revision of Afropolitanism, the novel's vision of home as residing in the embodied, moving self more sincerely unveils, and creatively translates, the (idiosyncratic) world as home-in-the-self" (155). Throughout the novel, the characters are seen struggling how to find this sense of self, and through their search for their heritage and roots they seem to do so. Kehinde is seen struggling with these issues when he is looking at family pictures with "longing, for *lineage*, for a sense of having descended from faces in frames" (Selasi 307). Olu finds this sense of home in the material body when he talks about his wife: "the woman's body, a *body*, nothing sharp-edged or sterile, everything rounded and destructible and soft, and so home" (307). As opposed to descriptions of existential displacement, the softness of a woman's body turns out to be his safe haven. Selasi shows that in a world that may be estranged to all the senses, something as close as the body can be a solace. By using tender and gentle language such as

"rounded" and "soft" while focalising this sense of home, the readers' perceptions of being bound to a culture or geographical location in the hegemonic way of thinking are questioned and presupposed. This corresponds with Selasi's *TEDTalk* which advocates for a more local perspective since "all experience is local, all identity is experience" ("Don't Ask" 02:37). While the four Sai children had the same upbringing, they all have their own distinct personalities due to the different experiences and places where they have lived, as seen through the focalisation of the different characters. However, there is one exception of this 'home-in-the-self', as it does not apply to Sadie's self-image which is rather focalised from a sense of not belonging.

The Sai children are all struggling to navigate their position in the world, originating from a sense of not belonging. Throughout the narrative, it is emphasised that the Sais are "weightless … a family without gravity, completely unbound" (Selasi 146). The family seems to be the manifestation of Afropolitanism, with Olu living in Boston, Kehinde in London, Sadie studying in Yale, and Taiwo working in New York. Although Selasi's essay positively addresses tying a "sense of self" from a country on the African continent and a "G8 city," the novel rather illuminates the accompanied issues from this cultural hybridity. Youngest daughter Sadie deals with these issues most prominently, as she has a very problematic self-perception and suffers from bulimia which serves as an assault against her own body. According to Phiri, Sadie is struggling with a "sense of interior alienation and non-belonging" (150). Her body becomes "a complicated, political vehicle against, and ironically embodied expression of, an historical and contemporary limited cultural imagination" (Phiri 152). By this, Phiri means that Sadie suffers her lack of heritage and rootlessness, feeling tied neither to her Ghanaian roots nor to her American surroundings to such a degree that she experiences a scattered sense of self. Body image is an important motif throughout the novel, but Sadie seems especially concerned, with thoughts like: "their

empathy is bound within the limits of their reality … the fact remains: she is invisible. Unpretty" (265). Sadie suffers from an even more severe experience of lacking a voice, originating from her complex relation to her body, causing her to feel "invisible". Whereas her sense of rootlessness already results in her problematic self-perception, Sadie sees beauty as the American standard for obtaining power and privilege. The bulimic assaults against her body are an expression of this feeling of non-belonging – an estrangement from her surroundings – and a "disruptive act of rebellion against an entrenched (Western) heteronormative sociocultural imperialism" (Phiri 151). Sadie's act of purging is a manifestation of the weight of history at the intimate, domestic level. However, towards the end she reclaims her heritage, and her body, when the family visits a local village in Ghana. Here, Sadie recollects how one of the dancers is "short, chubby" and "*doesn't have the look of a dancer*" (Selasi 267). This stimulates Sadie to start dancing as well:

> *I am dancing*, she thinks, disbelieving, unable to stop, stomach taut, thighs on fire, lids slack, hips in circles, shoulder up shoulder down, around, foot out foot in, she is outside her body or *in* it, inside it, unaware of the exterior, unaware of the skin, unaware of the eyes, unaware of the onlookers, aware of the pounding, aware of the drum. (270)

She finally experiences a sense of belonging, feeling in close harmony with her own body. While she is always concerned with the way people think of her, this is the first instance where she exceeds outer perceptions and power dynamics of her body. The emphasis on movement, "up," "down," "out," "in," suggest how all geography is temporal and subject to change, while the inner body is the only thing that is not subject to outer perceptions. As a consequence, this experience becomes an important marker of her identity. This all shows a different side to the cultural hybridity Selasi's eulogises in her essay "Bye-Bye Babar,"

showing how it can cause a scattered self-image, creating new, less elitist, notions of Afropolitanism.

Lastly, Selasi's focalisation opens up new insights of existing stereotypes concerning the Afropolitan experience, similar to Adichie and Evaristo, and mostly offers the reader a more complex understanding of the neologism. Hence Feldner contends that "the novel explicitly addresses the reputation African migrants have in the United States" (134). In *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi represents a rather 'silenced' narrative, showing the intricacies of the Afropolitan experience. First of all, the reader learns through the focalisation how each family member deals with their search for an identity and the question whether existing stereotypes are what they actually should identify with. As a response, Selasi tries to broaden these perspectives in her focalisation, offering deeper insights into what it means to identify with the Afropolitan experience. For example, when Olu talks about his father, he says: "He was that man. He was that stereotype. The African dad who walks out on his kids … I hate him for being that African man. I hate him for hurting my mother, for leaving, for dying" (Selasi 305-306). He is disappointed in his father for conforming to society's expectations, for being the stereotype. However, since the focalisation offers multiple perspectives, the reader also follows Kweku's own experience, which shows he always acted out of love for his family: "the hours he worked were an *expression* of his affection, in direct proportion to his commitment to keeping them well: well educated, well travelled, well regarded by other adults. Well fed. What he wanted, and what he wasn't, as a child" (46). Kweku is so concerned with creating opportunities for his children and conquering systemic obstacles, that he does not see what they truly need. While he has consciously distanced his children from their African heritage to create better opportunities for them as American citizens, the reader learns that this causes the children to feel existentially disoriented. Thus, Selasi shows

the complexity of issues concerning diasporic settings by constructing a focalisation that shifts from character to character.

Moreover, Selasi provides a critique on the American Dream and shows how racial bias is holding back Black people in America. By doing this, she illuminates some racist tropes which keep lingering on in the popular imagination, for example people's expectations of Fola as a single Black business woman: "she is a woman, first; unmarried, worse; a Nigerian, worst; and fair-skinned … she might as well be a known terrorist" (100). The omniscient focalisation enables Selasi to display the general presuppositions people have, which are in this specific passage brought up one by one, ultimately creating a general perception of her based on the single story of Africa and social constructs. Something similar occurs when Olu talks with one of his professors, who calls "African immigrants … the future of the academy," but also points out how he "never understood the dysfunctions of Africa, the greed of the leaders, disease, civil war" (118-119). Despite his optimistic comment on African immigrants, he puts them away as a homogeneous group, oversimplifying the continent, and immediately holding them accountable for the miseries of Africa in its entirety. These racial stereotypes ultimately turn out to be holding back both Fola and Olu, since they constantly cope with living up to people's expectations in their attempt of trying to fit in. As a consequence, the reader is introduced to often unheard perspectives, and Selasi offers the reader a deeper understanding of the difficulties of the Afropolitan experience, of how to relate to the world when people impose these stereotypical identities on them.

The family's sense of being unbound is actually expressed through multiple layers in the narrative, as the narrational gaps illuminate this similarly. The narrative frequently jumps through time and space, serving as a significant narrative device to *Ghana Must Go*. The jumps through time and space already reflect some aspects of Selasi's terminology of

Afropolitanism, reflecting how easily the characters move between geographical spaces, going from Boston to London to Lagos, although it reaches further than that. Phiri has theorised this as follows:

> This is demonstrated in the novel's circuitous segues between structural (non-linear), temporal (present to past) and spatial (Africa to America), which disrupt the Afropolitan ideal of seamlessly fluid subjectivities with the suggestion instead of a family deeply mired in subjective, often context-responsive, instability. (148)

The jumps through time and space thus invite the reader to think more deeply of how Afropolitans exist in the world. Although Eze and Ede have critiqued Selasi's theory for being focussed on well-to-do middle-class existences, Selasi still sketches ease of travelling as a major component of this mode of consciousness. The novel consists of three parts, the first one mostly told from Kweku's perspective, the middle proportionally divided between the children and Fola, while the last part is predominantly Fola's perspective, serving as a nuance to the shifting focalisation, giving the novel more structure. The headings are called "Gone," "Going," and "Go," which according to Feldner "contribute to the atmosphere of movement and travel" (134). While each part consists of several chapters from different characters, time jumps frequently occur within chapters, showing characters in different periods of their life. Especially towards the end of the novel, the point of view keeps shifting, sometimes making it hard for the reader to identify which character is telling the story in which time period and at what place. Time and spatial jumps occur as quick as "Another house, another kitchen, two months ago" (Selasi 153). Thus, the reader has to pay close attention and is actively involved in mapping out the timeline of the family and their internal relations, serving as rhetorical signals to the readers' imaginative empathy.

Lastly, Selasi uses a certain narrative tone that adds up as a technique for making her reader engage with the Afropolitan experience. Whereas Evaristo is almost addressing her

reader personally and Adichie provides social commentary through her writing, Selasi uses her tone to generate empathy from her reader by adopting a melancholic tone. According to Phiri, Selasi almost uses a "lyrical (blues) mode" which "undermines the Afropolitan feeling of being 'at home' in the world, replacing it with an elusive and fragile reality of being fundamentally unhomed" (148). As opposed to Selasi's essay "Bye-Bye Babar," which describes the feeling of being home in the world on quite a positive note, the nostalgic tone of Selasi's narration again emphasises the inner complexities and sorrows of characters. This tone is most prevalent in Kweku's part, where he talks about returning to his native country:

> Transfixed by the view, with the first few tears forming now, loosely, like a cumulus, clouding his eyes, too unripe yet to fall. The effect was to soften the edges, a filter, the beach sparkling gray in celestially blurred light, like a scene from those soaps all the nurses loved watching. (Selasi 57)

The tone is immediately set when Kweku talks about tears coming into his eyes once he recollects turning back to the place where he grew up. This is followed by a passage that remains 'clouded' by his tears, using praising language such as "sparkling gray" and "celestially blurred" to describe bad weather. Whereas father Kweku experiences this feeling of nostalgia quite intensely, the four children also display a sense of longing, or not belonging, throughout the narrative, as they describe their loneliness and sorrows. This aspect of not belonging is an important stimulator for the narrative tone, for example when Taiwo says: "she *doesn't* belong. But isn't meant to. Not here" (158). While she lives in New York and feels like a local, she still experiences a sense of non-belonging and existential negation due to her distanced heritage. As Ucham has argued, "these elements stir up feelings of nostalgia for an absent home, leaving the characters feeling partially connected to any place in which they reside" (69). However, whereas the children talk about their geographical location in quite a distanced manner, they do use a similar 'lyrical blues' tone when they talk

about their family. For Olu, his father remains “miles and oceans and time zones away (and other kinds of distances that are harder to cover, like heartbreak and anger and calcified grief” (Selasi 6). By using endless entities like “oceans” and “time zones” in the same mode as emotional distance, the tone immediately becomes melancholic. These emotional distances are what plague the Sai family. Due to the tonal cues, these passages spark empathy for the children’s lack of family throughout the narrative, displaying their longing for a strong family bond. Another instance, when Sadie talks about her strong bond with her mother she says: “It’s the only thing that Sadie has that Philae doesn’t (she thinks). Her mother. Her loyal, indispensable, keeper of secrets, secretive, unflappable, beautiful mother” (154). In this passage, she is comparing her life to her friend Philae’s, and whereas she is criticising her own life throughout, she proudly talks about her mother. She emphasises how special their connection is, using both “keeper of secrets” and “secretive” in succession, the enumeration displays her deep admiration and fondness of her mother. However, the reader knows that she lost contact with her mother at the time of speaking and might empathise with her for not knowing how to reach out. Despite the fact that the four Sai children struggle with existential disorientation and how they should relate themselves to their cultural heritage, the tragic and sometimes nostalgic tone used for their fellow family members displays how the Afropolitan experience works on a more intimate level and might bring the issues they are coping with closer to the reader.

To conclude, Selasi uses the narrative techniques of paratext, focalisation, narrational gaps and tone to create an awareness of the intricacies of the Afropolitan experience in *Ghana Must Go*. By zooming in on a more intimate level, Selasi attempts to reimagine the political by making it more relatable and brings issues of Afropolitanism closer to the reader. Whereas her essay “Bye-Bye Babar” has been critiqued for glorifying this self-image, her novel nuances these realities by displaying the pertaining complications of identifying oneself

in relation to Afropolitanism. By exemplifying coping mechanisms of trying to feel at home in the world while feeling unbound, Selasi's narration tempts at an empathic relation with the Afropolitan experience.

Conclusion

Current political movements concerning Black Lives Matter have shown how severely integrated race still is in our contemporary realities. It is therefore crucial that society establishes greater compassion for and solidarity with those afflicted by racism, and realises the racialisation that structures our societies and everyone in them unevenly. Although the Afropolitan experience is only the tipping point of Black living, this thesis has shown what literature can do to add to this task. Literature provides an aesthetic encounter with reality and invites the reader to question his or her interior world since all readers are susceptible to cultural expressions that tackle racial injustice.

Since this thesis revolves around Adichie's *Americanah*, Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* and Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, three works by authors of African descent, it was important to create the correct framework in the first chapter which allowed to move away from the legacies of colonialism and (mis)representations while also acknowledging the historical challenges that the Black community has gone through up until this day. The sustained language debate has displayed the major issues concerning the continuing struggle against the perpetuation of clichés about Black identities in the West and the fundamental necessity to reppropriate their own histories. Selasi coined the word Afropolitan as means to express her cultural complexity, which turned out to be a fitting frame for this thesis – despite the literary critiques – for its effort to grasp what it means to be of African descent in the world today. The specific narrative techniques of paratext, focalisation, gaps, stylistics and tone turned out to be meaningful tools to analyse how these works of fiction explore new perceptions and needs of the Afropolitan condition.

Fiction seems to be a valuable source to address the residual powerlessness concerning contemporary Black living. The analysis on how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has arranged her narrative in *Americanah* illuminated how she opens up a space in her fiction to

represent often unheard narratives and cultural hybridity. Therefore, she uses her narrative devices to spark an active readership, attempting to create imaginative empathy with the complexities of the Afropolitan experience among her readers, and displaying the humanity. She uses an ethnosizing narrative strategy, which emphasises the difficulties of relating to specific cultures and the use of language in oppositional terms, aiming for a more relational approach. Moreover, she sometimes imparts productive unease among her readers by confronting the reader with contemporary stereotypes and challenging their own presuppositions by offering a social and political commentary within her narrative, which might affect the reader's way of thinking in ordinary life.

The following chapter demonstrated how the narrative of Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* invites the reader to engage with the painful dynamics of racism today by means of the stories of twelve women of distinct backgrounds and milieus which are all crossing borders concerning genre and writing style. This narrative about the importance of connection offered a growing awareness of the complexities of Black womanhood and new perspectives from traditional literature. The insightful interventions in Evaristo's narrative, which she carries out with narrative techniques, generate a deeper awareness of privilege and map the urgency of Black feminism. Productive unease turned out to be an important element of Evaristo's narrative, confronting her readers with prevailing stereotypes and pertinent racial issues. In the end, she provides a narrative that does justice to the Black experience and demonstrates difference in experiences should be cherished, not hierarchical.

Afropolitanism also opens up new discourses surrounding blackness in our contemporary world. In the last chapter I provided a comparative analysis with Selasi's essay "Bye-Bye Babar" and her novel *Ghana Must Go,* the latter which establishes a more nuanced perspective on the Afropolitan experience and its complications for individual beings. Whereas Adichie's narrative draws on universal experiences, Evaristo's on the political and

intersectional spheres, Selasi rather zooms in on the intimate level to grasp a sense of issues concerning identity. However, all authors have consciously positioned themselves and their notions of Afropolitanims in their paratext, in order to move beyond the confines of ascribed identities in their narrative. In Selasi's narrative, a new fluid sense of the self arose, transcending geographical or cultural entities, while also illuminating the difficulties of Afropolitanism as an existence in the world.

I chose to do research on this topic since I believe in the importance of telling these stories, and hope the analysis of how they are told will illuminate the need for new discourses and encourage more to do so. Readers of these works of fiction are able to learn more about themselves and about others.

I acknowledge that this thesis has only been able to discuss these three novels very briefly due to its limited length. I have chosen to focus on contemporary novels that open up discourses on a specific mode of consciousness in order to limit my research, but the Afropolitan experience continues to be critiqued and definitely has its pitfalls. A different frame of reference might offer interesting findings as well, as it e.g. would also be interesting to analyse these novels from a feminist perspective, perhaps concerning fourth wave intersectional realities.

Moreover, I have chosen some very specific narrative devices in order to compare the novels and limit my scope. However, for future research other narrative techniques might also be very relevant in order to discuss the way these novels address problems concerning race and gender. Besides, I have selected three novels from authors of similar backgrounds since I wanted to focus on *how* the stories are told instead of *what* is told, but future research could also consider how these novels relate to male authors of African descent or female authors from different backgrounds, for example comparing works of women from different continents in order to grasp a wider range of cultural hybridity.

Lastly, this thesis conducted an analysis on reading experiences, so I have to reckon mine is drenched in Western discourses. I might have addressed some issues less inclusively as I was hoping to do. However, I am a firm believer that it is important to engage with these materials for every individual across the human spectrum, and hope my thesis will be an insightful contribution.

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